HISTORY AS FICTION: EXPLORING ISSUES OF NATION, NATIONALISM AND IDENTITY IN SELECT PRE-INDEPENDENCE AND POST-INDEPENDENCE INDIAN WRITERS LIKE RABINDRANATH TAGORE, SUNIL GANGOPADHYAY, AMITAV GHOSH ETC.

Introduction

Section I – The Idea of the Nation

Thinkers like “Renan were aware that nations are not ‘natural’ entities and the instability of the nation is the inevitable consequence of its nature as a social construction. The myth of nationhood, masked by ideology, perpetuates nationalism.”1 Therefore, in order to find the core of nationalism we must first grapple with the idea and concept of ‘nation’. But in doing so we encounter the paradoxical chicken and egg question: Which came first, nation or nationalism? According to K.R. Minogue, “Nationalism which began by describing itself as the political and historical consciousness of the nation came in time to the inventing of nations for which it could act.”2 For Ernest Gellner, “Nationalism is not the awakening of nations to self-consciousness: it invents nations where they do not exist.”3 In spite of this paradox what is clear is that a nation is a collection of people. It is human communities which are the basis and their interaction, interests and aspirations lead to nationalism.
The most basic concepts in politics that of society and state and the state-
society relationship lead us to understand the process of nation formation.

In the modern world the state is synonymous with the nation state, a
natural outcome of primitive society and city states. The Latin word ‘nation’
implies a people with common racial, religious, linguistic, cultural and
historical ties that identify themselves as a group with a common political
destiny. In French ‘Nation’ signifies a community of men linked in the present
by the will to live together. In Italian ‘Nazione’ is defined as an organism
possessing ends, existence and means of action superior both in power and
duration to those of the single individuals and groups which compose it. In
English ‘Nation’ calls attention to those persons who compose a political
community. It is also used to denote an aggregation of individuals united by
other as well as political ties, ties commonly of race, religion, language or
tradition.

It is believed by some western philosophers and historians that nations
in the modern sense of the word emerged only after the end of the middle
ages, while others categorically state that it was the French Revolution which
ushered in the concept of the nation. According to Elie Kedourie “Nationalism
is a doctrine invented in Europe at the beginning of the nineteenth century.”
He goes on to add that the origins of the doctrine of nationalism are rooted in
the Enlightenment and its aftermath in Europe. Both the Enlightenment and
the French Revolution introduced important political, social and cultural ideas
and brought about change in the way people looked at the world and their roles in it. The most significant impact was in the realm of politics. What the French Revolution did was to make the idea of the ‘nation’ more politically inclusive. It was to include all aspects of society but would be above it. It was an assertion that the Nation was more than the king, aristocracy and the church. According to the revolutionaries the people were sovereign and they owed no allegiance to any government that did not derive their sovereignty from the nation. This subversive doctrine helped to influence the rise of nationalism.

The French Revolution found an ardent admirer in Immanuel Kant (1724-1804). He argued powerfully the idea of freedom and its corollary, free states and nations. The Kantian view of freedom is one where man is free when he obeys laws of morality which he finds within himself and not in the external world. Kant’s doctrine makes the individual the very centre, the arbiter, the sovereign of the universe. Kant merely reinforced the teaching which the French Revolution spread with such success over Europe and the world. Here Kant is propounding very clearly the idea of autonomy as the essential end of politics. Self-determination thus becomes the supreme political good. Nationalism carries forward the Enlightenment idea of self determination.

From a study of western political thought and literature we learn that a nation can be formed in any one of the following three ways. First by
transforming a state already in existence. Or by fusing several existing states to form a united nation and if not, then by destroying existing political forms and creating new ones. The movers and shakers behind nation formation may be the upper and middle classes who aim to combine political change with maintenance of the existing social system. It may also be the middle classes, the gentry with the aid of peasants who support radical measures but not revolutionary social upheaval. Peasants, agriculturists along with the intelligentsia who agitate for national liberty and redistribution of land may also be in the forefront of nation formation. Any one or a permutation combination of these groups are usually responsible for the construction and consolidation of the idea of the nation. But it is the intelligentsia which plays a critical role in providing leadership to what eventually becomes a mass movement for nationhood. Therefore the role of literacy, culture and education as discussed by Benedict Anderson and Partha Chatterjee among others is crucial to imagining and realizing the nation.

While the Latin word ‘nation’ implies a common racial descent, ethnically exclusive nationalism is not viable in the modern world. Even apparently homogeneous nations such as the French, the German and British are mixtures of various races. India and other large Asian states have highly heterogeneous populations. Carrying forward the ideal of the French Revolution, the ‘nation’ is not just politically inclusive but socially and culturally inclusive as well. All major nations have been melting pots. While geographical proximity can bind people together, that in itself need not
consolidate them into nations or nationalities. More than geography or climate it is culture and history that play decisive roles in the creation of nations and nationalisms.

The term nation refers to a people who feel united and have a desire to work for a common political destiny. According to Ramsay Muir, "A nation is a body of people who feel themselves to be naturally linked together by certain affinities which are so strong and real for them…."\(^5\) Nationalism is a sentiment and a will. It is essentially spiritual in character and is the result of many forces. A good example of this is the image of a Jewish nation that Jews have believed in, created and cultivated right from ancient times. This image of a nation leads to the desire for a homeland, a territory where language, religion, traditions, culture and history coalesce. In a sense nation precedes nationalism.

Sovereignty, geography, history, common interests notwithstanding, Renan believes “A nation is a soul, a spiritual principle…. It presupposes a past; it is summarized however, in the present by a tangible fact, namely, consent, the clearly expressed desire to continue a common life. A nation’s existence is…. A daily plebiscite, just as an individual’s existence is a perpetual affirmation of life.”\(^6\) In his lecture *What is a nation?* delivered at the Sorbonne on 11\(^{th}\) March 1882, Ernest Renan proposed to analyze the idea of the nation. The idea of nation was ambiguous, and was often confused with
race, religion and language. This prompted Renan to address some of the issues related to nation and nationalism.

The evolution of the idea of nationalities and by implication of the nation can be located from the fifth century AD until the tenth century when the Germans imposed dynasties upon extensive parts of Europe. After the partition of Verdun in the ninth century, modern France and modern Germany came into being. From here onwards France, Germany, Italy and Spain matured into nations.

Renan sets out the defining features of these national states. While the emphasis was not on homogeneity the over-riding principle is the fusion of their component populations. This was made possible by the adoption of each other’s religion. The second reason was the adoption of the local language by the conquerors along with the incorporation of local customs and native culture. This assimilation led to the language and religion of the conquerors and the conquered becoming the same. Religion and language ensured the fusion of native culture. This fusion became over centuries the actual mould of the nation.

