CHAPTER 2

INDIAN WRITINGS AND

THE IDEA OF THE NATION
A work of art takes birth in a definite time frame historically and that time frame contains several units of the family, the immediate society, the larger social background and at last the status of the country in relation to the world (Goswami 11).

Indian literature and the emerging scenario of Indian struggle for independence cannot be segregated in any discourse of the genre. The socio-political status of India was full of chaos and confusions before Independence as the national freedom movement was at its peak during this period. Literary activities in vernacular languages as well as in English language were trying hard to reflect the main socio-political stream of their respective time frame. Thus a new kind of literature evolved and it was coined as 'nationalist literature'. Nationalist literature—with all its biases and ideological problems—was anti-colonial in sentiment. It sought to define a native identity different from European constructions of the same. The main purpose was to raise 'national consciousness'. This meant constructing images of a tribe or region’s history, glorifying its pasts, reviving myths, and rejuvenating pride in its cultural forms. Thus the nationalist project was always a cultural one. There was nothing inherently unified about the diverse cultures, religions and languages that comprised the Indian subcontinent under colonialism. The European model of nationalism, which took for granted the existence of one religion, one language or one ethnicity was doomed to failure. It was for this impossibility that the British argued that India was not fit to rule itself. It was on behalf of this sense of identity that, beginning in the nineteenth century, Indian writers of literature began to imagine cultural unity through their fictional and poetic works.
Coming to Indian Nationalist literature it is to be found that this particular type of literature in the form of novels, essays and patriotic poetry played an important role in arousing national consciousness, both in pre and post Independent India. These writings are excellent examples of the writers’ or poets’ delineation of the idea of nation. For example, the novel *Anandamath* by Bankim Chandra Chatterjee was a source of great inspiration to all the nationalist leaders. This Bengali novel vibrates with patriotic fervour and which was arguably the precursor of the latter writers of the genre Indian Writing in English.

*Anandamath* is a Bengali novel, written by Bankim Chandra Chatterjee and published in 1882. The novel was “first published into English as *Abbey of Bliss.* The story, set in eighteenth century India, concerns a *sanyasi* revolt against the Muslim rule” (Jackson 7). It is considered one of the most important novels in the history of Bengali and Indian literature. Its importance is heightened by the fact that it became synonymous with the struggle for Indian independence from the British Empire. The novel was banned by the British. The ban was lifted later by the Government of India after independence. The national song of India, *Vande Mataram* was first published in this novel. In the “Introduction” to the novel, Basanta Koomar Roy says:

The theme song of this great novel is *Vande Mataram*—Hail Mother. Today *Vande Mataram* is India’s national song. It rang through the length and breadth of the land as a call to duty. It inspired equally the Mahatma Gandhi pacifists and the Aurobindo Ghose revolutionaries. Suffering the most barbarous atrocities in the British jails in India, thousands of Mahatma Gandhi’s followers
chanted this great song of freedom. And when Aurobindo Ghose’s men stood on the gallows to be hanged for the ‘crime’ of loving their own country, they joyously breathed their lust with the sacred mantra of *Vande Mataram* on their lips (Roy 17-18).

*Anandamath* begins on a realistic note and depicts a society which is almost modern. The first four chapters paint a picture of terrible and terrifying realism. The novel is set during famine in Bengal and it is realistically described in the following lines:

Multitudes fled from their homes, only to die of starvation somewhere else. Those that did not leave home died anyway. Fever, cholera, tuberculosis and smallpox reaped a rich harvest in human lives...Alas, there were none to bury or to cremate the dead! Even in the wealthiest houses the bodies of men, women and children rotted unto decay (Chatterji 32).

In these days of “devastation and distress” (Chatterjee 32), Mahendra Singh, one of the rich men of the village of Padachina, is staying in his mansion along with his wife Kalyani, and their little daughter. All his friends, relatives and servants are gone. Some have run away; and others have died. And so they at last “locked the doors of the mansion, freed the cattle, and set out for Calcutta with their daughter in the arms of her mother” (Chatterjee 33-34).

The journey is a difficult one. They all begin to be overcome with pangs of hunger. “Yet they continued their journey...through the waves of fire and finally at sunset they reached an inn” (Chatterjee 34). There is no one inside the inn. Mahendra then
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picks up an empty pitcher that is lying in the house and goes out in search of milk to save the lives of his wife and little daughter, leaving them alone in the gloomy and empty house. In a few minutes a crowd of countless shadows enter the room. They are the man-hunters who will sell Kalyani for food. Kalyani somehow manages to escape from the man-hunters and is fleeing through the forest with her infant. After a long chase, she loses consciousness at the bank of a river. A Hindu monk, stumbles upon her and the baby, but before he can help her, he is arrested by the British soldiers, because other priests were fueling revolt against the British rule. While being dragged away he spots another priest who is not wearing his distinctive robes and sings a beautiful nature-song dealing with river, breeze and forest with an invocation to Mother India. The priest deciphers the song, rescues Kalyani and the baby, taking them to a rebel priest hideout. Concurrently, Kalyani’s husband, Mahendra, is also given shelter by the priests, and they are reunited. The leader of the rebels indoctrinates Mahendra by showing him the three faces of Bharat-Mata (Mother India) as three goddess idols being worshipped in three consecutive rooms:

1. What Mother Was - An idol of Goddess Jagaddhatri
2. What Mother Has Become - An idol of Goddess Kali
3. What Mother Will Be - An idol of Goddess Durga

Gradually, the rebel influence grows and their ranks swell. Emboldened, they shift the headquarters to a small brick fort. The British attack the fort with a large force. The rebels blockade the bridge over the nearby river, but they lack any artillery or military training. In the fighting, the British make a tactical retreat over the bridge. The Sanyasis undisciplined the army, and lacking military experience chase the
British into the trap. Once the bridge is full of rebels, British artillery opens fire, inflicting severe casualties. However, some rebels manage to capture some of the cannons, and turn the fire back on to the British lines. The British are forced to fall back, the rebels winning their first battle. The story ends with Mahendra and Kalyani building a home again, with Mahendra continuing to support the rebels.

The plot background was loosely based on the devastating 'Bengal famine of 1770' and unsuccessful 'Sanyasi Rebellion'. Bankim Chandra dreamt of an India rid of the British. In this dream, he romantically imagined untrained Sanyasi soldiers fighting, beating the highly experienced Royal Army. Despite the romanticism, the novel's patriotism was a significant voice amidst the oppression and the struggle for independence. The novel's prose has been quoted by many writers talking about Indian independence. The book, no doubt, calls for the rise of Hindu nationalism to uproot the foreign Turko-Afghan Muslim rule of Bengal and put forth as a temporary alternative the East India Company till Hindus were fit for Self Rule. However in the actual rebellion, Hindu sanyasis and Muslim fakirs both rebelled against the British East India Company. Basanta Koomar Roy justifies the point when he says:

Chatterji's dream of a new nationalism for India did not die with him. Its translation into terms of national achievement has now become the definite mission of millions of India's Hindus, Mohammedans, Sikhs, Parsees, Jains, and Christians. The man's great achievement for India was that he made patriotism a religion, and his writings have become the gospel of India's struggle for political independence. Most popular among those writings, most
widely read by the masses, and most deeply impregnated by the
spirit of his own great love of India is the novel *Anandamath* (Roy
23-24).

The content of *Anandamath* is, therefore, a historical anachronism but all the same the book has a place in the evolution of Indian novel, partly because of its structure and partly because it reflects so faithfully the idea of nation and search for identity which are everlasting cries for the people of India.

