

Conclusion

I

The narrative energy of the texts coming from the so-called third-world was supposed to be derived from an effort to recover the past ruptured by a dilapidating experience of colonialism. From the debris of colonial encounter a 'self' was to be recovered, imagined or even forged. The recovery of postcolonial self is believed to be the driving force behind the significant writing coming from the "third world" (L. Gandhi 8). The Hegelian binary of master and slave that has had a profound influence on the western historical understanding has also served the postcolonial practice of reconstructing the past. History is not about amorphous entities; hence the self was to be a well-defined component of historical value. The naming of this 'self,' then, was a political act, where any assertion of the 'self' was interpreted as an antithetical activity to the dominance of the colonial master. This theoretical framework is what prompts the reading of these texts as national allegories¹. The expectations emanating, thus, from such a text and the questions it would pose were supposed to be informed by colonial encounter.

Closure of a narrative depends on two codes: the fulfillment of expectations and the answering of questions². Narrative is supposed to have achieved closure when it has delivered what it promised and if it helps the reader in finding answers to the questions that it evoked in his or her mind. What kind of expectations does a text from a postcolonial society raise? What are the questions that it asks and strives to answer? This draws attention to the way texts emerge and are received in a given framework of literary production and consumption. The historical experience of colonialism and imperialism has engendered certain textual expectations in the so called third world. The writing coming from this polemical zone³ is analysed in a framework of nationalist expression. And quite clearly the experience of imperialism has had a deep impact on the way individuals and communities come to perceive them in relation with the larger cultural configuration. The "third world" literary production is in response to the colonial encounter. As narratives coming out of the "third world" these texts are supposed to have achieved answers to questions of identity in the context of colonial experience. A richer reading of the texts however is accomplished outside the paradigm. Nationalism is not always articulation of oppression borne under the external force and the texts do not always subscribe to this negative definition of collectivities of postcolonial societies. The writers choose and express more than the just tales of colonial past. Even when the vestiges of colonial legacy are recognized in the cultural memory,

the narrative foregrounds the present cultural landscape. The texts selected for the study indicate that their writers are aware of and are conversant with a richer social reality. Viney Kirpal's observations are instructive in this regard:

The contemporary third-world novelist, with a shared social reality and community still available to him ... makes his characters – who have been exposed to western influences - assert their individuality and at the same time he makes them *seek ways of meeting social and communal expectations*" (Kirpal 146-147) (emphasis added)

...the modern third-world novelist has to be aware of transformation and the manner in which they are occurring in his society. (Kirpal 148)

The narrative moves towards a communal expression of the self which is part communitarian, part regional, part even national. This collusive expression finds the syntactical modulations in the nationalist residue of the freedom struggle but the the form this expression takes does not follow a predetermined mould. At any given moment the communitarian or even national articulation of identity occurs within a spectrum of possibilities. Sudipta Kaviraj makes a case in the context of pre-independence nationalist thought that the reality of nationalism as a socio-political project took its exact form among many possibilities in that situation (Kaviraj 1). The nationalist discourse has been an ambiguous term because it is indeterminately situated between several possible and justifiable meanings. The same holds true even in post-independent situation that the writers face in their respective societies and communities. There are community norms before there are norms of the nation (Chatterjee 1993: 225). The novels can be read as an attempt to circumvent colonial or anti-colonial legacy of nationalism. Nation emerges in the daily exchanges of various communities.

II

The three narrative works that have been discussed come from writers who locate their identity within the national identity. National identity – or identity per se – is an ever expanding entity, to pin down the process is to claim to have accomplished the unaccomplishable. What is sought is not the answer to the question, "who are we?" but now that we are who we are how do

we live. The issue is becoming rather than being. As they narrativize their collective self they draw upon variety of experiences and situations.

