Introduction: Community as Site of Creativity

Contemporary literatures have to cope with mass readers, specialized readers and different interpretive communities with a confusingly large spectrum of discourses. Newer perspectives in cultural criticism have challenged the view of a metanarrative and encourage a fundamental reconsideration of established models of inquisition and demanded a reworked arrangement of strategies for reading and responding to self-representational acts of literature. As a consequence, many of the new contexts of literary criticism have forced critics to expand their stock of ambiguous encounters to take in, for example, a deliberation of tensions between some of the following: race, class, ethnicity and gender; nationalism and globalism; postmodernism and postcolonialism; native, and postcolonial contexts; subaltern or oppositional voices and hegemonic or media-constructed narratives.

The re-definition and re-construction of any unified narrative into a postmodern bricolage of competing traditions, histories, re-tellings and re-imaginings has materialized from a variety of locations, including the writings of women, the newly-recognized voices of First and Third Worlds’ peoples and the narratives of immigrants who have attempted to affirm their own hybrid identities and the existence of their own histories. The cultural and literary configuration of present-day literatures whether in India, America, Australia or Canada is most resistant to stereotyped definitions and traditional interpretations.

Until recently, the term ‘world literature’ implied primarily the European literature as literatures written elsewhere suffered the colonial neglect. The popularity of various studies and theories on postcolonialism shifts the focus to other literatures coming out from different cultures and histories. Now, many academic institutions have become aware of the literary treasures that exist in other cultures in different parts of the world as well. The new temporal and spatial features, resulting in the compression of distances and time-scales, are among the most significant aspects of globalization affecting cultural identities.

An essential part of the definition of present-day globalization is that it represents the transcendence of nation-states, their boundaries, their sovereignty, and calls into
question their general competence. There is the transcontinental tribe of wonderers who
are growing, global souls for whom home is everywhere and nowhere. The world has
become increasingly interconnected—economically, politically, but just as importantly
cultural — and increasingly culturally differentiated at the same time.

II

Undoubtedly the twentieth century has been a unique period in world cultural
history. We see a departure from the world which could with some reliability be
perceived as a cultural mosaic, of separate pieces with hard, well-defined edges. Because
of the immense increase in the traffic in culture, the large-scale transfer of meaning
systems and symbolic forms, the world is increasingly becoming one not only in political
and economic terms, as in the climactic period of colonialism, but in terms of its cultural
construction as well, a global expertise of persistent cultural interaction and exchange.
This, however, is no egalitarian global village. What we see now is quite firmly
structured as an asymmetry of centre and periphery. When making note of any examples
of counterflow, it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that at least as things stand now, the
relationship is lopsided (Hannerz, 92).

Though globalization has a homogenizing effect, it has also let loose a world of
social differences. Globalization accentuates heterogeneity and heterogeneity stresses on
cultural differences. Here Mazlish and Iriye crucially remarked that already suggested by
the notion of multiculturalism, it is further supported by the extraordinary exchange
manifested at the heart of globalization, wherein for every McDonald’s outside the US,
for example, there are Thai, Chinese, Indian, and other formerly exotic-type restaurants
within the country. Individual choice is almost too abundant. In the light of globalization,
massification and mass consumerism are needed to be rethought as mixtures of
homogenization and heterogeneity (Mazlish and Iriye, 6).

Cultural difference has become global. The current process of globalization
contrary to earlier expectations of an increasingly homogeneous world, ‘leads to an
increasing sensitivity to differences,’ a ‘paradoxical consequence’ of the fact that the
flows of information, knowledge, money, commodities, people and images have
intensified. Accordingly, the sense of spatial distances which separated and insulated
people from the need to take into account all the other people which make up what had become known as humanity has become eroded. Now the reality is that we are all in each other’s backyard (Featherstone, 1993).