It may be pointed out that the idea of nation, nationalism and patriotism which form the core of the novel *Anandamath* grew only in the latter half of the 19th century. Another Bengali novel, *Ghore Baire* (*The Home and the World*, 1916) written by Rabindranath Tagore which also vibrates with the idea of nation and nationalism but from another stand-point. The book illustrates the battle Tagore had with himself, between the ideas of Western culture and revolution against the Western culture for the sake of Indian nationhood. These two ideas are portrayed in two of the main characters, Nikhil, who is rational and opposes violence, and Sandip, who will let nothing stand in his way from reaching his goals. These two opposing ideals are very important in understanding the history of this region and its contemporary problems. There is much controversy over whether or not Tagore was attempting to represent Gandhi in Sandip but many argue that Tagore would not even venture to personify Sandip as Gandhi because Tagore was an admirer of Gandhi and Gandhi was the worshipper of anti-violence while Sandip would use violence to get what he wanted. The book shows “the clash between new and old, realism and idealism, the means and the end, good and evil” (Desai xxiv) within India and southern Asia.
The setting of the novel *The Home and the World* is in early 20\(^{th}\) century India. The story line coincides with the National Independence Movement taking place in the country at the time, which was sparked by the Indian National Congress. There were various national and regional campaigns of both militant and non-violent ideas which all had the common goal of ending British colonial rule. Militant nationalism had a strong following in the early part of the 20\(^{th}\) century, especially during the World War I period. Some examples of this movement are the Indo-German Pact and *Ghadar Conspiracy*; unfortunately both of these failed. The latter stages of the movement saw a transition to non-violent forms of resistance led by Mahatma Gandhi. India remained a British colony until 1947, when Pakistan (August 14) and India (August 15) gained their freedom. On January 26, 1950, India adopted a constitution and became its own republic. At the time of Indian Independence, the Muslim dominated north-west and eastern parts of the country were separated to form West Pakistan and East Pakistan (which later became Bangladesh). Particularly important to the novel is an understanding of the *swadeshi* movement, as a part of the Indian Nationalist Movement. The *swadeshi* Movement started in response to the Partition of Bengal by Lord Curzon which occurred in 1905. The Swadeshi movement was a successful resistance policy against the British colonization. Indian citizens were encouraged to boycott British goods in order to foster Indian identity and independence. This movement was important in fostering “the new spirit in India,” and separating India from Britain, which was largely thought to be responsible for the subsequent widespread poverty.
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Tagore’s idea of nation becomes multi-dimensional in *The Home and the World*. The novel tells us not only the personal struggles of the three main characters, but also little details of the family structure and how traditional Indian households were like. In the book, Bimala starts off as a traditional, obedient housewife who is faithful to her husband and even forces herself to be respectful towards her nagging sister-in-law. “I would cautiously and silently get up and take the dust of my husband’s feet without waking him, how at such moments I could feel the vermilion mark upon my forehead shining out like the morning star” (Tagore 18). However, as she falls “in love” with Sandip, she slowly moves away from her traditional housewife role. She becomes more daring, more confidently brushes off her sister-in-law’s criticisms, and crosses outside the women’s quarter of the house, and easily converses with another man, Sandip, who is not her husband. Through her dilemma, the readers are able to learn about the change in the traditional ways of the Indian household.

The plot is set in the estate of the Bengali land lord Nikhil. He marries Bimala, a woman who is both of a lower status and of a darker complexion, which is contradictory to his family traditions. Their love is idyllic and both are dedicated to one another until the appearance of his friend and radical revolutionist, Sandip who is a passionate and active man, and is an opposite of the peace-loving and somewhat passive Nikhil. His charismatic speech, support of the Swadeshi movement, and a renewed appreciation of everything Indian while denying everything British garnered support from local natives across the province. After hearing Sandip speaks at a rally, Bimala insists that Sandip visit Nikhil’s estate. While visiting, Sandip's alluring nature
easily attracts the innocent and unsuspecting Bimala, and she suggests he make his headquarters at their house. Once empowered by the inside world, knowing only her husband and home, she becomes engaged with the outside world, taking part in the Swadeshi movement by working with Sandip. As the novel develops, Bimala is drawn to Sandip’s passion and the attraction between the two becomes inevitable, producing a love triangle. She begins to question her marriage with Nikhil and finds in Sandip what she has always sought after in a man: zeal, ambition, and a hint of danger. She begins to help Sandip by stealing money from Nikhil’s treasury, convinced that if it is not equally his money as well as hers, then it belongs to the country. While Bimala claims her national duty as motivation, her true intentions lie in pleasing Sandip. Nikhil subsequently discovers their actions, but grants Bimala freedom to grow and choose what she wants in her life (as their marriage was arranged when she was a young girl). Meanwhile, Bimala experiences love for the first time, which ultimately helps her understand that it is indeed her husband Nikhil who really loves her. The novel ends with a riot, resulting in Sandip fleeing the city. Nikhil is mortally wounded in the head. Amulya, a young follower of Sandip's movement and whom Bimala thinks of as her son (since she has no children) dies by a bullet through his heart.

While the entire novel centres around the Swadeshi movement, the author of the novel is not advocating it but rather warning his reader of the dangers of such a movement. Tagore knows that it is possible for even a seemingly peaceful movement to turn quickly into aggressive nationalism. Such a change would do the country more harm than good. The character named Sandip is the vivacious and ardent leader of
He knows that his movement has the potential to turn ugly. He fervently believes however that freedom must be achieved no matter the cost. Sandip cites a story from the *Bhagavad Gita* in support of his own path (Tagore 131). The story tells of the Hindu Lord Krishna advising Arjuna to perform his duty as a warrior regardless of the result. Sandip's use of the Hindu epic poetry to support his movement illustrates the tendency of individuals to use religion as a basis for nationalism. The use of excerpts from the Indian epic poem was indicative of the blending of traditional elements of Indian culture with the ideals and goals of the modern Indian Independence movement. As both have the potential to yield individuals claiming an unshakable fervour for their cause, this can be a rather dangerous combination, a fact clearly acknowledged by the novelist.

Nationalism is also expressed through the rejection of foreign goods, which was a part of the *swadeshi* movement. Sandip was strongly against the sale of foreign goods and stated that all foreign articles, together with the demon of foreign influence, must be driven out of India. Nikhil on the other hand felt the opposite. He was against this bonfire business. Instead of destroying something, he loved to build up something and so he refused to “tyrannize” (Tagore 109). Bimala even pleaded with her husband to “order them to be cleared out!” (Tagore 109). She also stated that banishing foreign goods “would not be tyranny for selfish gain, but for the sake of the country” (Tagore 109).

The title of the novel *The Home and the World* suggests the relationship of the home with the outside world. Nikhil enjoys the modern, western goods and clothing and lavishes Bimala with them. However, Bimala, in the Hindu tradition, never goes
outside of the house complex. Her world is a clash of western and traditional Indian life. She enjoys the modern things that Nikhil brings to her, but when Sandip comes and speaks of nationalism with such fire, she sees these things as a threat to her way of life. Bimala’s struggle is with identity. She is part of the country, but only knows the home and her home is a mix of cultures. She is torn between supporting the ideal of a country that she knows she should love, or working toward ensuring that her home, her whole world, is free from strife and supporting her husband like a traditional Indian woman should. Bimala is forced to try to understand how her traditional life can mix with a modern world and not be undermined. This theme ties in with the nationalism theme because it is another way that Tagore is warning against the possibility that nationalism can do more harm than good.

To depict his idea of the nation Tagore in this novel intermingles the two contrasting ideas—‘religion’ and ‘nationalism’. In this novel, religion can be seen as the more ‘spiritual view’ while nationalism can be seen more as the ‘worldly view’. Nikhil’s main perspective in life is by the moral and intangible while Sandip is more concerned about the tangible things, which to him is reality. Sandip believes that this outlook on life, living in a way where one may follow his or her passions and seek immediate gratification, is what gives strength and portrays reality, which is linked to his strong belief in nationalism. Both Nikhil and Sandip seem to represent two opposing visions for the nation. Nikhil’s vision is one of enlightened humanitarian and global perspective, based on a true equality and harmony of individuals and nations. On the other hand, Sandip’s radical, parochial and belligerent nationalism, which cultivates an intense sense of patriotism in individuals, threatens to replace
their moral sensibility with national bigotry and blind fanaticism. Bimala is caught between the two ideals without knowing what should be her guiding principle signifying Bengal tottering between two possibilities. Seen from this perspective, Nikhil’s death at the end of the novel, just when Bimala is turning the corner and returning to her senses after a prolonged infatuation with Sandip and his views, also signals Tagore’s pessimism about the future of Bengal.