In The Gunny Sack Vassanji's Shamsi protagonist Salim alias Kala is on the border zone of community and nation. The thrust of his narrative pushes him away from the family and community and towards the communitarian and racial alliances that will generate the space for the nation. Salim, culturally and communitywise, belongs to the migrant Asian traders who nurture an almost morbid obsession with their racial purity. However, Salim's ancestry, like many other members of the community, challenge this obsession. Salim is forced, because of his mixed lineage, to inhabit an uncomfortable third space. His mother Kulsum would not let him get close to the Black Africans and participate in their cultural lives. His grandmother Ji Bai, however, keeps the memory alive in her mind and passes on the knowledge to him. The divergent responses of the two matriarchs to the inscrutable past provide the narrative tension. They provide the ambiguity as to what direction the relationship between communities would take. Indian community could become more isolated and ghettoized or else it could cluster with other social entities and engender new collective aggregates. The narrative is sympathetic to Ji Bai's evolved self-understanding. Ji Bai calls Nyerere her son. She accepts Salim's Black girlfriend unquestioningly. She dances like an African. Salim and Ji Bai, thus, develop a strong emotional relationship. It is to him that she bestows all her knowledge of the past. She typifies the integrated Indian who has negotiated various coordinates of her identity. She also breaks away from the stereotype of the Indian shopkeeper who stays clear from the socio-cultural life around him, happy in his island of financial security.

Salim does get close to the Black Africa as he not only falls in love with a Swahili girl but also becomes a part of the nationalist students' movement. He grows up to be a politically aware Tanzanian citizen. However, he faces racial exclusion owing to the emergence of Black nationalism. The repressive measures of the "postcolonial" state force him, eventually, to escape from his country. Official nationalism, thus, is oppressive. But this is not merely a problem of racialism practiced by the Black nationalists. Salim grants that the historically isolated migrant community was responsible in equal measure for the distrust that the emergent African nation developed. Nationalism and the national community would have had a separate face and character had the communities allowed free, uninhibited clustering of their respective members. Nation, the grandest of all social communities in modern era, is composed of various smaller

social entities: subnational, regional communities as well as families. The politics of exclusion and inclusion practiced in these formations has its bearing upon the shape of that large, grand collective self.

Alka Saraogi's protagonist Kishore Babu in *KaliKatha: Via Bypass*, has struggled with his Marwari identity throughout his younger years. Even in the days of fervent nationalist struggle he could not step out from his community's grip. He dithered regarding his commitment towards the community and felt guilty for not having firm resolve to participate in "national" movement. He is equally uncomfortable with the unbridled nationalist rhetoric of his friends, particularly his Bengali peer Shantunu, as well as with the near total indifference to the national struggle prevalent in his community. One issue that does inspire confidence to act is the reform movement within his own community. For example he compares the attitude towards women in his community with what he sees in the European and even Bengali residents of community. But the author underlines the fact that not all Marwari youths were as indecisive. Kishore's another Marwari friend, Amolak, a staunch Gandhian, appears as one character who is dissenter and is guided by larger ethical and social concerns. The relationship between the Bengali and the Marwari and of both with the national is placed in a fluid matrix. Shantunu, the Bengali friend sometimes Kishore by derogatory communal sobriquet, 'medo' but only because he believes that Kishore has no hang-ups. Within the context of friendly exchange he criticized Marwari customs and community practices. The novel highlights the uncomfortable fact of Marwari collusion with the colonialist. Amolak in that context counteracts this stereotype. The madman is also allegedly a Marwari who has given up the trappings of his community identity and becomes a voice for national and communal harmony. On the other hand, the narrative also records the failings of the Bengali intelligentsia, especially those who collaborated with colonialism.

