

Chapter IV

Conclusion

This dissertation has tried to study the two constructs of nation ideology- gender and race, by critically exploring two novels- Bapsi Sidhwa's *Ice-Candy-Man* and Kamala Markandaya's *The Nowhere Man*.

As a social category, the concept of 'nation' is multi-faceted and is defined differently by various socio-cultural critics of different ages. In the course of time, meaning of the term 'nation' has acquired totally different shades. To begin with, it was only 'a body of men' belonging together by similarity of birth and having some common traits. This meaning was devoid of any political considerations. But then, by the 19th century, 'natioⁿ' came to mean as a group of persons inhabiting a particular land with certain limits and obeying the same government; who could claim to elect representatives for a particular territory. Usually, a nation was considered to be a body of people pre-politically united on the basis of a common religion, language, geography, race, customs etc. Though these factors help in identification of a nation, they are insufficient to determine the true 'essence' of a particular nation. They do not explain why human beings sacrifice their lives in wars or independence struggles for the abstraction called 'nation'.

According to the modern philosophers like Ernest Renan, Peter Alter, Benedict Anderson, Homi K. Bhabha and others, the term acquires a psycho-socio-cultural orientation. 'Nation' becomes an ambiguity, an allegory, a myth, a spiritual principle and an ideology. Today, 'nation' exists in willingness of people to live together in present and the future, people who possess a common glorious past; regardless of differences of language, race, religion and region.

The nation exists in daily lives of individuals. Therefore, the national identity of an individual can be both- ideological and political. Nationalism substitutes religion in modern age due to its sentimental and inspirational implications. The pride in common heritage and in the myths of a common origin keeps people together and prepares them for future sacrifices.

The national histories or 'nationalism's heroic narratives' (to use Edward Said's words) glorify the past and deaths of nation's patriotic sons as a part of national propaganda. Different forms of narratives like folk-arts, novels, newspapers, electronic media, historical documents (archives) and government reports build up a huge mass of national histories in process of nation-building. Fictional literature like novels and short stories provide a kind of fictional glory to absurd and somewhat imaginary ideology of 'nation'. According to Benedict Anderson, nation is an 'imagined community' as its members never know each other face-to-face and yet, they carry image of their fellow countrymen in their minds throughout their lives. A nation, being a fictional construct, needs to assert itself through national narratives.

Novel, being an imaginary work of art, can play an important role in narrating and defining nation as an imagined community. It is because, just like real people, characters in the novel live in a socially complex world unaware of each other. So, through imitation, novel prepares conditions for nation's existence and tries to reflect the national culture, when a writer narrates a story, his or her cultural past also gets narrated in the form of the 'unsaid' which is inseparably his or her national identity.

However, there is always a significant difference between the opinion of narrator about community's existence and of those who actually live in

the community. The coherence of the narration and nationality depends upon some differences without which it is meaningless to search for the identity of a nation in itself or against 'other' nation. Now, this principle of 'otherness' overshadows major constructs of nation ideology- like race, gender, ethnicity etc. The modern definition of 'nation' depends upon existence of an 'other', which never disappears.

The nation ideology establishes gender roles for its men and women citizens where women receive 'inferior' or 'marginal' status of the 'other' and men are situated at 'central' or 'superior' position. Women are passive mothers of nation who produce and rear sons for community, while men are supposed to be active father figures who protect and preserve society. The patriarchal assumptions of nation-building process offer a subjugated position to women who are vulnerable and are to be patronaged by men. In the national allegory, they become the 'mother' images due to their reproductive function and their bodies become social possessions. The 'other' can violate the purity of this society-producing machine and thus, attack the honour of the 'self'. Wars or social conflicts between two communities or nations make women from both sides suffer the most. Communal riots during Indian partition, Nazi holocaust or recent Gujarat riots are examples of how women's bodies are violated, raped and mutilated and are used as an instrument to assault the 'other's' sense of 'self' and 'honour'.

Humiliation of the 'other' continues through racial hatred where physical characteristics (particularly the skin colour) decide identity of the 'self' and the 'other'. The 'white' is assumed to be 'superior' or 'central'; while the 'black' or 'coloured' is 'inferior' or 'marginal' and is to be ruled or subjected by the

'white' masters. This racial enmity continues to affect relations of people belonging to different races or ethnicities even in diaspora communities. In addition to it, the adherence of the immigrants to the culture of their motherland and their refusal to assimilate within the host nation results into hostile race relations. If immigrant nationalities try to politically assert their identities, struggles might end into ethnic riots and humiliating treatment given to the minority in question. While narrating a nation in a particular space and time, these issues become crucial in identifying the nationalities of individuals.

When the two novels *Ice-Candy-Man* and *The Nowhere Man* are read through this point of view, it becomes clear that they function as national narratives dealing with major concerns of racial and gender differences, which haunt modern world.

"All nations depend on powerful constructions of gender. Despite many nationalist ideological investments in the idea of popular unity, nations have historically amounted to the sanctioned institutionalization of gender difference. No nation in the world gives women and men same access to the rights and resources of the nation-state. --- Nationalism is implicated in gender power. As a result, nationalisms have 'typically sprung from masculinized memory, masculinized humiliation and masculinized hope.'"¹

Ice-Candy-Man challenges centrality of masculine master narratives through the choice of a female child. It shifts the focus to those who are not usually regarded as central to the history and thus, refracts national

¹ McClintock, Anne. *Imperial Leather*, Routledge, New York (1995), p.353.

history through a gendered consciousness. Through Lenny, she tries to probe into feminine psychology of a growing teenager girl as well as into the grown up world of passions and desires. The women around her are the symbols of gender roles imparted by the nation on its women. Her mother fits well in the mother image of occupying the secondary position in the family, taking care of her husband and children. Lenny is influenced by her Ayah's sex appeal, which in a way ushers Lenny into a dusky, mysterious world of unknown cravings. It is very unusual on part of Sidhwa that being a female writer, she uses a girl-child as a narrator ; who , equally unusual to her age, talks about male- genitals, bosoms, mysterious fragrances, skillful fingers, strange cravings in the stomach and about the body language of men wooing women.