Thus, the novel The Home and the World—through the lens of the idealistic zamindar protagonist Nikhil—excoriates rising Indian nationalism, terrorism, and religious zeal in the swadeshi movement; a frank expression of Tagore’s conflicted sentiments, it emerged out of a 1914 bout of depression. The novel ends in Hindu-Muslim violence and Nikhil’s (likely mortal) wounding. The matters of self-identity, personal freedom, and religion are developed here in the context of a family story and love triangle. Post-colonial critics such as Ernest Gellner and Benedict Anderson have pointed out how nationalism cultivates the sentiments of irrationality, prejudice and hatred in people and Leela Gandhi has spoken of its attendant racism and loathing, and the alacrity with which citizens are willing to both kill and die for it. Frantz Fanon has explained that although the objective of nationalism is to create a horizontal relationship and fraternity within its people, in reality the nation never speaks of the hopes and aspirations of the entire ‘imagined community’, and hierarchy, factional hegemony, inequality and exploitation remain a daily occurrence in its body. In Sandip’s actions, Tagore has insightfully and shrewdly anticipated all these pitfalls of nationalism pointed out by later literary-cultural critics (Choudhuri 118-119). So, the novel, The Home and the World
occupies Tagore’s anti-nationalist sentiment conceived against a backdrop of a larger ideology of love, creation and global human fellowship.

One prominent nationalist writer in Hindi Literature of the post independence period is Bhartendu Harish Chandra (1850-1885). He was born on 09 September 1850 in a distinguished and opulent Agarwal family of Varanasi. From his grand-father and father he inherited material prosperity, Vaishnava traditions and literary talents. Harish Chandra showed love for devotional music and aptitude for composing poetry even at the age of five. Today Bhartendu Harish Chandra is revered as the father of modern Hindi literature. His writings marked a transition from tradition to modernity. He brought old literature into focus and created a new one, rich and varied in content, wide in range, refreshing in style, and nationalistic, progressive and reformatory in tone. Among his literary works, dramas and love lyrics are most famous. His genius as a poet lay in bringing poetry from the royal courts to the common people and introducing realism into it. He travelled widely in northern India and learnt several other languages such as Bengali, Marathi, Gujarati, Marwari and Punjabi, which widened his intellectual horizon.

Bhartendu Harish Chandra started a chain of journals such as Harish Chandra Chandrika, Kavivachan Sudha, Balabodhini Patrika and Bhagwadbhaktitoshini. These were not merely excellent literary magazines but also served as a plank on which to express views on diverse issues. His writings typify the agonies of India, unrest of the middle-class, hopes and aspirations of the youth and urge for progress and removal of injustice. His writings and speeches helped in the evolution of nationalism and advanced the cause of social reform. He deprecated child marriage,
encouraged widow remarriage, promoted education and worked for women’s emancipation.

Before discussing the delineation of the idea of the nation in Indian English (or Indo-Anglian) Fiction it would be helpful to sketch a short map of the development of the Indo-Anglian fiction along with its thematic plenitude. Although Indo-Anglian literature is rich in every branch, it is the Indo-Anglian fiction which has put India on the literary map of the world and brought her home to foreigners as never before in the history of international cultural relations. Indo-Anglian fiction has indeed opened a window for foreigners through which they can see India as Indians themselves would like to see her.

The novel was a late comer in Indo-Anglian literature but it is in this sphere that the greatest progress has been made. Up to the end of the 19th century there was hardly any novel written by an Indian in English and now there are novelists like Mulk Raj Anand, R.K.Narayan and Raja Rao who are read all over the world. This is not surprising because unlike poetry, there was no tradition of the novel in India and present-day India with her multi-cultural conflict, identity crisis and nationhood is a fertile ground for the growth of the novel.

The Indo-Anglian Fiction could not be written till a rather long time (till the second-half of nineteenth century) though English was quite in fashion by now. In the 19th century English was used as the medium for serious discussions by Indians on social, political, religious, economic and educational problems. Raja Ram Mohan Roy wrote very powerful English to advocate various social reforms in India. But nobody thought of writing fiction. Baring of the first Indian novel in English Bankim
Chandra Chatterjee’s *Rajmohan’s Wife* (1904), no Indo-Anglian could try their talent for more than a half century to come chiefly because they “could not overcome the inferiority complex instilled into them by the countries of foreign rule” (Singh 179) and secondly, since the English language was still considered by a considerable population—a language of British rulers and then it was anti-nationalism to use English as a medium for creative writing. Such bitter feeling still exists in many and hence “almost every article on Indo-Anglian writing begins with an apology for the writers who prefers to use English for the expression of their creative genius” (Singh 179).

A variety of historical novels paved the way for the birth of Indian English Fiction. These historical novels are *Hindupur* (1909) and *The Prince of Destiny* (1909) written by S. K. Mitra and S. K. Ghose respectively. As time passed by the novel form became increasingly popular with creative artists. After a long gap during which practically no Indo-Anglian novels appeared, around 1930, we find some historical novels such as K. S. Venkataramani’s *Marugan, The Tiller* (1927) and *Kandan, The Patriot* (1932), A. S. Panchapakesa’s *Baladitya* (1930) and Ram Narain’s *The Tigress of the Harem* (1930). Then one year later after the publication of K. S. Venkataramani’s *Kandan, The Patriot* Umraon Bahadur’s *The Unveiled Court* (1933) was published which, too, was more or less a historical novel, exposing defects in the government under the regime of a prince. But the initial vogue of the historical romances, obviously associated with the awakening of Indian nationalism, soon started coexisting with the more recent social and political awareness which swept over other Indian literatures of the time. As nationalist feeling came to the forefront of
Indian life, even purely novels on social reform were inflamed by politics since any
desire to improve the lot the of people was bound to be linked with political
independence.

Up to 1920s the Indian English fiction was experimental. The writers of that
period were experimenting to provide recognition to the Indo-Anglian fiction. They
wrote social, historical and detective novels but historical romances were much
popular. The period between 1920 and 1950 was dominated by novels with political
and social themes. During the 1950-1985, the writers like R. K. Narayan, Mulk Raj
Anand, Raja Rao, Kamala Markandeya, Anita Desai, Bhabani Bhattacharya, Manohar
Faraka, Nirad C. Choudhury, Salman Rushdie and others are attempting their art of
fiction writing with unlimited and unrestricted themes. Today, the themes of the
Indian English novel are many and varied. K. B. Vaid, commenting on the themes of
the Indian novelists, says that the thematic preoccupations of these novelists are:

- portrayal of poverty, hunger and disease; portrayal of widespread social evils and tensions; examinations of the survivals of the past; exploration of the hybrid culture of the educated Indian middle classes; analysis of the innumerable dislocations and conflicts in a tradition-ridden society under the impact of an incipient, half-hearted industrialization (quoted in Sinha 40).

Some other themes are inter-racial relations, the Indian national movement and the struggle for freedom, the partition of India, depiction of hunger and poverty of Indians, conflict between tradition and modernity etc. The younger novelists like
Anita Desai and Arun Joshi display an increasing inwardness in their themes. The Indian novel in English is thus characterized by a variety of themes. It continues to change and grow.

It is already mentioned that Indian English novel really came to its own at the time of Indian freedom-struggle. The direct or indirect influences of Gandhian struggle for independence and his teachings and principles became a recurring theme of the fictional writings. It was only with the Gandhian struggle for freedom that the Indian English novel really came to its own. K. S. Venkataramani’s *Murugan, The Tiller* and *Kandan, The Patriot* were written after the appearance of Gandhi on the Indian horizon. Murugan is an exponent of Gandhian economics, as Kandan is an exponent of Gandhian politics. Venkataramani’s other writings too reflect the theme of Gandhism. His *Jatadharan*, a collection of stories and *The Next Rung*, a critique of modern civilization bear sufficient influence of Mahatma Gandhi. These two writings have attempted to show the Indian cultural heritage along with the clash between east and west.

With the publication of Mulk Raj Anand’s *Untouchable* (1935) and *Coolie* (1936) and Raja Rao’s *Kanthapura* (1938), the Indian English novel started a new journey. This journey achieved a success with the arrival of R. K. Narayan in the realm of Indian English fictional world. These three constitute the big trio of the Indian English novel. These three writers between them laid the foundation for the emergence of the contemporary Indian English novel and set the trends which influenced later Indian English literature. The major achievement of these writers was the creative adaptation of English to Indian needs and the assertion of an Indian identity by dealing with
Indian issues, both large and small, in their own inimitable styles of story-telling. All the three deal with the idea of nation and nationalism in different ways. Raja Rao in his novel *Kanthapura* deals with the theme of Indian Nationalism in the background of Gandhiji’s struggle for independence, Mulk Raj Anand in his *Untouchable* presents the theme in its social perspective. Both tried to sow the seeds of nationalism among the Indians by dint of their writings. On the other hand some novelists tried to reflect a certain ambivalence towards the freedom movement and to show that ambivalence the novelists like R. K. Narayan used the self-reflexive or gentle comic style in their novels.