The latest phase of Kishore Babu's life which comes after his bypass surgery is the one which is presented as most relevant for the contemporary postcolonial situation. The collective identity that he aspires for is fashioned synchronically through an interaction with the other communities. One most important event as Kishore Babu regains his political and ethical consciousness, which he had abandoned in the wake of communal riots of 1946, is acceptance of his cousin. His cousin Banwari had transgressed the community boundaries by marrying a Bengali woman. The cultural exclusivity of the community which this marriage challenged was shattered. Kishore Babu of

yesteryears had disowned his brother after this. But the reconciliation of the cousins in the latter part of the novel only testifies to the writer's, and the protagonist's confidence, in such intermixing of communities. Kishore Babu, thus recovers his national consciousness as he begins to identify and honour the choices of the dissenters. The snobbish Marwari which Kishore Babu had become starts identifying with the plebian, and finds there the possibility of a possible national community. This, however does not mean that community has to be dismissed. Kishore Babu is proud of the thrift and financial acumen of his community which he desires to contribute in the national prosperity.

Gaikwad in his autobiography The Branded is committed to the national process of increasing democratization of social space. The victimization of his community which was institutionalized in colonial times has carried on unabated in the postcolonial nation. The onus is largely on the national initiative in the form of affirmative actions of the state. The community however is not a passive social entity. The demands that it has begun to make on the national elite is transforming the socio-political landscape of the nation. Gaikwad's narrative calls into question the way postcolonial nation is imagined to the exclusion of its oppressed inhabitants. But the narrative is also a documentation of a social process that go on between various communities in formal and informal settings. The story of Gaikwad's education and schooling is pointer for the need to increase the clustering of social aggregates. The fluid boundaries of historically rigid communities are recognized as a step towards establishing a valid national community. The issue is, however, not that simple. It would not be appropriate to try to articulate the community's narrative merely in the vocabulary of postcolonial concerns. The fundamental need of the community is the restoration of basic human dignity. This is possible, as mentioned above, largely in the framework of nation-state.

Communities are always local and present. They may recall the remote origins but are always mindful of the immediate. They may look to past but they are always involved in engaged with the present. The three communities have to negotiate their politics of identity and recognition in the wake of historical changes which include the conditions of postcoloniality as well as the democratization of public sphere. The former is the background and the foreground is the present political processes. Point of reference is no longer the East-West encounter. What the texts

explore is the deeper social process within various local communities. Nation is not an evocation of the pristine past, nor the articulation of community identity an unproblematic retrieval of an innocent self. Nation and community both have failed the individuals but the energy of these individuals is geared towards reimagining both of these public spheres.

III

The authors of the three texts, in the last pages of their respective narratives, mark not the end but a beginning of yet another phase of their identitarian and narrative journeys¹. This new phase is not recorded in the text. It belongs to the future. In the last lines of the novel the protagonist of The Gunny Sack addresses his infant daughter invoking fulfillment of dreams in future. The three perpetually debating friends of Kali-Katha:Via Bypass, get together in a phantasmic future to resolve their differences. Gaikwad in The Branded, in spite of immense hurdles, renews his commitment to a democratic future. Each of them thoughtfully imposes order on the temporal organization of their respective narratives. Beginnings go back several generations in case of the first two writers and the third invokes a strategic experience of his grandparents to ground his narrative². The beginnings all are fraught with crisis: the displacement. Journey, then, is an apt metaphor for their creative endeavours. However, if “for any writer to begin is to embark upon something connected to a designated point of departure,” (Said, Beginnings xxii) does that automatically imply that to end is to disembark at some point of arrival? The concomitant question is what prompts such a journey? The expanding historical consciousness which E. H. Carr speaks of incites the writers to delve into their communitarian pasts. Historically marginalised communities have looked up to the act of narrativizing as a liberatory experience. Their narratives not only foreground their forgotten stories³ but also counter the negative image that the communities are trapped in. The writers in their communitarian recounting struggle with what Charles Taylor calls a “reduced mode of being,” a depreciatory image of the community reflected by the dominant social formations⁴. The narratives, thus, are an attempt to fight the negative image, the stereotype. Critiquing the dominant discourse, the narratives seek to supplant them with a more positive sense of the collaborative self. The negative self-image is a reduced mode of being. The gaze of the other which mirrors back the depreciatory image of the self can inflict real damage. It imprisons individuals and communities. Gaikwad gives a moving example:

If a bird is confined to a life in a house by clipping his wings lest it flies away, it is forced to remain in that house all its life. Even if it

wishes to fly, it cannot. Absolutely in the same way once a person from these tribes is shoved to jail right at his birth, he gets inextricably bonded to it. Even if anybody tries to retrieve such a person from his prison or the person himself tries to escape from it, he cannot come out of that hell (Gaikwad 200).