We can see that when diverse groups come together, assimilate, blend and share traditions, culture along with geographical space create a new identity. By not holding on to the past and by interchange and fusion, the German and French groupings could evolve into nations. Renan says this was possible because, “the essence of a nation is that all individuals have many
things in common also that they have forgotten many things.” ⁷ “Forgetting is a crucial factor in the creation of a nation.” ⁸ Genealogical roots are the first casualty in this forgetting largely due to the successful mixing of populations. This unity is the prerequisite of the nation and the modern nation is a result of a historical process and the culmination of several events such as dynasty, anti-feudal consciousness, revolution and most importantly the will of the people. Renan examines these events in order to arrive at his definition of a nation. Though the will of the people is the cornerstone of the ‘nation’, Renan takes up the idea of nation as a product of dynasty and empire.

Western nations such as France, England, Italy and Holland were founded by royal dynasty but not Switzerland or the United States. Moreover France survived as a nation after the revolution and the fall of its royalty. Therefore nations can be formed with or without a dynastic principle and nations can exist even when the dynastic principle ceases to operate. To further dilute the ethnographic argument Renan provides the example of the Roman Empire which was an agglomeration of different cities, provinces across continents dealing a blow to the idea of race. That ethnographic considerations have not played any significant role is testified by the composition of modern nations. Renan points out that France, Germany, Italy and Britain are a combination of numerous races. Since there is no pure race and can never be one it is foolish to make race the basis of any political theory or practice. Such a premise can only invite disaster, as seen in the case of Nazi Germany in the twentieth century, proving the fallacy of one single pure race.
While the study of race is important to understand the evolution of humanity it should have no application in politics. Race has thus become increasingly less important and Renan reiterates that instead of harping on ethnography, “It is good for everyone to know how to forget.”

From ethnography, Renan moves to philology and shows how language unites people without forcing them to do so. The United States, England, Canada, Australia and New Zealand speak the same language but are different nations. So also Portugal and Brazil, Spain and the Latin American countries. But Switzerland thrives in spite of having three official languages. Here Renan introduces the concept of the ‘Will’ which he takes up in great detail later in his address. As stated earlier, for Renan, the will of man or a nation is superior to anything else. It is the will of the nation that keeps a country like Switzerland united, in spite of the diversity of its dialects. India is a living proof that it is not race, religion or language that keeps a nation united.

Many languages and dialects have disappeared or are no longer spoken in different parts of the world. In any case, “Languages are historical formations, which tell us very little about the blood of those who speak them.” Like race, an exclusive concern with language has dangers and drawbacks. Human beings are much more than an entity defined by a fixed language or culture. It is reason and moral virtues, education and knowledge that enlighten, ennoble and take civilization forward.
Renan then takes up religion as a criterion for nationhood and immediately declares that religion like race and language cannot be an adequate basis for the constitution of a modern nationality. Religion and rites were family rites and in ancient times determined the existence of a social group which by extension included the state. Thus, in Athens, religion was a state religion and every Athenian had to swear by it. However foreigners and slaves did not have to accept it. This was generally the practice in other medieval republics. But over a period of time religion became an individual matter and one could be French, English or German and follow any faith or practice none. While religion plays an integral role in the personal lives of people it is not such an important feature in the creation or demarcation of national frontiers.

Any discussion of national frontiers makes us turn to geography and Renan also analyses the role of geography in the determination of what constitutes a nation. It is believed that geography determines history. Rivers, plains, seas, oceans, hills, mountains and forests have helped mankind travel, trade, build settlements, feed and clothe itself. But mountains and rivers cannot be taken as natural frontiers. Since natural boundaries are open to dispute they cannot be the basis of nationhood. Once again Renan pronounces the supremacy of the human will. He says, “No, it is no more soil than it is race which makes a nation. The soul furnishes the substratum, the field of struggle and labors; man furnishes the soul. A nation is a spiritual principle.”

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What is now clear is that for Renan this spiritual principle cannot be created by race, language, religion, vested interest, geography or military might. After examining the different criteria which are used to distinguish nations and finding them inadequate Renan concluded that it was the will of the individual which would indicate whether a nation exists or not.

“A nation is a soul, a spiritual principle. Two things, which in truth are but one, constitute the soul or spiritual principle. One lies in the past, one in the present.”12 It is a shared heritage and a shared desire to live together that create the nation. A nation is based on social capital and sharing joy, sorrow, hope, duties and responsibility is what binds a nation more than customs and frontiers. These are universal and break down differences of race, religion and language. It is the solidarity created by past sacrifice and willingness to build a future together that creates a nation. So power, politics, governance or bureaucracy does not make the nation. It is not politics that determines the nation but human will. The nation is above politics and nationalism is collective will and collective being. This view corresponds to the views of the French Revolution. While Renan terms nation and nationalism as subversive because they not only repudiate politics but go beyond it, G. Aloysius says that,”It is the congruence between culture and power is what nation and nationalism is all about.”13 He further cites Ernest Gellner and Benedict Anderson who conclude that the basis of the nation is the universalization of literacy, social mobility, formal equality and anonymous membership of an imagined community.
John Plamenatz describes “two types” of nationalism where it is “primarily a cultural phenomenon” which then takes a “political form”. Of these two types of nationalism the one which came into being in Western Europe is the Western type and the other located in the countries of Eastern Europe, Asia, Africa and Latin America is of the Eastern type. The primary difference between Western and Eastern types of nationalism lay in the fact that the western ‘nation’ was “culturally equipped” and the standards for nationhood were based on ideas about “man, morals and society” which were believed to be intrinsic to the culture of those countries and societies.

Eastern nations, on the other hand, were backward and far removed from the cosmopolitan high culture of advanced nations. In order to match upto the standards of advanced western nations, the underdeveloped nations had to borrow and adapt standards from an alien culture and carry out a process of cultural transformation. Setting themselves up against the western nations it was necessary to regenerate their national culture if they were to progress to the level of western nations. This comparison and contrast with western nations became possible due to the reality of colonialism.

According to Ashis Nandy, the success of modern colonialism was not based so much on military or industrial power but on its ability to overturn a traditional order and way of life. A secular culture introduced by the colonialists appealed especially to the elite who saw in it an opportunity to align with the rulers and cement their hold on social hierarchy. The old ways
were seen to be coming in the way of the new age of social and material progress.

The search for social regeneration was therefore imitative. At the same time another contradictory strand ran through this enterprise. A certain ambivalence was seen in the colonized elite’s attitude towards the alien ruler. Should the old traditional way of life be completely jettisoned? Without the markers of religion, caste groups, traditions and customs how would national identity be determined? Raja Rammohan Roy, Ishwarchandra Vidyasagar, Bankimchandra Chatterjee, followed by Rabindranath Tagore and Mahatma Gandhi were some of the leading figures of the national movement who grappled with the idea of identity. Keeping this contradiction in mind, Partha Chatterjee once again quotes Plamenatz as declaring “Eastern nationalism is disturbed and ambivalent as the nationalisms of Herder and Mazzini were not.” However a distinction must be made between the nationalism of Eastern Europe and that of Asia and Africa. Asian and African nationalism was a response to colonialism and conquest by an alien civilization unlike that of Eastern Europe which by virtue of a similar culture found it easier to assimilate with the comity of nations of Europe. Of course nationalism in Eastern Europe was blighted by Nazism and Fascism; an outcome of belligerent, aggressive and chauvinistic nationalism.