The next great development or re-awakening of the Indian English novel took place in the eighties and the decades that followed it with the publication of Salman Rushdie’s epical *Midnight’s Children*. Rushdie’s novel is remarkable for it was a movement away from the nationalistic novels of the triumvirate—R.K. Narayan, Raja Rao and Mulk Raj Anand and a foray into the fundamental concept of the national narrative. For Rushdie, it was a redefining of the relationship between the Self and the Nation and in doing so, he opened up new avenues for an entire generation of ‘post Rushdie’ writers of Indian English who treading on his path were able to express themselves in a variety of voices and modes. The Indian identity no longer remained a single one based on nationalism but forayed along with each and every individual Indian who had their own valid versions of national identity. For a clear understanding of the idea of nation and nationalism in Indian English fiction, three novels are negotiated which are written by three icons in the realm of fiction writing— Mulk Raj Anand (*Untouchable*), Raja Rao (*Kanthapura*) and Salman
Rushdie (Midnight’s Children)—for clear insight into the variation of the idea of nation with the changing scenario as well as changing writers.

Mulk Raj Anand was one of the triumvirates who inaugurated the new chapter of writers of fiction along with R.K. Narayan and Raja Rao. English education was the strength behind, but the inspiration had always been the people of the land, their lives, occupations and pains. In his immediate society, Anand had friends belonging to the scavenger class. His maiden attempt at novel writing, thus, takes into consideration the life of an untouchable, then a coolie. His themes obviously follow his intimate experience, his education, and his political and social philosophy. It can be said that his themes are Indian to the core but the applications are a combination of the Eastern mode of story-telling with a technical orientation of the West. His Untouchable is a high watermark in Indian English novels as a work of social realism. This novel deals with the problems of untouchability in Indian society. Untouchability is a social curse and Mahatma Gandhi vehemently opposed the system and tried to remove the curse from our society. He introduced many missions against untouchability. He treated the Dalits, the Harijans and other downtroddens equally as human beings. This novel also shows Gandhi’s mission to uplift the untouchables.

The central protagonist of the novel is Bakha, a dalit whose job is to clean the latrines of the people. When the novel starts we find Bakha is huddled in cold rags in his ramshackle hutment. The time is one autumn morning. His father shouts at him rudely to get up to clean the latrines for the benefit of the soldiers in the nearby cantonment. Ignoring his father, Bakha responds to the calling of Havildar Charat Singh to clean a latrine and is quick to do his bidding as he takes his brush and jug of
phenol and expertly washes the latrine clean. The Havildar promises Bakha a hockey stick as he knows Bakha is rather good at the game. With the self-respect of a slave boosted in this manner, Bakha goes on washing the dirty latrines for the second time during the morning.

As an outcast from normal society, Bakha experiences the curse of being born as an untouchable. His sister Sohini has to wait for some caste Hindu to pour water into her container as she, being an untouchable, has no right to touch the well. But the hypocrite Brahmin priest, Pandit Kali Nath, attracted by her youthful charms designs to give her water. Bakha receives humiliation and torture when he absent-mindedly bumps into a high caste gentleman while relishing the juicy delicacy of a ‘Jilebi’ (a sweet). His tearful apology falls on deaf ears. No one takes pity on him; instead, the ‘touched’ man hits him on his cheek. Later on his terrible experiences in the temple and hockey match create a sort of dejection in him and he resigns himself to a sense of fatalism. Here the novelist beautifully delineates the crude realities of Indian social system dominated by the corrupt priestly class.

The greater effect of the novel is its archetypal presentation of the colonial situation. This begins in the second paragraph of the novel, introducing Bakha as a young man of eighteen who had been caught by the glamour of the ‘white man’s’ life, the Tommies had treated him as a human being and he had learnt to think of himself as superior to his fellow-outcastes. Otherwise, the rest of the outcastes were content with their lot (Anand 2).
The passage clearly shows the source of the process of individuation in Bakha and in all those protagonists who become conscious of their existence as a human being and thus find it difficult to continue as a member of the tribe or community. The source is the conflict of cultures that has raged (and still rages) through the Commonwealth; when a member of one culture is touched by the other he becomes aware not so much of the attraction of the new culture (Bakha’s ambition to look like a gentleman) as of the fact that he is an individual, separated from his own society but not joined to the new. E.H. McCormick in his New Zealand Literature used Matthew Arnold’s phrase to describe this colonial condition:

Wandering between two worlds, one dead.

The other powerless to be born (Arnold 296).

In Bakha’s case, he is dead to the full meaning of Hindustan—he fails to recognize the snake image under the banyan tree in the temple courtyard—and he comprehends only the trappings of Western culture. Here Bakha is united in feeling for once with a whole group:

The consciousness of every boy was full of a desire to wear Western dress, and since most of the boys about the place were the sons of babus, bandsmen, sepoys, sweepers, washermen and shopkeepers, all too poor to afford the luxury of a complete European outfit, they eagerly stretched their hands to seize any particular article they could see anywhere, feeling that the possession of something European was better than possession of nothing European (Anand 92).
The sensation of belonging is contrasted with Bakha’s rejection by his father, Lakha and by the caste society the father still respects: “they are really kind. We must realize it is religion which prevents them touching us” (Anand 74). But even the temporary sensation of belonging granted to Bakha by the Havildar’s gift of the Hockey stick is ruined by an accident as the boys’ hockey game and the meeting addressed by Gandhiji ends in the burning of foreign cloth. Furthermore, the whole basis of Western culture is wholly rejected in Bakha’s comic encounter with the Christian missionary, Mr. Hutchinson. Robertson comments:

The way of the “traveller” addressed in the Hindi hymn sung at the meeting is not forward into the total imitation of the new culture, but back into the modified culture in which one is born—a purified Hinduism which can incorporate aspects of Western culture, such as the flush system. This is what Anand is saying to Indians in his novel but he is also anticipating the solution to culture conflict which has been more and more forcefully urged in recent years: the return to a modified native culture proposed by native leaders in Canada, New Zealand, Africa and the Caribbean and supported by the writers in those countries (Robertson 58).

The novelist also points out the motive of the Englismen to take the advantage of the desperate situation and convert the lower caste Hindus to Christianity. But Bakha survives from this trap and moves into the milling crowds who are thronging towards the city maidan (open field) to attend a rally addressed by Mahatma Gandhi. He is struck by Gandhi’s statement that untouchability is the greatest blot on
Hinduism. But Gandhi also exhorts the untouchables to purify themselves by eschewing their habits like drinking and eating carrion. Bakha is again confused when he overhears a dialogue between two gentlemen standing near him. He listens to the criticism of Gandhi and his preaching expounded by one of them, while the other, a young poet expounds the need of destroying all castes, and emphasizes the need for the sweepers to change their very occupation itself. Herein lies the irony.

Anand is undoubtedly writing a message for his own culture in *Untouchable*; much of the novel contrasts the innate decency of Bakha with the gap between the protestation and practice of untouchability among caste Hindus in India chiefly in the hypocrisy of the priest who claims Bakha’s sister has defiled him when he himself fondled the young girl’s breasts, but also in other senses where characters cut corners when it suits them, as in the meeting which Gandhi addresses. He also contrasts the rigidity of Hindu beliefs with the humane relations which can develop casually between the Harijans and other “lesser breeds without the law”, such as the Havildar and other Muslims, and among the boys who play hockey together.

But for this message to do more than mock hypocrisy, and easy objective, it would have to suggest a positive course of action. Anand proposes a double resolution, spiritual and physical; Gandhi offers the first:

(Untouchable) should realize that they are cleaning Hindu society...They have, therefore, to purify their lives. They should cultivate the habits of cleanliness...They claim to be Hindus. They read the scriptures. If, therefore, the Hindus oppress them, they should understand that the fault does not lie in the Hindu religion,
but in those who profess it. In order to emancipate themselves they have to purify themselves. They have to rid themselves of evil habits, like drinking liquor and eating carrion (Anand 138-139).

And he goes on to propose the Untouchables “should now cease to accept leavings from the plates of high caste Hindus” (Anand 139) and should have free access to wells and temples, two reforms Anand obviously supports by the crucial incidents he portrays at the well and at the end in showing how Bakha and his family get their daily food thrown to them.