Focusing on the cultural implications of transnational capital, anthropologist Arjun Appadurai has tendered a useful set of terms for a world that has undergone what he calls, after Deleuze and Guattari, "deterritorialization." In his scheme, a variety of "scapes" -- ethnoscapes, mediascapes, technoscapes, finacescapes and ideoscapes -- are constantly at play. It is no longer the case that cultural flows of peoples, commodities, money and cultures ensure an increasingly differentiated global landscape of culture (Appadurai, 191-210). Homi Bhabha’s view is that the wider significance of the postmodern condition lies in the epistemological ‘limits’ of those ethnocentric ideas that are also the enunciative boundaries of a range of other dissonant, even dissident histories and voices -- women, the colonized, minority groups, the bearers of policed sexualities. “For the demography of the new internationalism is the history of postcolonial migration, the narratives of cultural and political diaspora, the major social displacements of peasant and aboriginal communities, the poetics of exile, the grim prose of political and economic refugees.” (Bhabha, 1994, 1998: 936). We associate this phenomenon with cultural studies which shows democratic interest in the stories produced by writers from various communities. These communities may be that of the ethnic groups of Jews, Africans, Asians, and natives in United States, minority community like Parsi, Christian and Dalit in India, or that of lesbian/gay, women communities in a dominant heterosexual society or corrosive patriarchal society, so on and so forth.

As global processes edit down the authority of the nation over the hearts and minds of the citizens, they revisit and uncover the ethnic traditions and small communities, symbolically or politically, that have long been covered up by the idealistic model of the national community. Writing on culture, multiculture and postculture, Joel S. Kahn argues that we live in a world distinguished “not just by difference, but by a consuming and erotic passion for it.” The metanarratives through which modernist thinkers sought to interpret the world through simplistic Enlightenment universalisms have moved out now. The forces of modernism and cultural imperialism that have operated in the past to constitute a homogeneous world after images constructed in
eighteenth century European bourgeois thought are gone. In effect, it makes it possible for those of postmodern sensitivity at the same time to fear and marvel at that difference which is thereby revealed to them (Kahn, 125).

Stuart Hall brings out three possible consequences of these aspects of globalization on cultural identities: (i) national identities are being *eroded* as a result of the growth of cultural homogenization and the “global post-modern”; (ii) national and other “local” or particularistic identities are being *strengthened* by the resistance to globalization; and (iii) national identities are declining but *new* identities of hybridity are taking their place (Hall, 2004: 630). The global procedures have lessened the control of the nation over the people, and this clears the ground for the people to return to and uncover the ethnic traditions that have long been covered up by the model of the national community.

The return to ethnic community as a source of political identity, as a site of fictional creativity, in the world is here to stay, at least for the time being. This accent on difference makes it possible for those silent histories and unwritten lives of people which have been suppressed and repressed by elite national histories and metanarrative of nation. When people and cultures/subcultures living on the margins of nation tell and narrate their stories they are asserting, seeking and negotiating for cultural space along with others and resist domination and usurpation by dominant cultures. They voice for a democratization of views, ambivalence, ambiguity, and multiplicity of identities.

Other typical attributes of the new cultural politics of difference are to oppose the monolithic and homogenous in the name of diversity, multiplicity and heterogeneity; to reject the abstract, general and universal in light of the concrete, specific and particular; and to historicize, contextualize and pluralize by highlighting the contingent, provisional, variable, tentative, shifting and changing. Cornel West claims that these gestures are not new in the history of criticism or art. Nevertheless, he argues, what makes them new -- along with the cultural politics they produce -- is how and what constitutes difference, the weight and gravity it is given in representation and the way in which highlighting issues like empire, class, race, gender, sexual orientation, age, nation, nature, and regions at this historical moment acknowledges some discontinuity and disruption from previous forms of cultural critique (West, 521).
This new cultural politics of difference are neither simply oppositional in contesting the mainstream (or malestream) for inclusion, nor transgressive in the avant-gardist sense of shocking conventional bourgeois audiences. Rather, they are distinct articulations of talented (and usually privileged) contributors to culture who desire to align themselves with demoralized, demobilized, depoliticised and disorganized people in order to empower and enable social action and, if possible, to enlist collective insurgency for the expansion of freedom, democracy and individuality (West, 522). This analysis propels the cultural critics, writers and artists to expose, as a basic module of their production, the very operations of power within their immediate work contexts, i.e., academy, museum, gallery, mass media or literature, esp. novel. We see the impact of this social phenomenon in the discursive conceptualization of self, family, community and nation, and in the very examination of novel in realm of literary discourse.

III

Historiography has become a hot issue in postcolonial context too. Subaltern historians like Dipesh Chakrabarty, Partha Chatterjee, Ranajit Guha etc. view that recent struggles and debates around the rather tentative concept of multiculturalism in Western democracies have often fuelled discussions of minority histories, as the writing of history has increasingly become entangled with the so-called “politics and productions of identity” after the Second World War, the question had arisen in all democracies of whether to include in the history of the nation histories of previously excluded groups. In the 1960s, this list usually contained names of subaltern social groups and classes, such as, former slaves, working classes, convicts, and women. The mode of writing history came to be known in the seventies as history from below.