Since a distinction has been made between the two nationalisms it is necessary to study how the two evolved and the differences between them.
According to Hans Kohn, “Nationalism, which has its roots deep in the past” is “not older than the second half of the eighteenth century” and “Its first great manifestation was the French Revolution...”\(^{17}\) People’s participation is the mainstay of nationalism. As the French Revolution showed, the ideas of popular sovereignty, a revision of the social hierarchy and secularization of society based on enlightenment principles of the secular spirit of science gave rise to a materialistic, industrial society based on science and technology. This society consisted of an emerging class that was ready to break free from tradition and the past, striving to give a new direction to the language and culture of the people. “In its rise, it claimed to represent not only a new class and its interests, but the whole people.”\(^{18}\) This new class, which was neither nobility nor clergy, was the product of the spread of science and rationality, of modernization and industrialization and the champion of equality and democracy. This middle class became the promoter of nationalist ideals and claimed to represent not only its own class but the whole ‘nation.’

Hans Kohn correlates the rise and power of the middle class with the different stages of nationalism:

Where the third estate became powerful in the eighteenth century – as in Great Britain, in France and in the United States – nationalism found its expression, but not exclusively, in political and economic changes. Where, on the other hand, the third estate was still weak and only in a budding stage at the beginning of the nineteenth century, as in Germany, Italy and among the Slavonic
peoples, nationalism found its expression predominantly in the cultural field…With the growing strength of the third estate, with the political and cultural awakening of the masses, in the course of the nineteenth century, this cultural nationalism soon turned into the desire for the formation of a ‘nation-state’.  

Thus, while geography, race, religion, language and common descent create nationalities, the feeling of nationality is not nationalism. Nationalism is a product of the growth of social and intellectual factors at a certain stage of history.

In India this stage of history was set up by British colonial rule. Ashis Nandy states the obvious that colonialism is not only about economic gain and political power though they are important motives. But colonialism is “principally addressed in the sphere of Psychology.” He argues that “the first differentia of colonialism is a state of mind in the colonizers and the colonized, a colonial consciousness which includes the sometimes unrealizable wish to make economic and political points from the colonies.”

This colonial consciousness precedes a national consciousness as well as informs it. Nationalism is historically fused with colonialism and no matter what the type, modern or traditional, of nationalism, “the one that wins out in the end is the modernizing, westernizing element…”

This type of nationalism, Nandy terms as illegitimate. He explores the psychological contours of colonialism in the rulers and the ruled and tries to
define colonialism as a shared culture whose sustenance is not entirely dependent on the physical presence of alien rulers. Therefore we can see why colonialism almost always continues in newer forms even after the departure of colonial powers.

“As a state of mind colonialism is an indigenous process released by external forces. It’s sources lie deep in the minds of the ruler and the ruled…” and “that which begins in the minds of men must also end in the minds of men.” However, postcolonial history has shown that national freedom is no guarantee against oppressive and iniquitous government and in many ways the new ruling classes slid effortlessly into the shoes of the earlier masters. Their hypocrisy and sophistry have been effectively captured by Salman Rushdie and Amitav Ghosh in their fictional depiction of the nation. They portray in their works very succinctly the truth, that the triumph of the national principle does not necessarily entail the triumph of liberty for the individual or society.

Nandy points out that that during the early years of British rule in India, roughly between 1757 and 1830, the rulers came mainly from a feudal background. “But while British rule had already been established, British culture in India was still not politically dominant, and race-bound evolutionism was still inconspicuous in the ruling culture.” The dominance of the British middle class morality and culture on British imperialism coincided with the emergence of an Indian middle class who internalized the colonial codes and began to speak in the same language.
To the British, Indians had to be first saved and then civilized. The Indian middle class elite also saw the British as agents of progress and joined hands on a mission to reform and uplift Indian society along colonial parameters. This is what makes Partha Chatterjee ask, “why is it that non-European colonial countries have no historical alternative but try to approximate the given attributes of modernity when that very process of approximation means their continuous subjection under a world order which only sets their tasks for them and over which they have no control?”

His views echo Nandy’s when he declares that “it is not just military might or industrial strength, but thought itself, which can dominate and subjugate. It is to approach the field of discourse, historical, philosophical and scientific as a battleground of political power.” Thus not only colonialism but the subsequent growth of Indian nationalism was a consequence of post-enlightenment bourgeois –rationalist conception of knowledge.

The new nationalisms and emerging nationalists absorbed the notion that “…just as nations exist, so nations by definition must have a past. So every nationalism has invented a past for the nation; every nationalism speaks through a discourse… which claims to demonstrate the rise, progress and efflorescence of its own particular genius.” It is true that nationalists make use of the past in order to subvert the present in the same way that writers do. Valor and bravery are not envisaged in the colonial present. Sei Samay harks back to 1757 when it was the Muslims, under Siraj-ud-daula, who fought the
British and the Hindus who collaborated. *Twilight in Delhi* goes back to 1857 when the sepoys rallied under the last Mughal ruler. Of course Gora too is a child of 1857.

According to Elie Kedourie nationalism often creates uneasy and unequal relations among competing groups. It may explain the major political divide between Muslims and Hindus in pre-independence India. This divide was most prominent in Bengal and Punjab, areas of the highest concentration of Muslims, and to a lesser extent in the United Provinces. The Hindu view of nationalism was often seen as a means of freedom from foreign yoke both Muslim and British. While Hindus harped on the golden past of a glorious Indian civilization, Muslims, especially after the failure of the Revolt of 1857 mourned the loss of imperial powers and the ebbing away of social and political traditions. As a consequence both Hindus and Muslims introduced their own versions of nationalism reviving old quarrels and humiliations in the process. The issue of language and culture also became tools in the hands of Indian nationalists as is the case everywhere. With Persian being replaced by English as the official language, and the later growth of the vernaculars, linguistic debates became more acrimonious. The issue of the supremacy of Urdu and Hindi divided the Hindus and Muslims and linguistic sovereignty combined with religion set off the chain reaction to partition. So we can say that in the Indian context religion, language and culture could be seen as disruptive aspects of nationalism. It is obvious that this could not be an adequate basis for self esteem and cultural autonomy. What was needed was
an alternative model that would look critically at Indian tradition, evaluate the nature of the western impact on them, and update Indian culture without disturbing its authenticity.