The apparent paradox of purification by emancipation is defended by the poet in the penultimate chapter, and resolved by proposing the ‘organic’ introduction into Indian culture of ‘the flush system’. The spiritual message given by Gandhi makes Bakha in the last chapter accept his lot with the hope of escaping from the latrines when they are converted to the flush system; more important, the calmness that descends on him at the end of a day of crises makes him abandon his hope of becoming a ‘gentleman’, of wearing the clothes of the sahibs imitating them.

Bakha’s growth towards aggressiveness (though in limited sense) is not attributed to the instinct within him, but to the external objective situation that interacts with his consciousness. The novel narrates the events of a single day in the life of Bakha, who by nature is clean, swift and dignified, but who by profession is a sweeper, an outcaste whose job is to clean latrines, and hence an untouchable. The events are presented from the point of view of Bakha himself; Anand employs the stream-of-consciousness method which enables him to dramatize the interaction between consciousness and situation. The central event is Bakha’s pollution of a rich Hindu merchant in the town,
who then humiliates him before others. The event opens Bakha’s eyes, and Bakha realizes with a sudden shock what he really is in society:

Like a ray of light shooting through darkness, the recognition of his position, the significance of his lot dawning upon him. It illuminated the inner chambers of his mind. Everything that had happened to him traced its course up to this light and got the answer (Anand 43).

This new knowledge about himself further deepens as the day progresses. He sees Pandit Kalinath making lecherous advances towards his sister Sohini; he has picked up a loaf of bread from the pavement thrown to him by a rich housewife; he is repulsed by the hostility of Colonel Hutchinson’s embittered wife; he is confused by the alternative systems offered as the means for his liberation, viz., Christianity, Gandhism and Machine.

To the Western reader there is a certain strain in accepting the reconciling of spiritual and mechanical solutions to Bakha’s problem, and there is some evidence in the arranged denouncement that Anand also felt this strain but was determined to make his point and give his novel a practical applicability. And who can say what effect his novel has had in the formal changes that have occurred in Indian society with the passing of the “Untouchability Offences Act (1955)”, even though one notes that it is still not wholly effective? In spite of Anand’s resolution of the paradox and of the hope he offers for the Harijan, the Western reader is probably inclined more to side with Dr.Ambedhkar, a Dalit who was the Chairman of the Drafting Committee of Indian Constitution, in his disagreement with Gandhi over the problem. When the
young poet suggests the use of 'flush system' as a means of achieving this end he is not misinterpreting Gandhi but suggesting a practical alternative which cannot be ignored. E.M. Forster in his Introduction to this book (who was highly impressed by this particular point) has praised it. He says:

No god is needed to rescue the Untouchables, no vows of self-sacrifice and abnegation on the part of more fortunate Indians, but simply and solely—the flush system. Introduce water-closets and main-drainage throughout India, and all this wicked rubbish about untouchability will disappear (Forster viii).

Thus a casteless and classless society could be created. Though the novel is Gandhian in its motivation, it is however open-ended.

The novels of Mulk Raj Anand touch the surface of post colonial methodology to evolve new perspective for the term 'Other', 'hybridity' and 'suppressed class'. Characters of his novels projected as 'marginalised class' and 'subaltern class' search the way to self-identity. The character like Bakha always breathes under the dark shadow of identity crisis. Untouchable set an entire generation of educated Indians thinking about India's social evils that were perpetuated in the name of religion and tradition. These and other early novels and short stories brought into sharp focus the dehumanizing contradictions within colonized Indian society. Through his writings he revealed that in addition to the foreign colonialism of Britain there existed layers of colonialism within Indian society. This internal colonialism stood in the way of India's transition to a modern civil society. While exposing the overarching divide between the British and a colonized India, he reveals an Indian society creating its
own layers of colonizers and colonized thereby rendering the fledgling Indian nationalism an extremely problematic concept. Amarjit Chandan took an interview of the author in London, 1982 where the author expressed his idea of nation beautifully:

> It is not possible to conceive India as a nation in European terms. Historically speaking there is no revolutionary situation going in India (like the French revolution). India is surging with movements of all kinds. India as a state is going to last out and may ultimately be able to bring about a kind of union in the next hundred years, where the different communities have a national identity. The intelligentsia at the top is certainly Indian and is united and there is no doubt an Indian tradition of philosophical heritage. The miracle is that such a vast country is far more united than Europe which has been striving for nationalism for more than 200 years. The nationalist movement also gave some ethos. The ideas of liberty, equality and fraternity, the ideas of class struggle are dominantly present in the emergence of a new individual in each novel (quoted in Chandan 97).

Like Mulk Raj Anand’s *Untouchable*, Raja Rao’s *Kanthapura* (1938) also enacts some of the motifs of nationhood and postcolonialism. It portrays Pre-Independent India in all its realistic fervour. The novel is in the form of a story narrated by Achakka, an old woman of the village of Kanthapura. The village is a scenic beauty in the state of Karnataka. The village has clear cut class distinctions even in the very setting. There are different quarters occupied by different community people like the...
Brahmin quarter, the Sudra quarter, the potters, the pariah lane etc. The novel revolves around the lives of the people of Kanthapura and their effective participation in the freedom struggle. Moorthy, the village Gandhi spearheads the movement. They ardently follow Gandhian principles of Ahimsa or non-violence. The villagers slowly get united and the unifying force is their fight for free India. The women with the leadership of Rangamma and later Ratna emerge as the true satyagrahis. The British Government is pictured as evil and the culture based folk tales and epics are interspersed with the atrocities of the British. The famous practice of Hari katha is one such feature which is utilised to attack the British rule. The novel traces the start of freedom movement in a small village Kanthapura which later on gathers momentum and spreads all over the nation. Hindu traditional practices with respect to their various beliefs are beautifully shown in the novel. The police in the hands of the British Empire unleashes terror in the village finally destroying the whole village. Many men, women and children die in the various scuffles. Gandhi’s ideologies slowly but steadily spreads itself and the whole nation is seen waking up from its slumber against the British Empire’s tyrannies. The novel traces genuinely the growth of the Independence struggle in India with Gandhi at the background influence.

*Kanthapura* is a veritable Grammar of the Gandhian Myth—the myth that is but a poetic translation of the reality. It will always have a central place in Gandhi literature. In this novel, Raja Rao created a living microcosm of rural India awakened by the Gandhian impact in terms of the story of the Gandhi-man, Moorthy. The well-ordered, peaceful life of the village came under the influence of Gandhian ideas of social change, of moral regeneration, and above all, of political liberation through
Moorthy. Moorthy, the central protagonist of the story was a young man of the village educated in the city. As mentioned earlier, Moorthy was a follower of Gandhian ideals. The message of the ‘Gandhian Civil Disobedience Movement’ came to the remote scheduled village Kanthapura when Moorthy came from the city. Moorthy was loved by all except a few reactionary elements of religious orthodoxy, represented by a man like Bhatta. Bhatta has nothing personal against Moorthy, but what irks him is Moorthy’s pariah business, the Gandhi affair.

The vision of Gandhi converts Moorthy into a Gandhian, a Satyagrahi whose mission is to stir the sleeping people of Kanthapura. He taps religion in order to build up a mass movement. A chance discovery of the half-sunk linga by Moorthy is charged with tremendous religious activity. Moorthy takes up the mission of a mendicant going from door to door with his ascetic bowl to collect money for a series of ceremonies which muster people from the Brahmin quarters as well as from the non-Brahmin quarters. This is intended to foster fraternity among the segregated people and to knit the divided people into an integrated body. In a society in which Akkamma visits the Pariah quarters only from a distance, in which Bade Khan cannot stay in the Potter Street, the Sudra Street, and the Brahmin Street, and in which Bhatta resents the admission of the Pariahs to a temple or the Sanskrit College, Moorthy takes the liberty of mixing with them and even eating with them. He goes to the house of Rachanna and sips milk at the entreaties of his wife; despite stiff opposition from his own orthodox mother, Narsamma, he goes more and more to the Pariahs and one day carries the dead body of Puttayai’s wife for a while. He is
treated as a Pariah, as an outcaste, and ex-communicated for alleged caste-pollution. Even Range Gowda, the Tiger, favours the end of all discrimination.