Under pressure from growing demands for democratizing the discipline of history further, this list was expanded in the seventies and eighties to include the so-called ethnic groups, the indigenous peoples, children and the old, and gays, lesbians, and other minorities. The expression “minority histories” has come to refer to all those pasts on whose behalf democratically minded historians have fought the exclusions and omissions of mainstream narratives of the nation. Official or officially blessed accounts of the
nation’s past have been challenged in many countries by the champions of minority histories (Chakrabarty, 97-98).

Postmodern critiques of “grand narratives” have been used to question single narratives of nation. Minority histories, one may say, in part express the struggle for inclusion and representation that are characteristic of liberal and representative democracies. For Dipesh, “history is a subject primarily concerned with the crafting of narratives. Any account of the past can be absorbed into, and thus made to enrich, the mainstream of historical discourse so long two questions are answered in the affirmative: Can the story be told/crafted? And does it allow for a rationally defensible point of view or position from which to tell the story? The first question, that of crafting a story, enriched the discipline for a long time by challenging historians to be imaginatively and creative both in their research and narrative strategies. How do you write the histories of suppressed groups? How do you construct a narrative of a group or class that has not left its own sources? Questions of this kind often stimulate innovation in historians’ practices.” (Chakrabarty, 98) The close connection between narration and history is quite evident here.

For Lyotard, "Artists and writers must be made to return to the fold of the community; or at least, if the community is deemed to be ailing, they must be given the responsibility of healing it" (Lyotard, 1993: 4). Narrative of community is one of the sites where members of communities try to write their own little histories, their fissures and silences, and their articulation becomes a way of negotiating with other voices, dominant or equal or subservient. The aim is to break down and disorder the binary itself, to reject the simple structure of closed dualisms through a deconstruction and reconstitution that allows for radical openness, flexibility and multiplicity. The key step is to recognize and occupy new and alternative geographies — a ‘thirdspace’ of political choice — different but not detached entirely from the geographies defined by the original binary oppositions between and within objectivism and subjectivism. A similar thirdspace of political choice also figures prominently in Foucault’s heterotopias, “formed in the very founding of society” as “something like counter-sites that can be found within the culture, are simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted”. Heterotopias, combining the real and imagined, are the “space in which we live, which draws us out of ourselves in which
the erosion of our lives, our times and our history occurs, the space that claws and gnaws at us” (4-5).

Our proposition is to use this peripheral positioning as a site of creative opportunity, another place of radical openness where new alternatives can be imagined and effectively practiced by consciously and strategically disordering difference and choosing marginality. Community narratives work from this peripheral positions and they connect to the ‘making’ of minority history thus raising issue of historicism and hegemonic historiography. The mainstay of community novel is the mini histories of individual members of specific community and groups which are bound by shared memories and culture, political concerns and problems. These novelists are the historians of their community and their works are their histories. At the heart of the community narrative is the "wrestling for representation." The struggle for novelist representation in the terrain of literature belongs to a larger clash over the meaning and justice of representation which is taking place in the spheres of contemporary culture and politics. Such project is related to the advocacy of identity politics, that is, the notion that a person's politics is determined by one factor of identity, such as race or class or gender or caste. It, thus, makes a way to enunciate the promises and problems of multiculturalism.

IV

Post-colonial literature is intimately interwoven with a variety of environments in which it is produced and consumed, and obviously the works of postcolonial works are often a response or reaction to particular historical contexts. Cultural or imaginative schizophrenia, that is, a state of divided identity, divided by culture, history, circumstance, is one idea more specific to immigrant experience. Novelist Nayantara Sahgal contends, "I am thinking of schizophrenia as a state of mind and feeling that is firmly rooted in particular subsoil, but above ground has a more fluid identity that doesn't fit comfortably into any single mould"(Sahgal, 1992). One can say that the ‘particular subsoil’ she is talking about is the particular culture of a particular community, which despite its many slippery identities ‘above ground’ remains the most essential location of self-identity and the identity of the fiction and their interpretation. Different writers are influenced by, respond to and conceivably mould the communities in which they reside.
How to approach a novel produced in this post-colonial context has always been a moot question. However, for the sake of positional clarity, we can put forward three perspectives, though they can be overlapping, oppositional or concorded, from which we can view a novel; these are perspectives of nationalism, cosmopolitanism and particularism.