The first encounter between colonizer and colonized while creating a new social and educated elite did not entirely succeed in alienating them from their roots. In fact, intellectuals and thinkers like Raja Rammohan Roy, took from the west and introduced a Semitic version of Hinduism to the urban Bengali middle class. Ashis Nandy sees this as a product of “partly colonial designs of cultural and political self-hood for the colonized.”28 The idea of the nation, nationalism and issues of identity are closely linked to this cultural colonialism. It is the “second colonization and resistances to it” especially the “psychological resistance to colonialism”29, that became the basis of the Indian ‘nation’ and subsequent nationalism. Of course the response and resistance to colonialism was colored and influenced by the western world view. Because, “The West has not merely produced colonialism, it informs most interpretations of colonialism.”30

For example, though India existed as a sacred land for its people, bounded by mountains and oceans, it was British interventions that pitch forked India into the modern industrial age. This in turn created educated middle class professionals who became the forerunners of the nationalist movement. Unlike in Europe, the conditions that created the French Revolution or the Industrial Revolution did not exist in India. A political and
social tradition was superimposed instead of gradually evolving. All along European domination worked in tangible as well as intangible ways. The professional and middle classes, under British influence were the first to be converted to nationalism. Tagore in his *Nationalism* (1917) discusses the influence of Europe on Eastern Civilizations, particularly, India. The contrast between the past and the British present was stark. In traditional society the people and the rulers remained apart. Villages were self-contained with their own administration and self-government. The rulers were distant and politics and contests remained centered around seats of power leaving the people by and large untouched. But, according to Tagore the difference between modern western government and government in the old style “is like the difference between the hand-loom and the power-loom. In the products of the hand-loom the magic of man’s living fingers finds its expression and its hum harmonizes with the music of life. But the power-loom is relentlessly lifeless and accurate and monotonous in its production.”

Along with the all pervading power of this type of modern government is the influence of modern industrialization. This economic policy of the British government destroyed the traditional village economy and upset social stability. At the same time the British education system began to take the youth away from traditional learning systems and occupations creating intellectual disorientation in the process. Western education in the form of information and instruction was at variance with the traditional skills, knowledge and wisdom of the family and community. This served to create
not only disorientation but confusion and rootlessness among the youth. It is this aspect of western education and economy that Tagore critiques in *Gora*. Tagore along with Gandhi was deeply disturbed by the debilitating impact of westernization on Indian social and cultural life. While the British modernizing mission replaced the old order with the new one it also gave rise to nationalism as a substitute for the loss of communal and tribal ties and customs. The Revolt of 1857, described as the first ‘War of Indian Independence’ can be seen as a culmination of not only British political actions but a response to the threat of westernization.

Tagore’s *Gora* tries to stem the tide of secular hierarchies and their attendant theories from over-running traditional societies. His aim is to hold on to customs and rituals which have been termed meaningless by the new world order. *Gora*’s fight is not so much against the new rulers as against the Indian elite who have succumbed to the temptations of a new anthropocentric doctrine. *Gora*’s Indian wasn’t the noble savage but one who was comfortable with his past and present, who embraced nature as a living partner and who moved with the river of time. Through *Gora* and later in *Ghare Baire* we see Tagore offering us a critique of both colonialism and nationalism by examining its cultural, social and psychological impact. The defeat of colonialism was made possible by a combination of the westernized urban elite, who acquired westernness to defeat the west on its own terms, and the vast majority of the non-westernized who retained their traditional culture, myths and Indianness. It is this struggle against colonialism that was
actualized by writers like Bankimchandra Chatterjee and later, very successfully by Tagore. The protagonists in their novels, as well as in the novels being studied here, like the colonized Indians do not remain mere victims of colonialism but participate in the colonial process by being collaborators as well as protestors against colonial rule and its oppression. They make choices and their choices inform their complicity as well as their resistance to colonialism.

Nandy provides an “alternative mythology of history which denies and defies the values of history.” He rejects “the model of the gullible, hopeless victim of colonialism caught in the hinges of history.” Nandy enquires into the psychological structures and cultural forces which supported or resisted the culture of colonialism in British India. This naturally extends into a study of post-colonial consciousness. An attempt has been made by this researcher to also show through the texts and the authors studied that the idea of the Indian nation, the growth of nationalism and the search for a unique identity is a result of “a battle for survival…sometimes consciously, sometimes by default.”

The imposition of colonial culture forced the Indians to find an alternative language of discourse. Even though they were influenced by and often products of Western rationalist thought, some like Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar did not abandon their roots. He combined western rationalism with Indian classical texts to solve India’s social problems. He countered the
Manusamhita with the Parasar Sutra instead of using western points of reference. It is this cultural traditionalism of Vidyasagar that is carried forward by Tagore and Gandhi who focused on the living traditions of India. They try to highlight both the classical and folk based cultural traditions of India as opposed to the modernism which informed colonial ideology. According to them, industrial society, modernity and cultural homogeneity came together to form the western ‘nation’ and threatened to edge out local and indigenous cultures. They formulated a new idiom to battle colonialism and to protect the cultural diversity of India. As Ernst Gellner points out “nationalism is, essentially, the general imposition of a high culture on society whose previously low cultures had taken up the lives of the majority….It is the establishment of an anonymous, impersonal society….in place of a previous complex structure of local groups, sustained by folk cultures reproduced locally and idiosyncratically by the micro-groups themselves.”

It was unacceptable to Tagore and Gandhi that this new high culture, a product of colonial rule, should subsume indigenous cultures.

Benedict Anderson analyzes the concept of the nation as an imagined community and Partha Chatterjee discusses its relevance to Indian nationalism. In their seminal works *Imagined Communities* and *The Nation and its Fragments* Anderson and Chatterjee point out to the role played by culture, language and capitalism in the formation of nation and nationalism. They strongly propound the role of culture in the creation of nation and nationalism. Both believe that cultural nationalism precedes political
movements, but Chatterjee disagrees on the modular nature of these cultural artifacts. He argues that tradition and culture are indigenous and differ from western models.

According to Anderson, nation and nationalism are cultural artifacts which have evolved and changed over time. These cultural artifacts which are the culmination of complex historical forces in Europe in the eighteenth century became models to be replicated elsewhere. What were these cultural artifacts and was their transplantation, especially to India really possible? To arrive at some answers we need to study Anderson’s theories of the origins and evolution of nations and nationalism. Anderson defines the nation as an imagined political community. A political community that evolves from its cultural roots. He emphatically states that nationalism is a product of the “cultural systems that preceded it, out of which…..as well against which….it came into being.”

Instead of dwelling on political ideologies Anderson focuses on the linkages between religion, language, literacy and print capitalism to buttress his argument. Language, rather a sacred language was the bedrock of religion and religious culture. So a sacred language and written script, be it Arabic, Latin or Sanskrit help to form the first imagined communities based on religion. But while religious communities could be imagined through sacred languages it is the relationship between language and literacy which fueled the growth of this religious community in Europe. The clergy, fluent in both
Latin, and the vernaculars mediated between the Church and the people. Once again a religious movement and community was imagined through language.

Martin Luther’s theses were translated into German and achieved mass readership thanks to print capitalism and the rise of the vernacular. In sixteenth century Europe, bilingualism, the vernacular press and the print media played a significant role just as it was to do in India in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The Reformation in Europe saw the rise of the vernacular along with the corresponding growth of the bourgeoisie into a powerful community. During this period the book and the newspaper became “the first modern-style mass-produced industrial commodity.”

So origins of the nation can be traced to capitalism and one of the earliest forms of capitalist enterprise – book publishing. Like all capitalist ventures it was governed by market forces. The initial market was the Latin knowing literati but soon printers began to reach out to a larger vernacular readership. Due to capitalism, literacy and social change this readership expanded to include the merchants, traders, women and youth. The subsequent induction of vernacular languages into the administrative machinery succeeded in the spread of these languages. The decline in the use and power of Latin and the increased number of vernacular users created a secular, nationally imagined community.