We see that Moorthy goes from door to door, even in the pariah quarters of the village and explains to the villagers the significance of Gandhi’s struggle for independence. He inspires them to take to charka-spinning and weaving their own cloths. In spite of obstructions created by the religious orthodox people of the village, the Gandhian thoughts and ideas take root slowly in the minds of a vast majority of the people of the village. Of course, these people misinterpret the movement in the light of their traditional wisdom derived from the ancient scriptures and traditions. They realize that there is no real dichotomy between Gandhism and Hinduism.

However, Bhatta, the orthodox Brahmin, apprehends danger to his vested interests in religion, in what is being propagated by Moorthy and his men in the name of Gandhi. So to check Moorthy and his men he devises a plan. He tries to frighten Narasamma, the widowed mother of Moorthy, with the threat that Swami who is the ultimate authority in matters of religion might excommunicate Moorthy and his men if he continues to visit the pariah street and eat their food. Moorthy, naturally, ignores such threats and continues his work among them with the courage of his convictions. Would a Brahmin lose his Brahminhood if he touches a pariah? Or, if a pariah touches a Brahmin, what would happen to the pariah and the Brahmin? Like Anand’s Untouchable, in this novel Raja Rao has raised these questions. Moorthy, the central character in Kanthapura cannot change his holy thread everyday and cannot wash himself with the Ganges water because he has taken upon himself the task of spreading the gospel of Gandhi, which dissolves all castes
into one caste. In this respect, Moorthy's opponent is Bhatta, the Brahmin money-lender, who opposes any truck with the pariahs. He tells Rangamma:

Listen! Do you know Advocate Ram Sastri, the son of the old, orthodox Ranga Sastri, has now been talking of throwing open his temple to the pariahs? “The public temples are under the Government,” he says, “but this one was built by my ancestors and I shall let the pariahs in, and which bastard of his father will say No?” I hope, however, the father will have croaked before that. But really, aunt, we live in a strange age. What with their modern education and their modern women. Do you know, in the city they already have grown-up girls, fit enough to be mothers of two or three children, going to the Universities? And they talk to this boy and that boy; and what they do amongst themselves, heaven alone knows. And one, too, I heard, went and married a Mohomedan. Really, aunt, that is horrible! (Rao 33).

This passage suggests the fears of orthodox Brahmins like Bhatta that social changes would not only pollute society but may destroy the sanctity of the Hindu dharma.

When Bhatta visits the city, Seetharamu tells him:

The Swami is worried over this pariah movement, and he wants to crush it in its seed, before its cactus-roots have spread far and wide. You are a Bhatta and your voice is not a sparrow voice in your village, and you should speak to your people and organize a Brahmin party. Otherwise Brahminism is as good as kitchen
ashes. The Mahatma is a good man and a simple man. But he is making too much of these carcass-eating pariahs. Today it will be the pariahs, tomorrow it will be the Mohomedans, and the day after the Europeans...We must stop this. The Swami says he will outcaste every Brahmin who has touched a pariah. That is the right way to begin (Rao 34).

Not only do the Brahmins oppose the pariahs, but they rebuke Moorthy for his familiarity with Ratna, because Ratna is a young widow and her place is in the kitchen. When the Congress Committee is formed in Kanthapura, Moorthy is nominated the President and Range Gowde, Rangamma and Rachanna are members. In the task of organizing the freedom movement in the village Moorthy is helped by that Ratna, the young lady of progressive and enlightened views. As we read the narrative, we notice the Brahmin orthodoxy slowly but steadily loses ground and the spirit of Gandhi’s gospel gains the upper hand. The British Government on its part began taking prompt steps to counter the movement of the Gandhimen and to restrain the movement. Policeman Bade Khan is posted in the village and he is actively helped and supported by Bhatta and Swami. But, on the whole, the people remain undaunted and firm in their support to the Gandhi Movement. In the meantime, report regarding the historical ‘Dandi March’ of the Mahatma to break the ‘Salt Law’ and the ardent zeal it has evoked throughout the country, reaches the village. At this the villagers feel new spirit and do much to boost the public morale. Soon there is Satyagraha and picketing—under the leadership of Moorthy.
There is also the vivid description of the soldiers and coolies being asked to walk over the prostrate Satyagrahis, and many of them joining the Satyagrahis instead:

...and the Police frightened, caned and caned the coolies till they pushed themselves over us; and they put their feet here and they put their hands there, but Rangamma shouted ‘Vande Mataram! Lie down, brothers and sisters’, and we all lay down so that not a palm-width of space lay bare, and the coolies would not move, and we held to their hands and we held to their feet and we held to their saris and dhotis and all, while the rain poured on and on. And the police got nervous and they began to kick us in our backs and stomachs, and the crowd shouted ‘Mahatma Gandhi ki Jai!’ and someone took a cattle-bell and began to ring it, and they cried, ‘With them, brothers, with them!’ and they leaped and they ducked and they came down to lie beside us, and we shouted ‘Mahatma Gandhi ki Jai! Mahatma Gandhi ki Jai!’ (Rao 142).

There are police lathicharge and many are wounded and hurt seriously. The inhuman torture done by the policemen is beautifully described by the narrator:

And men are kicked and, legs tied to hands and hands tied to legs, are they rolled into the canal, and the waters splash and yells rise up, ‘Help, help, Ammayya!’ And the coolies rush up and some shout ‘Mahatma Gandhi ki jai!’ and others shout back ‘Vande Mataram!’ and a bayonet is thrust at one and he falls, and again through the night rises the lamentation ‘Ammayya—he’s gone—
he’s gone—he’s gone, Moorthappa,’ and it whirls and laments over the canal and the sugar-cane field and the Bebbur Mound and Skeffington Coffee Estate and the mango grove of the Kenchamma Temple—and crouching, we creep back through the village lane, behind lantana and aloe and cactus, looking at the Bebbur Mound, where the Gandhi flag is still flying beneath the full-bosomed moon, and the Canal-bund beyond which three thousand men are shrieking and slaying, weeping, wounding, groaning, crawling swooning, vomiting, bellowing, moaning, raving, gasping...and at the village gate there’s Satamma and Nanjamma and Rachamma and Madamma, and Yenki and Nanju and Pariah Tippa and old Mota and Beadle Timmayya and Bora and Venkata, and the children are there, too, and old men from the city, and the coolies of the fields who said, ‘Punjab, Punjab’(Rao 179).

Even large numbers are arrested. Moorthy is also arrested to a long term imprisonment. In his absence Ratna takes the charge of the Congress-work in the village. When the Satyagraha movement is in full swing, Ratna’s place in society as a freedom fighter is fully acknowledged, and all the women of Kanthapura, make her as their chief. As Satyagrahis, the women of Kanthapura break the age-old restrictions and taboos and become one. The following lines amply demonstrate this:

Ratna blew the conch from the top of the Promontory, and with the blowing of the conch rose the Satyanarayan Maharaj ki Jai!

Satyanarayan Maharaj ki Jai! from Swami’s courtyard, and the
throne was lifted up, and we marched through the Brahmin Street and the Potters' Street and the Pariah Street and the Weavers' Street and the doors creaked and children ran down the steps, and trays were in their hands, and the camphor was lit and the coconuts broken and the fruits offered, and one by one behind the children came their mothers, and behind their mothers and grand-mothers and grand-aunts, and people said, "Sister, let me hold the torch. Sister, let me hold the sacred fan." And shoulder after shoulder changed beneath the procession-throne, and the cries of *Satyanarayan Maharaj ki Jai! Satyanarayan Maharaj ki Jai!* leapt into the air. And somebody said, "Let us sing 'The Road to the City of love'," and we said "That's beautiful," and we clapped our hands and we sang, "The Road to the City of Love is hard, brother" (Rao 168).

The villagers influenced by Gandhism raise a brave resistance at first but ultimately they are compelled to flee. The narrator describes:

Ratna left us for Bombay the week after. But Rangamma will come out of prison soon. They say Rangamma is all for the Mahatma. We are all for the Mahatma. Pariah Rachanna's wife, Rachi, and Seethamma and Timmamma are all for the Mahatma. 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 Red-man'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 Bharatha 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. (Rao 183)

The people of Kanthapura are defeated, no doubt, but in their very defeat lay their victory. Their brave resistance has given a jerk to the British Government who ultimately have to leave the country. This is due to the distant but potent influence of Gandhiji, who, to the people of Kanthapura, is not a man or god, but “the Sahyadri Mountain, blue, high, wide” (Rao 127), and they, “pilgrims of the mountain” (Rao 127). Moorthy, though smaller, was also an impressive mountain to them. The people of Kanthapura feel safe and secure because they “knew there were the Small Mountain and the Big Mountain to protect us” (Rao 127).