Traditionally, in Europe the conception of novelistic genre is closely associated with the formation of nation itself. Benedict Anderson expounded the relationship between the novel and the geopolitical reality of the nation-state. It was in the journey of the fictional hero in the different parts of the country he was drawing the map of nation in the mind of the readers, and thus binding all the people living in different communities into one big “imagined community” of nation-state. Such a literary geography can convey two different things, that is, the study “of space in literature” and “of literature in space”. In the first case, i.e., the fictional one, is Balzac’s version of Paris, the Africa of colonial romances, Austen’s redrawing of Britain. The second case, that is, the real historical space, is the provincial libraries of Victorian Britain, or the European diffusion of *Don Quixote* and *Buddenbrooks* (Moretti, 3). Novel when transplanted in the land of the colonies as in Africa or India, became a handy instrument of decolonization. In the creative hands of Bankim Chandra, Sarat Chandra, Rabindranath Tagore, Raja Rao, etc. the novel turns into a space where they can draw the map of a unified India, where they can conceive a resistant Indian nationalism against British imperialism. Consequently it had become imperative to read an allegory of nationalism in the trials and tribulations, in the progression of their fictional characters.

But we see another historical change in the aftermath of colonialism, that of immigration and transculturalism/internationalism -- issues which are always associated with post-colonial writing. This is where the argument of cosmopolitanism enters as the setting and scope of much of post-colonial writing is international rather than local in focus. The novel, according to Amitav Ghosh, has been “vigorously international from the start” (294), born amidst cross-cultural reading habits and imbibing its nutrients from an experimental cross-reading of idea and styles. Yet, as Ghosh points out, it is the one form of literature most strongly founded upon ‘a myth of parochiality’ in the sense of a
definite locatedness, in contrast, for example, to a poem, that may, both in aesthetic and other terms, live everywhere and nowhere at the same time (Ghosh, 294).

Meenakshi Mukherjee noted that for a writer like Amitav Ghosh, terms like ‘marginality’ and ‘hybridity’ seem quite irrelevant as they segment the worlds into Third and First regions making it look like a rather absurd activity. His recognition is the result of being an individual not pressurized by the global market and who remains “unfettered by the burden of otherness.” She agrees with Timothy Brennan’s category of new novelists like the “Third World Cosmopolitans,” who are globally visible and are hailed as interpreters and authentic voice of the Third World (Brennan, 34). This group brackets Mario Vargas Llosa, Derek Walcott, Salman Rushdie, Isabel Allende, Gabriel Garcia Marquez and Bharati Mukherjee, but not Chinua Achebe or Wole Soyinka (Mukherjee, 2000: 166).

The Third World cosmopolitans have generated an idiom of the metropolitan meta-language of narrative and have ensured their favourable reception in the global centers of publication and criticism. Indeed in the postcolonial project, writers of his tribe are curiously privileged because like the quintessential migrant they float, “upward form history, from memory, from time.” The tangibility of such sensibility is no doubt there, though it is highly debatable. The postcolonial is by virtue of this displaced and mobile location then, freed of gender, class and political affiliations as he moves unhindered and unrestricted in his peregrinations across the vast spaces of the worlds and cultures he understands and internalizes (Mukherjee, 2000:166).

The worldwide notice which tribe of writers like Amitav Ghosh, Salman Rushdie, V.S. Naipaul, Michael Ondaatje, etc. received are in many ways related to the global forces influencing us and the world around us. They may be said to be cultural bye-product of the globalized world. They are “transcultural” writers who do not fit neatly into any particular area. They live and write “across” national and cultural boundaries (Stacey, 11). V.S. Naipaul was born in Trinidad of Hindu Indian descent, but has lived most of his adult life away for the place of his birth, much of it traveling in Africa, India and various other countries. It borders on impossibility to read his writing as Caribbean, Indian or African, even English, depending on the reader’s choice of emphasis. There are many writers whose books face similar hermeneutical problem.
For a postcolonial novelist like Rushdie has of the opinion that no passport can describe his identity; and that his loyalties are to ideas and not to places. He writes, he says, as a, "secular, pluralist man". He rejoices in eclecticism; "how does newness enter the world", he asks in The Satanic Verses, "How", he asks, "does newness enter the world?" and continues; when "a bit of this and a bit of that" meet and mingle; "Mélange, hotpotch ... is how newness enters the world. It is the great possibility that migration has given the world, and I have tried to embrace it" (Rushdie, 394). Globalization is also about the process of hybridization which gives rise to a global mélange (Pieterse, 45). This glorification of rootlessness and mongrelization of all things is affiliated with different facets of globalization and postmodernism. And deciding whether a work should be placed in the matrix of a tangible locality or rootless internationalism has become a key issue in approaching postcolonial literature.