The post – Kantians, Herder, Fichte and Schlegel specifically take up the issue of language, identity and nation in their writings. They argue against adopting a foreign language instead of the native tongue. This notion that the native tongue alone is the superior vehicle for self expression and fulfillment
is echoed in the views and writings of Indian literary men while they pushed
to propagate the vernacular in nineteenth and twentieth century colonial India.
Perhaps the resurgence of the vernacular in colonial India can be understood
in the light of these developments. Bankimchandra’s historical fiction may be
seen as not only a protest against foreign rule but also an attempt to revive and
use the native tongue as a means of connecting India’s past with its present
and to determine the future. To summarize Herder and Fichte’s views we can
conclude that only those who speak their own language can really be called
nations and that every nation must speak an original language. Only through
an original language can one retain one’s identity. Therefore it is necessary for
a nation to revive and develop its original language, for it is only through an
original language that a nation can reach fulfillment and freedom. The lingua
franca is what determines the nation. According to this doctrine, a group
speaking the same language is known as a nation and such a nation ought to
constitute a state. While language determines nation, the nation must be
constituted into a state in order to preserve language and identity.

If, according to Anderson, the origins of national consciousness in
Europe can be attributed to capitalism, print capitalism, rise of the middle
classes and growth of vernacular languages, in India too, the scenario in the
eighteenth and nineteenth centuries is quite similar. Religion and culture
created an imagined Indian community where bilingualism, even trilingualism
was the norm. Among the upper caste elite of Bengal, knowledge of Sanskrit,
Bengali and in some cases, Persian created the necessary linkages between
history, legend, folklore, traditions, administration and the daily life of the people.

Initially this elite mediated between Sanskrit, the sacred language and Bengali, the language of the people, and Persian, the language of the court. With the British conquest of Bengal, English became the language of power towards which the elite began to gravitate. As English became the language of administration, eclipsing the role of Persian, it became necessary for the British to introduce English education to ensure the supply of clerks and babus as cogs in the wheel of official machinery. With the spread of English education and the introduction of capitalism a new bourgeoisie elite was created in Bengal. An elite who had access to English education, was in the employ of the British or was associated with the colonial power in some form or the other. English education and close proximity to the colonial power ensured that this multilingual elite played the role of the clergy of medieval Europe in spreading English education and ideas as well as simulating the Reformation. Education and social reforms were an important means of bringing about social change. Print capitalism, introduced by the colonial power through its missionaries also passed into the hands of the elite. And just as the Humanists revived the literature of pre-Christian Europe, so also the Orientalists, with William Jones playing a leading role, pioneered the study of Sanskrit to discover the antiquity and diversity of Indic civilization. By then the Bengali elite having been subjugated under colonialism but with access to notions of liberty, equality and fraternity through a European education turned
their own culture and civilization as a means of redefining their identity. Already familiar with Sanskrit they began to use the print medium, to spread in the vernacular, the story of India, it’s people and culture. Thus creating a separate cultural space within colonialism that could not be intruded upon. Novels and newspapers became their medium. As in Europe, the leaders of the movement were “‘persons whose profession largely consisted of the handling of language: writers, teachers,…..lawyers.” With the impetus provided by the Orientalists they went back to their roots, to folklore, the epics, myths and legends of the land and coupled this with inquiry, introspection, rationalism and scientific temper culled from the Enlightenment and Reformation that reached them via colonialism. They were made familiar with the politics of the French Revolution and Nepoleonic conquest which was to have a strong impact on the social and cultural fabric of Europe. The nationalist and libertarian philosophy of the French Revolution spurred young men across Europe to conspire against the established order in order to fructify the radical ideas of nationalism and self rule.

The restlessness of the post 1815 generation in Europe finds a mirror image in the turmoil and restlessness in India preceding the Revolt of 1857. If the French Revolution was the turning point in Europe then 1857 was to play the same role in defining nation and nationalism in India. So first, a cultural community was imagined through which at a later stage political demands could be advanced. By the end of the nineteenth century in India, the spread of education, literacy, commerce, communication and consolidation of British
administration provided the agenda for vernacular unification. The role of the vernacular in the forming and envisioning of identity and nationhood is significant because in Tom Nairn’s words: “The new middle-class intelligentsia of nationalism had to invite the masses into history; and the invitation had to be written in a language they understood.” 39

Partha Chatterjee takes up the issues raised by Benedict Anderson and places them in the Indian, rather, Bengali context. Anderson studied the origin and spread of nationalism in the context of world history and concluded that nations are imagined into existence. Moreover, anti-colonial nationalism in Asia and Africa, according to him are modeled on western nationalism. Chatterjee refutes this modular framework. He argues that the “most powerful as well as the most creative results of the nationalist imagination in Asia and Africa are posited not on an identity but rather a difference with the ‘modular’ forms of the national society propagated by the modern west.”40 Chatterjee insists that nationalism is not to be taken as merely a political movement. Anti-colonial nationalism begins in the search for a sovereign domain within colonial society. In India nationalism emerged from a desire to preserve ‘national culture’. This ‘national culture’ was the preserve of the inner domain, the spiritual. The outer and the material domain was the arena of the colonizer whereas the inner was the essence of self, sovereignty and nationhood. This division of society into inner and outer domains was created by the English educated upwardly mobile middle classes who were equally at ease in both domains. While they traversed the inner and outer they were
unwilling to let the two mix. However the two domains were not insulated from each other. Education, reforms, social and political changes had their impact on the inner domain. But this only fueled the “most powerful, creative and historically significant project: to fashion a modern national culture.”

that was different from the west.

While the creative imagination preserved and protected the sanctity and sovereignty of this national culture it was from this space that a nationalized political ideology germinated. From the interstices of the outer and inner domain, emerged a modern Bengali language and a newer and more powerful narrative prose. The Bengali elite embraced the English language and education to become the new bilingual elite and they used their English education to infuse modernity into their mother tongue. The idea was to enable Bengali to withstand and in turn become a suitable vehicle for ‘modern’ culture. A culture that was national and modern was not a contradiction as long as it was Indian and not western. So it was Bengali and not English that became a powerful force in the making of Bengali modernity.

A sense of Bengali identity was nurtured and themes from history, society, women and family found expression in a vibrant modern narrative form—the novel. Just as the narrative was a distillation of English and Sanskrit influences but made modern by the vibrancy of living speech, so also language, literature, education, family and woman had to be Indian and different from western models. Chatterjee argues that nationalism asserts its
sovereignty over the spiritual domain before it makes its presence felt in the material domain of the state. Cultural nationalism has its own indigenous roots and political nationalism is possible only when the inner spiritual domain is protected from cultural contamination.

Unlike Anderson, whose theory of nationness is based on the political history of Europe, for Chatterjee:

The nation was being imagined away from politics, outside the area of influence of the colonial powers and had its own dynamics. It is this kind of imagining that led to a national movement and freedom struggle unique in its abjuration of violence and creative in its ability to unify diversity. Europe’s inability to manage its own ethnic nationalisms leading to two world wars bears testimony that culture, not politics, nor territory can define a nation.  