The problematising potential of the novel extends to anti-colonial nationalism too. In order to examine this let us turn to another dimension of the novel. The emergence of novel as a genre in 19th century India raises the question of whether it is derivative. While there is a debate on this issue, the novel’s role in enabling the notion of nation-state to take shape is an important one. Benedict Anderson has argued that novel is partly responsible for a community to imagine itself as a nation. The novels written in 19th century and even beyond in India may be used to support this claim. While in Kanthapura, the action is restricted to the village itself with none of the characters
venturing too far out, yet the village is not insulated against the happenings in other places. In fact, the stimulation for action is not local. The grand events that form the focal points of the novel take place in response to events elsewhere – Lahore, Bengal, Gujarat, etc. The village community moves from an insulated identity towards a national identity. In one sense, *Kanthapura* chronicles the formation of a national identity within a remote village. This thematic is also supported by the manner in which the village becomes a kind of a microcosm of the nation. The narrative tends towards mythicizing. For example Moorthy’s fast, Ramakrishnayya’s death, the receding of the flood, and nationalist struggle itself are mythicized. The narrative takes recourse to Vedantic texts and Puranas and inserts nationalist struggle into them. For example, in a harikatha, Jayaramachar brings in an allegory between Siva, Parvati and the nation. The three eyed Siva stands for *Swaraj*. Later Rangamma standing in as the commentator of Vedanta after the death of her father reads the Puranas allegorically, interpreting hell as the foreign rule, soul as India and so on. Shall we claim that the nation is thus constructed hermeneutically?

The process of imagining a community–of imagining nationhood – also underlines the homogenising tendency of nationalism. The congress workers, who so vehemently are *swadeshi* and give up anything foreign, unwittingly embrace the European model of nation. This notion requires a nation state to have a singular form. A nation is a community of people who have a common language etc. Thus in Kanthapura, Congressmen including Moorthy follow the same model of the nation-state. Sankaru epitomises this: his insistence on speaking Hindi even to his mother instead of the local language Kannada; his fanatic resistance to the use of English and so on. This
conception of the nation informs everyone: e.g. the narrator visualises Moorthy (when in prison) to be wearing kurta pyjama instead of dhoti. The Hindi teacher is not from any Hindi speaking region but a Malayali (Surya Menon). Thus, the very conception of ‘Nation’, which is conceived after the European model of the nation-state, undermines the swadeshi spirit of nationalism. Any pure form of nationhood untouched by colonialism is seriously questioned.

Another problem arises when this novel is read as a record of a nation-in-the-making. It would seem to exemplify Jameson’s argument that third world literature is necessarily a national allegory. When we keep in mind Benedict Anderson’s thesis about the emergence of nation-state is a work on the emergence of nation-state in Europe, Jameson’s argument seems to put third world literature in the past of European literature. This only re-enacts the familiar theme that comes across in the colonialist historiography of Indian nationalism: that Indian nationalism is a learning process as has been pointed out by Ranajit Guha. This particular view of nationalism characterises Indian nationalism as a response to the stimulus of colonial administration. The view of the history of the colonised society as a march towards the teleological goal of becoming ultimately ‘Europe’ places them always at a past time in relation to the colonisers present time. The denial of coevalness of time is a necessity in the discourse of colonialism (Guha 1-8). The description of the village life is as a timeless continuum in the form of Sthalapurana or the Harikatha wherein nationalist figures become mythical; whereas, colonialism disrupts the narratives of the community and introduces ‘history’. In as far as the change in the narrative technique, which becomes more linear while narrating the freedom struggle in
Kanthapura, history really begins with Europe inhabiting *Kanthapura*. This is most clearly suggested in the loss of mythicizing tendency of the narrative in the later part when the arrival of newspapers, novels and pamphlets has exposed the first person narrator to techniques of historicizing. This whole reading of the novel harps back upon the exchange between the coloniser and the colonised. The interesting insights offered by the novel are about the immense complications and violence that attend the arrival of colonial modernity in India.

The novel highlights with no subtlety the collusion between colonialism and Brahmanism. The manner in which Moorthy becomes an outcaste in the Brahmin quarters with his campaign against untouchability indicates the tension between Brahmanism and nationalism. For Brahmanism, the colonial ruler is not the enemy but Gandhi's anti-untouchable movement is. The collusion between Brahmanism and colonialism is suggested through the alliance between Bhatta, Bade Khan the policeman and the Sahib of the Estate. Swami, who is waging a war against 'caste pollution due to this pariah business', sees British rulers as protectors of the ancient ways of Dharma. Swami receives a large amount from the govt as Rajadakshina and is promised that he would receive moral and material support in his war against caste pollution.

The discourse of nationalism meets the discourse of religion at different levels in the novel. While Bhatta, Swami and their followers (who have often material motives such as Venkamma) resist Gandhism in the name of religion, in *Kanthapura*, the nationalists increasingly employ the religious discourse and customs and symbols for nationalist purposes. Religious resources are mobilised for the politicisation of the
people. But the customs, rituals and symbols that become tools of nationalist mobilisation are primarily Brahminic: arthi, puja, conches, bells, Vedanta, bhajan etc. They do not include the cultural practices of the lower castes though their participation is prominent.

Therefore, it is found that Kanthapura very ably reflects much of the nationalistic themes including the patronising attitude towards the lower caste society. The novel, much like hegemonic Indian nationalists, deploys anti-caste postures to dissemble the projection of brahminical culture as the legitimate national culture.

The next developmental idea of nation can be found in Salman Rushdie’s epical Midnight’s Children. It is being regarded as a foundational text of postcolonialism. The reason for this immeasurable popularity of Rushdie’s Midnight’s Children is to be found in its unique style. It seems there appeared an Indian writer who told the story of the nation in a postmodern style that defies any categorization, and who did not write about village life and social ills. The days of R.K. Narayan, Mulk Raj Anand and their peer group were phased out. Rushdie ‘chutnified’ both the Indian history and language with his acute sense of humour and invented new metaphors of nationhood.

Critics often regard Midnight’s Children as a national allegory giving imaginative form to India and its history. As such, it has become the central text in Indian literature written in English: “it sounds like a continent finding its voice,” reads the blurb from the New York Times on the cover of the Picador paperback. Indian critics, in particular, read the novel as a national allegory that can be criticized for the things it has left out or the things it has gotten wrong. K. B. Rao, for instance, writes, Rushdie attempts to swallow all of India in his epic novel. Therein lies his ambition
and his downfall. He is authentic when he writes about Bombay, the place of his birth, the city where he grew up. Probably there is no other Indian novel that captures the sights and smells of Bombay as *Midnight's Children* does, but when Rushdie writes about the rest of India, he is neither so forceful, nor so authentic (quoted in Kortenaar 60). Yet Timothy Brennan argues that *Midnight's Children* is a cosmopolitan text that exposes the false consciousness of nationalism, and many, such as Homi Bhabha and Gyan Prakash, celebrate Rushdie's transcendence of the nation-state. And other critics, such as David Birch, read the novel as a radically unstable postmodern allegory, a denial of the very possibility of meaning. Critical reception of the novel thus has accorded it a paradoxical status: by virtue of its exuberance and ambition it is a celebration (albeit a critical one) of India the modern nation; at the same time it exposes the ideological underpinnings of the nation, which stands revealed as a fiction manipulated by the classes that control the state. According to Kortennar:

The novel does expose the fictionality of the nation and of its history, but the denial of the possibility of literal truth does not deny the nation. Where there is no literal truth we must put our faith in fictions. All we have are fictions, but some fictions deserve our assent and others do not... Rushdie’s novel explodes the notion of the nation having a stable identity and a single history, then invites a sceptical, provisional faith in the nation that it has exploded (Kortennar 41-42).

Rushdie's allegory is not of the nation as that might be imagined to exist outside the world of texts, but of the nation as already mediated by the 'pretext' of national
history. This is Indian history in its canonical form, as found in encyclopedias and textbooks. David Lipscomb has shown that Rushdie had one such textbook, Stanley Wolpert's *A New History of India*, beside him when he came to write *Midnight's Children*. Indian history in texts such as Wolpert's is political history, the story of the nation made by middle-class nationalist politicians, and it has a well-defined narrative form: established origins, narrative watersheds, and an agreed-upon chronology of significant events. It is not history in the sense of a past recoverable by radical historians seeking the traces and the empty spaces left in the archives by classes other than the middle classes and by groups other than intellectuals. That is the project of the Subaltern Studies historians like Guha and Spivak, not Rushdie's. Rushdie's novel is a meditation on the textuality of history and, in particular, of that official history that constitutes the nation.