The inference is that in an age like our own, in which writers and texts are hyped, translated, marketed and commodified in print and electronically, all fiction has become global. Paul Jay in “Is Global Fiction Postcolonial?” suggests that all of the forces we usually associate with globalization -- transnational markets facilitating the flow of economic and cultural capital, the rapid expansion of diasporic spheres and hybrid intellectual identities, the speed with which print and electronic media transmit cultural work of all kinds around the world nearly instantaneously -- have created a situation in which anyone, almost anywhere, has access to literature produced from almost everywhere. But surely this kind of global access to fiction is uneven (Jay, internet).

Most of the writers who can plausibly be said to have a “global” or transnational audience are metropolitan celebrities writing in English (Rushdie, Gordimer, Walcott, Naipaul, and more recently, Arundhati Roy and Zadie Smith). And not everyone has the kind of access to fiction on a global scale than those of us hooked to the internet or living in metropolitan centers. If global fiction suggests a world in which everyone has quick access to a wide range of fiction in ways that transgress the boundaries and limiting power of language and the nation-state, we have a long way to go. Transcultural writing also hints that these writers do not always have a rich sense of culture to fall back on, and that their liaison with the culture or nation of their birth or heritage can often be problematic.
But the invocation of “global fiction” in the academy is aimed at something more limited and practical. Paul Jay further comments “global fiction” suggests a critical or generic category designed to supersede the category of national fiction. Like globalization itself, the concept of global fiction challenges not only the originary and regulating power of the nation-state, but the forms of national categorization we have used to regulate and control literary production and its study. In the West, the study of literature developed along national lines, and with the exceptions of Commonwealth and Comparative literary studies, the national study of literature held sway until the rise of multiculturalism and postcolonialism.

Now, the category of the global seems to threaten the category of the nation as a structuring principle for transnational literary and cultural studies. “Global fiction” is the one that supersedes all others as it seeks to name fiction which is transnational in nature and produced by — and engaged with — the phenomenon we’ve come to call globalization. It focuses on authors and texts seeking self-consciously to make a contribution to debates about the historical process of globalization. Global fiction, from this point of view, is fiction about globalization (Jay, internet). He claims that novels like Rushdie’s The Ground Beneath Her Feet, Zadie Smith’s White Teeth, Moshin Hamid’s Moth Smoke, or Arundhati Roy’s The God of Small Things are fictions which seem on the surface to be much less interested in the nation state, the national subject, and decolonization. They are concerned more with tracing the personal, social and cultural impact of globalization, and engrossed with either celebrating (Rushdie, Smith) or lamenting (Roy) cultural hybridity. Each of these novels focuses with particular force on themes and issues directly connected to globalization.

The whole history of conquest, colonization, decolonization and the development of the postcolonial nation is an integral part of the history of globalization, not a set of processes that predate it. But the central argument is that colonialism, postcolonialism, and globalization are historically linked in important ways. Rushdie, Naipaul, and many of the expatriate writers live with this; they can be best described as having multiple loyalties, even multiple belongings (to India, to Britain, to United States, Canada, the world) rather than as having none at all. They are concerned with the ways in which their Indian past is used to generate layers of representation within the text as well as around...
the product of the novel as it circulates in a global market of literary and cultural consumption. The identity of India, of the author, and the text itself come under consideration as the novel is positioned between multiple reading audiences, in particular the Indian and the British/American/Canadian audience. The interplay of desire and consuming as a productive dialectic, both within and around the narrative, become necessary in order to understand the creation of identity, and the dynamics of cultural exchange and consumerism in the global market.