Homi K.Bhabha takes the idea of an imagined community further. According to him “Nations, like narratives… fully realize their horizons in the mind’s eye.” It is a cultural construct because the nation stands as a symbolic force which underwrites the prose of power that each nation wields. The image of the nation, as he sees it, is an ambivalent one. It lies between history, politics and culture. He adds that “despite the certainty with which historians speak of the ‘origins’ of the nation as a sign of the ‘modernity’ of society, the cultural temporality of the nation inscribes a much more transitional social reality.” He quotes Benedict Anderson who proposes “that
Nationalism has to be understood, by aligning it not with self-consciously held political ideologies, but with large cultural systems that preceded it, out of which – as well as against which—it came into being.”45 It is this concept of the nation as a cultural concept that has been taken up by Partha Chatterjee.

Michael Oakeshott in “Character of a modern European state” describes the equivocal nature of the modern nation. “The national space”, is in his view, constituted from competing dispositions of human association. . . .” Moral rules and conventions of conduct on the one hand and common purpose and substantive end on the other. “In the absence of their merging into a new identity they have survived as competing dogmas – impos[ing] a particular ambivalence upon all the institutions of a modern state and a specific ambiguity upon its vocabulary of discourse.”46

Rabindranath Tagore and Mahatma Gandhi in their concept of nation advocated the need for morality to merge with national goals to create an ethical national discourse. Gandhi saw the modern nation as an extension of modern western civilization which “breeds greed.” The reason for our subjugation is, not cultural backwardness as Bankimchandra Chatterjee believed, but because “we have catapulted to greed.”47 He feared that like the English nation, India too was “becoming irreligious”48 and warned that without a moral and ethical principle, Home Rule could not be attained and it would simply mean expulsion of the English. “We do not want the tyranny of either English rule or Indian rule.”49
While Gandhi, Tagore, Vivekananda and the elite constructed an identity imagined in spiritual and modern terms another alternate construction of the nation was being imagined. The Dalit-Bahujan movement did not oppose modernization. Their focus was on egalitarianism and social development. The masses were more important than the nation. Another view is that of the subaltern school of thought. The subaltern school views Indian historiography as “dominated by elitism – colonial elitism and bourgeois nationalist elitism.”

Both these varieties of elitism believed that the development of a nationalist consciousness and the subsequent making of the Indian nation were a result of colonialist achievement with the active contribution of the Indian elite. The historical writing of the nation “fails to acknowledge, far less interpret, the contribution made by the people ‘on their own’, that is, ‘independently of the elite’ to the making and development of this nationalism.”

Mahasweta Devi writes about the tribals and Harijans who are ignored by the nation. Her stories can be termed “parables of India, national allegories along the collective lines of caste, class, gender and tribe.”

_Douluti_, the novella, “can be read as plea for the nation to be defined by the victims rather than by the ruling, parasitic groups.”

Gayatri Chakarvorty Spivak speaks for the subaltern, especially the women who were doubly marginalized and doubly unheard under colonialism. Spivak “has drawn our attention to that large majority of the colonized that has left no mark upon history because it could not, or was not allowed to, make itself heard.”

Spivak focuses on the female subaltern because, “If, in the context
of colonial production, the subaltern has no history and can not speak, the subaltern as female is even more deeply in shadow.”

The post colonial perspective is used to analyze the relationship between the colonizer and colonized. Postcolonial studies takes up Foucault’s notion of ‘discourses’, Gramsci’s ‘hegemony’, ‘deconstruction’ and even Marxism to focus on various texts to understand and examine colonization and the construction of identity. It also focuses on the impact and the response to colonialism by the colonized. It pays special attention to the formation of identity in the light of colonialism. Postcolonial studies critically analyses the colonial relationship across the vast historical and geographical area, an area spanning all five continents.

Therefore we can say that “post-coloniality recognizes that nations are mental, social and political constructions that change according to circumstances. In a time of massive immigration, rapid international communication, and the increased demands by minorities, national cultural boundaries are less stable than in the past and notions of national identity are changing.” In the light of this, we can better understand Elleke Boehmer’s views that “the language of postcolonial text, whether everyday or literary, is never merely reactive. It seeks to resolve as well as make conflict, to go beyond retaliation, to act out, not to foreclose, a dilemma. A text, literary, filmic or otherwise, can contribute fully, even centrally, to how a community defines itself and understands its future…”
Section II – Literature and Nation

Writers and novelists writing of the nation reflect the society of the nation as seen in the modern world and their writing portrays what Hannah Arendt terms “that curiously hybrid realm where private interests assume public significance.” While the public impinges on and colors the private realm forever, the ‘home’ and the ‘world’ flow into each other “like waves in the never-ending stream of the life-process itself.”

The space and time of the modern nation and the emergence of the nation as a form of narrative is embodied in the narrative culture of the realist novel. But, says Bhabha, to “encounter the nation as it is written displays a temporality of culture and social consciousness more in tune with the partial, over-determined process by which textual meaning is produced through the articulation of difference in language; more in keeping with the problem of closure which plays enigmatically in the discourse of the sign.” Therefore:

To study the nation through its narrative address does not merely draw attention to its language and rhetoric; it also attempts to alter the conceptual object itself. If the problematic ‘closure’ of textuality questions the ‘totalization’ of national culture, then its positive value lies in displaying the wide dissemination through which we construct the field of meanings and symbols associated with national life.
To read the nation as it is written is to question and contest tradition, culture, the state, and national feeling and sentiment located within an emerging national narrative of the emergence and historical continuity of the nation. The nation as narrative draws our attention to alternative and oppositional constituencies such as new classes, new identities and new social movements that are continuously being created. In narrating the history of the nation, “History may be half-made; and the image of cultural authority may be ambivalent because it is caught uncertainly, in the act of ‘composing’ its powerful image.”

Poststructuralist theories give us an insight and provide us with strategies to evoke the ambivalent margin of the nation – space. These theories highlight the establishment of cultural boundaries in order to create “thresholds of meaning that must be crossed, erased, and translated in the process of cultural production.” However, culture does not exist in a vacuum. Politics and culture co-exist and even overlap turning boundaries and limits “into the in-between spaces through which the meanings of cultural and political authority are negotiated.”

This section aims to look at the historical formation of nation, nationalism and identity as seen through literature. Various texts investigate the colonialism and its impact on the colonized during the nineteenth and twentieth century. They also focus on the process of the construction of ideas of nation in the home country, Britain and the colonies.
Jane Austen’s novel *Mansfield Park* set around 1815, covers the period from the French revolution in 1789 and the defeat and exile of Napoleon in 1815. After 1815, Britain would become the dominant power in Europe and a dominant colonial power as well. *Mansfield Park* shows the creation of “the ethos of a developing nation as it rebuilds its colonial structures.” It “is a metaphor for a nation dependent on its navy and its colonies.” The novel depicts how colonialism defines the nation.