The desire to reclaim the India of his past was the driving force behind Rushdie’s decision to write *Midnight's Children* – the novel was born when Rushdie realized how much he wanted to restore his past identity to himself. *Midnight's Children* was his first literary attempt to recapture Bombay, India. The novel explores the ways in which history is given meaning through the retelling of individual experience. History is seen subjectively through the eyes of the protagonist Saleem Sinai, therefore the retelling of history is fragmented and, at times, erroneous. For Saleem, born at the instance of India's independence from Britain, life becomes inextricably linked with the political, national, and religious events of his time; his life parallels that of postcolonial India. Due to the coincidental hour of his birth, Saleem is able to telepathically communicate with other gifted children born during the same hour of
India’s Independence. Rushdie is relating Saleem’s generation of “midnight’s children” to the generation of Indians with whom he was born and raised. As a product of postcolonial India, Saleem must piece together the multifarious fragments of his identity, just as India must begin anew in rebuilding her identity in the wake of colonialism. His story represents the plural identities of India and the fragmented search for self through memory.

Born at the stroke of midnight on August 15, 1947, the day of India’s independence from British rule, Saleem’s life is a microcosm of post-Independent India. His attempt to reconcile his various multiple identities reflects India’s struggle to reunite its multiple nationhoods after colonial rule. In a passage that echoes Fanon’s theory on national identity, Saleem muses on the meaning of India’s independence and acknowledges that postcolonial India is a unified nation that did not exist before. In a narrative build-up to the day of India’s independence, Saleem refers to India as

>a nation which had never previously never existed was about to win its freedom, catapulting us into a world which, although it had five thousand years of history, although it had invented the game of chess and traded with Middle Kingdom Egypt, was nevertheless quite imaginary; into a mythical land, a country which would never exist except by the efforts of a phenomenal will—except in a dream we all agreed to dream (Rushdie 150).

The dream Saleem refers to is the existence of a unified nation that was able, due to the collective will of its people, to gain its independence from Britain. In order to
break down the physical constraints of colonial rule, India needed to come together as
a nation; it needed to unite its multiple national identities to form the mythic land of
postcolonial India that Saleem is speaking of. Yet, this very reference to postcolonial
India as a “mythical land” challenges the fallacious supposition that India can, and
should be defined by a unified national identity.

Early in the novel, Saleem explains the difficulty of narrating his life story
because there are multitudes of different lives within him. Like India, he must
reconcile his multiple identities in order to define himself. He says,

there are so many stories to tell, too many, such an excess of
intertwined lives events miracles places rumours, so dense a
commingling of the improbable and the mundane! I have been the
swallower of lives; and to know me, just the one of me, you’ll have
to swallow the lot as well. Consumed multitudes are jostling and
shoving inside me (Rushdie 4).

Saleem’s struggle with self-identity parallels Rushdie’s analogy of “multiple rooting.”
One example of this is the role of multiple parentages in Saleem’s life. Switched at
birth by a nurse in the hospital, Saleem is raised by parents that are not biologically
his own. As a baby, due to the opportunistic hour of his birth, he is coveted by all of
his parent’s neighbours and assumes different roles when visiting each of them. He
says,

Even a baby is faced with the problem of defining itself; and I’m
bound to say that my early popularity had its problematic aspects,
because I was bombarded with a confusing multiplicity of views on
the subject (Rushdie 147).

Furthermore, when his parents discover they are not his true biological parents, they
leave him for an extended period of time with his Uncle Hanif and Aunt Pia who
become his surrogate parents. Saleem refers to this period of time as his “first exile”
[the second being when he moves with his parents to Pakistan]. Like Rushdie, who is
a product of multiple nations [India, Pakistan, England], Saleem must sort through his
own multiple identities to recognize his true self. These references to multiple
parentages relate to the feelings of homelessness and displacement as well to the
fragmentation of identity and memory that plague Saleem throughout the novel.

In *Midnight's Children*, Rushdie acknowledges the historical reconstruction:

> I knew the idea of the story, I had the idea of wanting to write about
> Bombay. I wanted to restore that past to myself. That was one thing.
> But also it seemed to me that the period between '47 and '77— the
> period from independence to the Emergency had a kind of shape to
> it; it represented a sort of closed period in the history of the country.
> That shape becomes part of the architecture of the book (quoted in
> Pattanayak 18).

Rushdie's choice of the events Independence, Partition and the Emergency-- events in
which his understanding is informed by the conflict between social freedom and
political crisis determines the shape of the narrative. Rushdie makes repeated
references to the pre-1947 past in order to foreground the post-1947 present.
Benedict Anderson's sense of the imagined constructedness of the nation concurs with Saleem's sense of the imagined nation-state in *Midnight's Children* and is further emphasized through Rushdie's statement that, "the idea of sequence, of narrative, of society as a story, is essential to the creation of nations" (quoted in Teverson 50). The novel in constituting history as a narrative act reveals its transformative power and suggests that all knowledge is constructed. Rushdie sees the inevitability of the exercise of power relations within the formation of the nation,

midnight's children can be made to represent many things, according to your point of view; they can be seen as the last throw of everything ... in our myth-ridden nation, whose defeat was entirely desirable in the context of a modernizing, twentieth-century economy; or as the true hope of freedom (Rushdie 278).

In the pages of *Midnight's Children*, we are able to see the psychological effects of colonial domination on a nation and its people. Instead of mirroring the colonial ideologies of India's past to retell the story of her Independence, Rushdie recreates the history of his homeland from the subjective and fragmented memory of his narrator. By paralleling Saleem's life with the events following India's independence, Rushdie ties the identity of the postcolonial country directly to the individuals that are products of it. The result is a text that vividly represents the plural identities of a country and its people who are seeking to define themselves in the wake of colonialism.

In *Midnight's Children*, Rushdie reveals a major discontent with the 'governmentality' based on a dynastic regime. Saleem's genealogy, which results in relations not of blood, reinstates the frequent textual reiteration that Mrs. Gandhi did
not share any blood relationship with Mahatma Gandhi. It is of significance that Mrs. Gandhi sued libel against Rushdie not for his attack on her social and economic reforms, but for the reference to her role as the widow who accelerates the death of the father of Sanjay Gandhi, the ‘labia lips’ of the novel. Though the libel did not affect the popularity of *Midnight’s Children* as a novel, it did reveal the presence of political stakes in the act of writing. It is of new historicist significance that the political sphere wields power by containing resistance (subsequent editions of the novel were required to remove the ‘offending’ reference and Rushdie was ordered to make a public apology in open court). On the other hand, *Midnight’s Children* as a novel which reconfigured the notion of history as a powerful connective between self and nation had the power to enable new Indian English writers of the eighties. Above all, the novel beautifully depicts Rushdie’s childhood and his lost idea of nation *i.e.* India — a nation which made Rushdie a bit nostalgic and it was in this nostalgia that Rushdie drove the train of India’s past haulting them at important historical stations at a punctual time (Dwivedi 520).

Therefore it is seen that Indian English fiction is a powerful representation of the culture of Indian people of both pre and post independent era. The mutual relation that exists between society and literature, between the prevailing social, economic and political conditions and the portrayal of the characters, can be aptly illustrated in the novels written by Indian English novelists. During the colonial period the Indian English Novel was concerned with and delved into the problems of identity of the Indian people suffering under the British yoke and hence was entirely of a different
mould compared to post-independence novels. After Indian Independence, Indian writers started looking at the Indian context and scenario from a post-colonial point of view though the concentration on identity problems continued. But at the same time, there were new hopes, which in turn no doubt led to the development of newer and varied problems—social, economic, religious, political and familial—that had been previously submerged in the deluge of the national movement and drew the attention of the creative writers. The partition, the communal riots after partition, the stigmatic caste system, the suppression and lack of individuality of women, the poverty of the uneducated Indian populace became the central focus. However, the reflections of the idea of Nation and Nationalism varied with the writers and also the changing scenario of same writers.
Works Cited