The alliance of expatriate writers with their home-land is, nonetheless problematic, but the relation of home-grown writers’ to their land is not an easy one either. R. Raj Rao contends that set against “the glamorous, based-in-Washington-or-London writers”, we have writers like Gauri Despande, Kiran Nagarkar, Shashi Despande, Adil Jussawalla and R. Raj Rao himself who are squarely based in India, publishing in India and writing for Indian audiences. He says that the first category is global—the second regional. But the global is not really the global—it is only euphemism for western. The West may appropriate these writers for its own ends by offering them green cards, publication opportunities, awards, and huge signing amounts. He agrees with what the poet Adil Jussawala calls “the two-nation theory”: the real India and the imagined India. Rao states: “We who live in the real India and write beset by the very real problems of the real India are set against those writers who are immigrants, metaphorically or literally, and who write about an imagined India, eroticized for Western consumption. But memory can be treacherous, and it is dangerous to access one’s homeland only through memory as does Rushdie” (Rao, 125-26).

Nativist like G.N. Devy defends the ‘bhasa’ tradition which, in one form or another, continues to inform modern writing. As against the classical Sanskrit tradition, bhasa denotes all modern Indian languages that have, over a period of several centuries, evolved their own poetics. In short, Devy argues a literary historiography that locates its origins in the work of Orientalists would claim that ‘classical India [is] “glorious” and British India [is] "progressive," but the intervening centuries [are], culturally, a period of continuous vulgarization’ ( Devy, 1992: 5). He ventures to recover the validity of this middle period by rediscovering local or ‘bhasa’ traditions. Others like Anantha Murthy or Nemade say that Indians can write only in the regional Indian languages and not
English. Each Indian language has a specific geographical foundation. Indian English does not “belong” to any specific area of India. Rao says that those who write in English in India are actually are “nowhere men and nowhere women” (126). But this politics of language is not our focus here but the literary representation of a particular culture of a community is.

Another characteristic of globalism is the increasing interest in heterogeneity and difference of cultures which is evident in the stress given to ethnic, “local” or particularistic identities either as a resistance to globalism or as a quest for root in the rootlessness of globalism. This may be a reaction to “the ethos of consumerism, an ethos that seeks to deny all cultural memories and reduces the richness of life into images of mass consumption. The quest for cultural belongingness or tangible identity sends them back to their one particular culture, the way of life of a community. Cultural cosmopolitanism views that it is good for people to model their lives by means of ideas, texts, customs, etc. that they gather from different cultures. Cultural particularism argues that its position is more consistent with human nature and with social reality than the universalist position.

According to the particularists, people are by nature motivated to act on the basis of the ties and commitments whose members interact with one another and take part in projects that are unique to their respective community (Gans, 149). The argument can be extended to the debate between national culture and ethnic/ minority cultures, the assertion of the marginalized or subaltern castes, thus accenting on the heterogeneity and difference inside the territory of nation-state. Take the case of India: the cultural space of India or Indian literary space is more or less dominated by the Hindu despite the fact that there are many communities like the Muslim, Panjabi, Parsi, Dalit, Christian, the tribal, etc. which are otherwise marginalized or silenced by the dominant history of the elite Hindu.

Postcolonial critics are coming up with the possibility of reading a Tagore novel as “patently canonical and hegemonising inside the Indian cultural context,” which can be otherwise taught and interpreted in the Western syllabi as “third world literature”, as a part of marginal, non-canonical text, counterpoised against “Europe” (Ahmad, 1992, 2002:292). It becomes impossible to read the Mahabharata or the Dharmashastras.
without being collided with by the brutality with which the dasyus and the shudras and the women are consistently being made into the dangerous, inferiorised others. Historically, all sort of processes -- associated with class and gender, ethnicity and religion, xenophobia and bigotry -- have regrettably been at work in all human societies, European and non-European (Ahmad, 280).

Significantly, Gayatri Spivak reads Mahasweta Devi’s “Stanadayini” as a parable of India after decolonization. The protagonist like Jashoda, India is a mother-by-hire. All classes of people, the post-war rich, the ideologues, the indigenous bureaucracy, the diasporics, the people who are sworn to protect the new state, abuse and exploit her. If nothing is done to sustain her, nothing given back to her, and if scientific help comes too late, she will die of a consuming cancer. She points out that the ideological construct ‘India’ is too deeply informed by the goddess-infested reverse sexism of the Hindu majority. As long as there is this hegemonic cultural self-representation of India as a goddess-mother (dissimulating the possibility that this mother is a slave), she will disintegrate under the burden of the immense expectations permitted by such a self-representation (Spivak, 1987, 2002: 292). India is not simply Hindu India. Indian literature is not simply Hindu literature. There are other literatures too which have nothing to do with Hindu but are connected with being an Indian in India. There are Anglo-Indian, Muslim, Parsi, Dalit, Tribal, women, etc, in whose writings their worldviews, their concerns and politics, take the center-stage, not pushed into passive actors in the periphery as it is often done in many Hindu novels.