These texts do fight the negative image but that image is reflected faintly in the mirror of colonial discourse. Each text recalls the colonial antecedents but as the narratives progress the colonial fades out and what emerges is the fissured social reality internal to the postcolonial societies. The recounting of communitarian stories takes cognizance of the restrictive social space where various subnational collectives are hierarchically positioned. The subnational communities, especially those who are positioned under the hegemony of another dominant community fashion their narratives with a consciousness of a more egalitarian and accommodating future.

IV

Third-world novel has a productive ambiguity that does not let it settle in favour of any convenient binary. The ruptures in the postcolonial societies were not blandly nationalistic, nor they are purely communal, nor even fundamentally communitarian. The narrative coming from such multifarious cultural landscape will be opened. And though the very obligation of the novel as a genre is to have a determinate locale and setting, community becomes the point of departure for the three writers. The narratives, however, do not settle in the recounting of the community and they continue to negotiate with other compelling discourses of collective self viz, religion, region and nation. In a modern age in “which the immanence of meaning in life has become a problem” (Lukacs 56) novel as a communitarian narrative provides a launchpad to engage with questions of self and its discontents. The goals of the narrative journey are not given and hence the communitarian and the individual growth are creatively negotiated in these narratives. The collective self – in the form of community as well as the nation – is not provided with a final form but is reinvigorated with and within each narrative of that self. Bakhtin’s observations are instructive here:

Nothing conclusive has yet taken place in the world, the ultimate word of the world and about the world has not yet been spoken, the world is open and free, everything is still in the future and will always be in the future (qtd. in Morson and Emerson 39).

Endnotes

1. Fredric Jameson's model severely restrains the creative impulse of "third-world" texts as it reads even the libidinal to be a kind of antithesis to colonial discourse.
2. In the order of "proairetic code" and "hermeneutic code" of Roland Barthes. The former structures actions and expectations while the latter shapes questions and answers.
3. Aijaz Ahmed makes a distinction between the use of the term "third world" as a polemical and theoretical signifier (Ahmed 96). The term only has a provisional value.
4. In the preface to his Beginnings, Edward Said, among other questions, asks: "Can one begin whenever one pleases?" (xxi) As this study comes to an end the questions presents itself in a slightly modified form: Can one end wherever one pleases¹? The question is pertinent not only in the context of the thesis but more so in the purview of each text chosen for the study. Said further goes on to say that "beginning is not only a kind of action; it is also a frame of mind, a kind of work, an attitude, a consciousness," (xxi) which, I take to mean, applies not just to beginning but to the end as well. Expectation being that as the action ceases the frame of mind and projections of consciousness linger on even after the last word is written.
5. Gaikwad mentions that his grandparents were escapees from the bonded labour of the Nizam. The Branded (5).
6. Vassanji speaks of the responsibility of the postcolonial writer in these words: "The writer must write if only to recreate that old world – for whatever reason – which soon exists nowhere but only in memory," and further "Unbeknownst to many inhabitants of these high rises, their lives past, and those of their forbears, are gradually becoming the stuff of history, legend, myth." The stories of "small people" – a phrase he uses in his novel AMRiiKA – must find mention in the annals of human history.
7. "...our identity is partly shaped by recognition or its absence, often by the misrecognition of others, and so a person or group of people can suffer real damage, real distortion, if the people or society around them mirror back to them a confining or demeaning or contemptible picture of themselves. Nonrecognition or misrecognition can inflict harm, can be a form of oppression, imprisoning someone in a false, distorted, and reduced mode of being." (Taylor 25)