Rudyard Kipling’s *Kim* (1901) was written after the second Afghan war and when the British Empire was threatened by Russia externally and by emerging nationalism from within India. This story of the orphaned Kim is the narrative of empire. It focuses on the construction of an identity that is an outcome of the imperial nation. Bankimchandra’s historical novel *Anandamath* (1882) has definite nationalist themes and sees the nation as mother. R C Dutt’s historical novels, likewise, delved into the Hindu past and glorified Rajput and Maratha rule. Both Bankimchandra and R C Dutt constructed the Muslim as the ‘other’ in their novels. Sunil Gangopadhyay’s *Purba Paschim* (1988) is about the two Bengals, and encapsulates the partition of Bengal, the partition of India and finally, the formation of the independent nation, Bangladesh. Sadat Hasan Manto’s stories set during partition mocks at nation states as repositories of violence and record the terror and anguish of a traumatic moment of the birth of a nation.
The rise and growth of the novel in India lies in the encounter between colonizer and the colonized. While the novel might date back to as early as 1800, 1857 marks the turning point, both in the history of colonial India as well as the history of the novel. It marks on one hand the setting up of the three universities in Calcutta, Bombay and Madras and on the other the Mutiny which ended the rule of the East India Company. India came under the crown to become a British colony. Soon English literary works became available to Indians bringing in their wake western ideas and literary forms. The novel form flowered and acquired a pan Indian following. Novels emerged in Bangla, Marathi, Hindi, Urdu, Tamil and Malayalam.

In the late nineteenth century English education and European influence created an unprecedented interest in Indian history among the educated class especially in cities. Meenakshi Mukherjee states that “this newly awakened interest in the past could not have been unrelated to a nascent nationalism among the reading public.....which the novelist could exploit”67 Thus the writing of fiction based on history became one of the chosen modes of literary production. Harking back to the glories of the remote past afforded the novelists a means of coming to terms with present servitude. It was a useful tool to link the pre-colonial past to yet nebulous postcolonial future.

It is in this context that Bankimchandra Chatterjee's Anandmath (1882) assumes significance. Sisir Kumar Das states that Anandmath “is the first Indian novel, where the dominant political trends of the time merged and were transfused into a myth, and it continued to inspire a large section of the
people for more than half a century in its struggle against an imperial power,”But it is Rabindranath Tagore who has been hailed as “the first visionary to create a national consciousness of India in literature.” The Writers of the period attempt to create and establish an identity different from that of the West; one that is rooted in the culture and traditions of India. At the same time the social reformers, influenced by western rationalism began their efforts to create a modern identity.

These two strands, Indianness and modernity, are important aspects of nineteenth century nationalism which, in Partha Chatterjee's words, “sought to demonstrate the falsity of the colonial claim that the backward people were culturally incapable of ruling themselves in the conditions of the modern world. Nationalism denied the alleged inferiority of the colonized people; it also asserted that a backward nation could 'modernize' itself while retaining its cultural identity”

The growth of cultural and social movements during this period reinforces the view that nationalism is “primarily a cultural phenomenon” although it takes a political form. If the nineteenth century was in the grip of nationalism it was but natural that the twentieth would be affected by independence which advanced further the idea of “sculpting a national identity.” With independence came partition and the accompanying trauma. For the writer of this era partition symbolized shattered dreams, “a betrayal...of a national ideal, that of integrity of the nation.” This backdrop
of colonialism, emergent nationalism and finally independence is what links the novels and novelists selected for study and analysis.

Section III – Methodology

The methodology adopted in this thesis is based on a chronological and comparativist study of the novels selected and to problematize and illuminate each other using postcolonial and modernist perspectives. An interdisciplinary approach through study of the history of India, especially of the period in which the novels are located is relevant for better contextualization of the novels. This has been supplemented by reading of non-literary texts in the areas of history, politics, subaltern studies and diaspora studies. Historicizing the novels and the study of some of the debates within history are some aspects of methodology used. A gendered reading of the nation and identity, along with a study of postcolonial and nationalist discourse of the time and after with an analysis of fiction is another aspect of the study.

Does history speak? This thesis studies the way the novels portray the impact of colonialism on the social and cultural fabric of the colonized and their response to colonization. It also studies the forms of anti-colonial resistance that culminated in the nationalist movement. Chapters 1 to 3 correspond to different stages in the evolution of the Indian nation as seen through the novels.
The foundational academic research and critical perspectives of scholars, historians, political scientists and cultural theorists in defining nation, nationalism and identity have been referred to. Ernst Renan, Hans Kohn, Elie Kedourie, Ernst Gellner, Benedict Anderson, Elleke Boehmer, Partha Chatterjee, Ashis Nandy, Sumit Sarkar, Rajat Kanta Ray, Stanley Wolpert, G. Aloysius, Sisir Kumar Das, Meenakshi Mukherjee, Susie Tharu and K. Lalita, Jasodhara Bagchi, Humayum Kabir and Niharranjan Ray are some of the scholars who helped in providing valuable insights and a better understanding of both the theoretical and fictional aspects of the novels and the themes.

Allusions to the texts are in full for the first time after which abbreviated title – names are used, for example, Gora will be referred to as (G). Quotations from primary sources have been indicated with title names and page numbers and when quoting from secondary sources the method of endnotes has been used. In case of several references from a source ibid has been used. Citations are according to MLA Handbook for Writers for Research Papers – Sixth Edition.

Section IV – History as Fiction

The objective of this thesis is to explore and trace the processes of the construction of the nation, nationalism and identity in the selected fictional works of four eminent Indian writers before and after 1947. The novels by Rabindranath Tagore and Ahmed Ali figure in the pre-independence selection and those by Sunil Gangopadhyay and Amitav Ghosh appear in the post
independence period. The selection of the authors has been based on the representation of the themes of politics, religion, culture and dislocation.


The thesis examines the use of history by the novelists and the ways in which they depict and reconstruct the nation. The focus has been on the themes of nation, nationalism and construction of identity and selfhood with the attendant parameters such as class, caste, religion, language, gender, subaltern, marginalized and diasporic status in colonial and postcolonial times.

An overview of the novels highlights the role of history in the narrative of the nation. *Gora* and *Home and the World* are set in the era of the Swadeshi movements and echo Tagore’s political concerns. Both the novels revolve around issues of nationalism, patriotism, identity and self-discovery. Ahmed Ali’s *Twilight in Delhi* though located in 1911, harks back to 1857 and focuses on the decline of Muslim influence both in the political as well as cultural and social arena. Mir Nihal, the protagonist, is trapped in a time warp in spite of living in a tumultuous time, he withdraws from the world around him and tries to recreate
and observe the rhythms of the past. Unlike his son, he refuses to splinter his self.

A search for an Indian, more specific Muslim identity is at the core of the novel.

Sunil Gangopadhyay's *Those Days* and *First Light* span the period from 1840 to 1910. He depicts the social, political and intellectual life of Bengal in this reconstruction of history. The novels stoke cultural memory by presenting a vast canvas against which the lives of numerous historical figures, literary luminaries, social and religious reformers and nationalist leaders are sharply etched. While the Tagore family of Jorasanko has a strong presence in *Those Days*, it is Rabindranath's genius and its flowering that is the leit motif of *First Light*. Though the novel seems to suggest that the evolution of Rabindranath's creative genius is coterminous with the growth of a nationalist consciousness, it is the stories of Bharat, the ‘bastard’ son of the king of Tripura, and Bhumisuta the bondmaid, that takes centre stage. Their struggle to survive is pitted against the larger nationalist movement. Dawn or First Light heralds a new democratic era.