Highlighting the limits of approaching literature from the nationalist perspective, we move towards a more culture specific way of reading novels. It about writing about themselves that Anthony Appiah talks of, about the subject of a literature of their own, about the simple gesture of writing for and about oneself which has a profound political significance (Appiah, 948). It is in this context that the very idea of community as the location of novel becomes significant in cultural studies. The novel, with its foregrounding in day-to-day existence, came on the debris of epic, a form which was scriptural as well as sacred. The argument that is often made is that if epic was the genre of supra-territorial empires, novel is the genre of well demarcated secular modern nation state.
The present study extends the debate further and while highlighting the arrival of novel as a discourse of nation, it would go further down and try to locate the novel in its immediate cultural context. If immediacy to the cultural context is one seminal feature of novel as a discourse of ‘this time’, then community is its ready reference. This research project will help us to understand the inadequacies of approaching novel in terms of its national pedigree or location. At the same time it would enable us to map out the foregrounding of the novel in terms of its immediate location in the cultural matrices it is written from. The relation between the novel and the nation has been overstated, and the present study shall try to correct this imbalance by introducing the role of community over and above the monolithic nation. Consequently, community is both the boundary and the perspective of any novel, notwithstanding its overt or covert communitarian character.

Community novel focuses with particular force on themes and issues directly connected to their community, their specific way of life, the politics of their worldview. Community particularists claim that their position could accommodate the national concern for people in general, while nationalism could not accommodate the particular commitments which people have to their ethnic/ minority group and its members. The value that might be lost or damaged if people are not loyal to their original cultures is the value of preserving these cultures and the interest people’s ancestors had in the continued existence of these cultures (Gans, 154). For illustration we can say that a Parsi writer has a special rationale to identify with Parsi culture because he or she was born into it, grew within it, and because the activities of their ancestors were carried out within this culture. This identification with the Parsi people and consider oneself as belonging to the Parsi people necessitates special responsibilities. Feeling accountable to the group and having preferential attitudes towards it, in certain areas, are constitutive of such identification.

Community novel highlights the presence or absence of their particular culture and the politics of space it negotiates in the study of “space in literature” and “of literature in space” along with fictional prose narrative of other particular cultures, dominant, emergent or residual. As a result, we approach Rohinton Mistry primarily as a novelist of his minority community, and his adopted national identities, be it India or Canada, come afterwards. A contemporary novelist like Rohinton Mistry does not rely on
national identities as such, because these identities do not provide them a sense of belonging. In all his novels his Parsi culture takes the centerstage. If read as a writer of his community, his works do not simply echo or even chronicle the predicaments of Parsis in India, they rather participate in the very process of Parsi struggle for survival. Reading his community novel and exposing its poetics and politics will add to the understanding of the novel as a genre as such. Such a perspective is of immense importance for a multi-cultural, multi-ethnic nation like India.

V

In the first chapter entitled, “From Empire to Community: Towards a Politics of Community Novel,” we chart a brief map of the intricate affiliation between history and genre, the trajectory from supra-territorial Empire to nation, then to community, from the absolute closed self-contained world of epic to the open-ended indeterminacy of the modern novel. Narrative comes in different forms and genres consistent with the demands and needs of time and space, history and location. In the ancient past, it was through timeless epics that grand Empires strive to represent their ‘universal’ discourses. Then, come drama, romance, novel, film, etc. and all of them provide questions and answers to shifting ideologies and discourses of different historical moments. Genres function as forms of cultural memory, capable of both recalling past usages and responding to the present in a new way. They are the repositories of social experience, crystallized forms of social and cultural perception, ‘organs of memory’ that embody the worldviews of the periods in which they originated, while also carrying with them the ‘layered record of their changing use.’

In the next chapter, “A Poetics of Community Novel,” an attempt has been made to work out a poetics of community novel on the simple hypothesis that (i) novelists more than anything else, work within the predicaments and problem of community they belong to, and (ii) that community novel evinces a distinct narratology of novel in terms of the specific location, genealogy and sociology of the community it is written from. We begin by focusing on the elusivity of the term “community” as anthropologists and post-structuralists debate over it, and the fluidity and solidity of linking it to the study of novel. The study of poetics is about the formal structure of literature be it drama, poem or
novel. But here we are not trying to give a complete and amalgamated treatise on the inherent principles and theoretical establishment of a community novel. Both the term community and novel are not fixed categories in themselves. While community is a matter of ‘becoming’ as well as ‘being’ (Hall, 1990: 225), novel emphasizes on novelness and open-ended indeterminacy. The novelist is "drawn toward everything that is not yet completed" and dragged other traditional forms into “into a zone of contact with reality”. (Bakhtin, 1981:13-16). Wholeness in the present is incomplete and inconclusive. Thus, the novel is fluid. Both community and novel are subject to continuous ‘play’ of history, culture and power.

We also focus on how the narrative tradition of a particular community influences the narrative structure of novelistic story, especially, when the form of novel is employed not only by the so-called third world novelists but also those belonging to different communities in the third world. Poetics of novel with which a Caribbean novelist works with is dissimilar from one utilized by Latin-American writers. Like the mode the novelistic genre is deployed by a novelist from India, who is trying to attend to complex sensibilities of a specific culture, is different from an African novelist rooted in his narrative tradition. We will see, underscoring the fluidity and flexibility of the novel form, how a African--American cannot just write a novel in the way a European does, or an Indian just like a Nigerian Christian, or a Hindu Indian just like a Dalit Indian as they cannot bypass their own old unique worldviews and the culture of telling stories.

In chapter three -- entitled “Poetics of Parsi Fiction: A Case Study of Mistry’s Novel,” -- a full-length study of Rohinton Mistry’s novels is undertaken from the perspective their being enabling narratives of community novel. Community novel stresses on the self-representation of the novelist’s particular culture. The novel form is central to the emergence of a new Parsi self-consciousness, and this Parsi consciousness is the foundation of the poetics of Parsi fiction. Subsequently, the locus of Parsi fictional enterprises is Parsi community, its history and culture. We begin with Parsi ethical ethos where Zoroastrian faith beats as its heart, followed by an historical sketch of their immigration from Iran to India, their rise to recognition and achievements during the time of British colonialism and their subsequent feeling of malaise in the postcolonial climate. To work out a poetics of this new field of literature has to depend on assumption that a
Parsi novel is a novel written by a Parsi on subjects related to unique Parsi culture and its various predicaments. We undertake to explore how distinctive Parsi identity impinges upon creative imagination, and generates different ‘fiction.’

Chapter Four, “Politics of Mistry’s Parsi Novel” is concerned with the politics of Parsi identity, its position of being a minority and a community in exile, as projected through Mistry’s novelistic enterprise. The politics of novels as narratives of nation tends to subsume, marginalize and even erase the narratives of minority cultures and communities within the nation-space. Rohinton Mistry cannot be approached merely as Indian novelist for three reasons; one in terms of his being a Parsi, he is neither Hindu nor Muslim -- the two dominant communities hitherto invoked to understand the nation space called India; two, as a writer writing from Canada, he is more an expatriate Indo-Canadian, than mere Indian; three, since Parsis are an exiled community, he might be approached as “a novelist of exile”. We explore the ways and means with which Mistry negotiates or even manipulates his national and post-national identities with that of his ethnic community identity.

In the conclusion, “Hybridized Cultures and Community Novel,” an analysis of the possible merits and demerits of taking community (as against nation) as the very cultural location of the novel will be taken up. Even with this narrowing of focus, however, the question of who is included and who is excluded becomes a pivotal point in the discussion. Community while it lends social and cultural authenticity to the fiction a novelist writes, also in a way delimits its scope in terms of its appeal among general readers. If there is no purity about the culture and the novel (which is utilized to articulate that culture), if they are found to be hybrid of many cultures or narrative forms, then, their insistence on the authenticity of the poetics and politics of their representation becomes problematic. However, Mistry’s fiction, despite its overt Parsi consciousness, goes beyond the interests of his community alone, as it deals with as much aplomb themes such as displacement, emergency, communal politics and saffronization of space in India, etc. For the minority writers, self-representation becomes all the more important as they participate in the very process of being silenced or marginalized by the dominant others.