*Shadow Lines* and *The Glass Palace* are excellent examples of the coming together of the personal and the public. British imperial policies and their impact on South Asia, the second World War, the freedom struggle, the Indian National Army, independence and partition form the backdrop for an exploration of the idea of nationhood, memory and the loss of home. From Bartholomew's Atlas, Ghosh takes us to the eastern frontiers of the empire. We are no longer confined to India but introduced to the impact of colonialism in Burma, Malaysia and Singapore. The struggle for freedom
goes beyond our borders. Alongside an embattled empire we see an embattled national consciousness and individuals caught in the crossfire. If Those Days and First Light are chronicles of a nation then Shadow Lines and The Glass Palace question the idea of nationhood and highlight the plight of the colonized everywhere. In the selected novels time and history weave private and public together. Gora, an orphan reared in an orthodox Hindu household, Bharat the King's bastard in First Light, the orphaned Jaya and Raha in The Glass Palace and both Mir Nihal and Asghar in Twilight in Delhi suffer an identity crisis - a necessary colonial condition. Their search for identity and selfhood coincides with the rise of national consciousness and the formation of the nation.

The period under study saw the growth of the Indian middle class, an outcome of the colonial project, and their desire to forge a cultural and national identity. This in turn was the precursor of resistance to colonialism culminating in the freedom struggle and independence. With independence, it is not nationalism but the nation itself, which becomes the main concern. The search for identity takes on a new meaning in this postcolonial space. The novel becomes the site of forging a middle class identity less concerned with the nationalist struggle and colonialism. Colonialism gives way to concerns of modernity. However, interest in history is re-intensified because in some ways the writers see themselves as “narrating the nation.” Therefore writing history and questioning older historical paradigms becomes their focus in the
post independence period. If, in pre-independence Indian writing, identity was forged by nationalism, then post independence, modernity and the critique of nationalism become the filters through which questions of identity are examined and explored.

Chapter one takes up the study of two of Rabindranath Tagore’s novels that are closely embedded in the history of the national movement in India. Tagore’s views on nationalism and his advocacy of a civilizational approach to nationalism rather than a political one is highlighted in the novels. A search for identity in the colonized space through introspection and self questioning is propagated rather than an aggressive nationalism based on religious, social and gender identity. The thesis analyses how Tagore validates his theory of nationalism by a close reading of Gora and Home and the World.

The thesis also studies the invasion of colonialism into the upper class and upper caste Bengali home, the fashioning of the ‘new woman’ and the conflict between tradition and modernity as seen in the two novels. The aim is to understand how and why a middle class became the forerunner of nationalism. This chapter finally looks at Tagore’s redefining of nationalism in the Gandhian mould: a nationalism that is more inclusive, people oriented and self sustaining. In chapter one we see Tagore portraying contemporary society and espousing his vision of the nation and how men and women should conduct themselves in it.
Chapter two is concerned with social and cultural changes that took place in India from 1840 to 1911 in the novels of Sunil Gangopadhyay and Ahmed Ali. The novels under consideration are *Those Days*, *First Light* and *Twilight in Delhi*. In Gangopadhyay’s novels historical figures play pivotal role while Ali uses a historical backdrop to portray the dilemma of the Muslim feudal class. Through a comparative study of Ali’s *Twilight in Delhi* and Gangopadhyay’s *Those Days* and *First Light*, the chapter looks at the rise of Hindu power and the decline of Muslim influence both in the political as well as socio cultural field. It also traces the crystallization of identity, Hindu and Muslim, the merging of nationalism and Hinduism and the moving away of Muslims from the idea of the Indian nation. The two different worlds inhabited by the two major communities vying for a place in the colonial sun is depicted in the novels and through comparison and contrast the different world views, the angst and vision of the future are highlighted. The novels document the changes and impact of westernization on Indian society and how the revolutionizing of lives and values under western rule led to a resentment of foreign rule.

Voices, known and unknown, emerged from the colonial space. Some of them belong to the makers and shapers of Indian history and the chapter analyses their role in the Bengal Renaissance that impacted India’s cultural and religious life in important ways. These voices belonged to the
torches bearers of the Indian Renaissance who shaped a national identity.

Chapter two carries forward the formation and role of the middle class in defining the nation. While Tagore critiques the communal turn in nationalist politics, *Twilight In Delhi* reflects the anxiety of Indian Muslims.

In chapter three, Amitav Ghosh continues the theme of colonialism but focuses on dislocation and its impact on identity, both within and outside the country. The thesis studies the movement of people across national boundaries in the colonial and postcolonial periods. He too questions the nationalist and communal legacy that had gone into the making of the nation.

In India, Gandhi and Tagore constantly tried to push against political and cultural boundaries to create a space where both overlap. Gandhi’s dream of Ram Rajya and Tagore’s universalism are echoed in Frantz Fanon’s revolutionary credo; “National consciousness, which is not nationalism, is the only thing that will give us an international dimension.” This national consciousness, this idea of the nation as an ambivalent nation-space which is at the crossroads of history is what this researcher examines in the selected works of the four authors taken up for study. The nation emerges within cultural discourse and when we speak amongst ourselves. The writers selected, portray in their novels, the problematic unity of the nation, the problems of integration and cultural difference, the split between the public and private spheres of the nation, of time past and time present and voices
from the centre and the margins as they construct and deconstruct the nation. They examine the mindscape of British colonialism in India and go back in time to do so. Their novels look at the impact of colonial rule particularly on individuals and Indian society of the time. What does this time travel reveal? “As Gandhi so effortlessly demonstrated, for those seeking liberation, history can sometimes be made to follow myths.” Their novels are located at the margins of modernity, straining towards the centre as they offer a panoramic view of Indian history, culture, society and politics. The subject people move from the periphery to rewrite their history in the fiction of the metropolis. Theirs is the quest for ‘nation’ of becoming ‘a people’.

Notes

3. ibid 152.
7. ibid 11.
8. ibid 11.
9. ibid 16.
10. ibid 17.
11. ibid 18.
12. ibid 19.
15. ibid 1.
16. ibid 2.
18. ibid 4.
19. ibid 4.
21. ibid 1.
23. ibid 3.
24. ibid 4.
25. ibid 10.
26. ibid 11.
29. ibid XII.
30. ibid XII.
33. ibid XV.
34. ibid XV.
37. ibid 34.
38. ibid 74.
39. ibid 80.
41. ibid 6.
42. ibid 4.


44. ibid 1.


48. ibid 18.

49. ibid 60.


51. ibid 3.


53. ibid 360.


55. ibid 212.


59. ibid 2.

60. ibid 2.

61. ibid 3.

62. ibid 3.

63. ibid 4.

64. ibid 4.


66. ibid 49.


71. ibid 1.
73. ibid 66.