Ayah is the stage upon which drama of communal hatred is enacted. Since she is a minority- a woman and that too, a Hindu working-class, beautiful woman- she is doubly marginalized. Her violation by men of 'other' community is the result of this presence of 'otherness' in the nation-trope. The woman's body is made a tool to dishonour 'other' community and in a sense, rape of Ayah symbolizes the rape of the 'other' nation. The 'cracking'- with its sexual implications- of the ayah becomes the 'cracking' of India- a nation's land violated and brutalized by people of enemy religion and nation. But this rape is unspoken, not actually mentioned. In the form of Parsee women, who through their restorative work of rehabilitation of 'fallen women' seek to heal the painful cracks in this partitioned Indian land, Sidhwa tries to locate feminism within a heavily gendered nationalism.

The theme of racial hatred (here, we consider it as communal hatred) is also a major one in the novel. Apart from harrowing descriptions of

communal killings and arsenal, Sidhwa tries to comment on changing mentalities of different communities through their changing social contacts and inter-personal dialogues. Flock of Ayah's admirers is unaware of their different casts and religions until leaders of their communities infuriate atmosphere. The minority Parsee community is politically neutral and tries to vouch-safe its own future by staying away from national unrest. They are more concerned about the existence of their own diminishing 'nation' in the midst of the chaos resulted by the two newly born nations.

“ The child does not only belong to the family--- child rearing is no longer purely a question of family order, it embraces a multitude of interests for the social order.--- the problem of childhood is the greatest national dilemma. “²

The narrative in *Ice-Candy-Man* that also claims to be based on Sidhwa's childhood memories of Lahore during partition holocaust proves this. Collective memory is the product of individuals and groups who come together in the act of remembrance. They suffer and recover because they are together. The process confirms their sense of collectivity. The partition was central to process of nationalizing the nation and the violence visited upon people during it by each other played a constitutive role in molding of India and Pakistan.

Kamala Markandaya's *The Nowhere Man* deals with the question of racial hatred. It discusses the experiences of commonwealth diaspora which Markandaya herself as an expatriated writer has gone through during her stay in England. The title hero Srinivas is a representative of the major bulk of immigrant people from the third world who migrated to affluent Western countries in search

² The American, 58:1, July 2001, 65-70.



of fortune and a better tomorrow. Again, the idea of 'otherness' overtakes the narrative, while developing relationships between native 'white' people and the 'black' immigrants. The conflict between two races arises as a result of the globally accepted dichotomies of 'us' and 'they', 'majority' and 'minority', 'white' and 'black'. Markandaya highlights differences between the two races through physical and psychological clashes between Indian and British nationalities in the context of two different spaces and times- in the pre-independence India of 1940s and the racially disturbed England of 1960s.

Careers of Srinivas and his father are spoilt and the British Raj shatters their dreams. Humiliating treatment given by the white masters forces Srinivas to enter the freedom struggle. His active support to revolutionaries brings him face-to-face with irrational and illogical hatred of the 'other' race. Their house is raided and the white police officer assaults Vasantha's honour. Once again, Vasantha, a woman, becomes a victim of this racial hatred where the 'other' is insulted through their women. In search of a new world and better future, Srinivas and Vasantha migrate to England. It takes many years for them to accept the new nation and its ways. In an attempt to be a part of the new culture, they allow their sons to grow up in the Christian faith and fight for the nation, which they now consider their own. At last, the English neighbours accept them as 'one of them'. The second generation of this immigrant family- Laxman and Seshu- is disillusioned when, after sacrificing their life (in case of Seshu) and roots (in case of Laxman), they are still treated as 'outsiders'. The harmonious relations with host neighbourhood do not last long and increasing social unrest and dissatisfaction against the 'blacks' take away from Srinivas his remaining hope in the goodness of his fellow Englishmen. He is made to feel an outcast, an exile, a

'nowhere man'. The only hope is Mrs. Pickering who is the representative of few rational and broad-minded whites. Srinivas becomes a prey of insane anger and dislike of the blacks-hater Fred Fletcher. The writer also throws light on difference of cultural attitude of the two races towards family and human relations, by describing marital relations of Srinivas and Vasantha, Dr. Radcliffe and his wife. In the 'family' allegory, nation is viewed as a family where all fellow citizens are bound to each other in harmony just like family members. Failure in the roles allotted by family to its members results into individual crises and it affects the peace of community as well. Fred's parents are not on ^{good} terms and he himself is unable to earn money, shelter and respect for himself and his family. His frustration and anger get an outlet in the form of his brutal actions against helpless Srinivas. The narration ends with both men dead and both parties puzzled and baffled at the brutality unleashed by meaningless despise.

Evidently, both novels have different backgrounds and are set in different time and space. The cultural set ups in which their authors are brought up are also diverse. Sidhwa writes a narrative on partition holocaust from gender perspective, while Markandaya is concerned with the racial anxiety of diaspora community. Yet, there is a common thread that connects these two novels as national narratives. Both narratives deal with the experiences of their authors as individuals trying to establish their national identity in an adopted nation. The central characters in both narratives share liminality imposed upon them by their minority positions. The search for a coherent national identity through gender and racial bias brings them on a common platform. *Ice-Candy-Man* is an attempt to study the formation of two new nations through a girl's developing consciousness which is moulded by family, community, social and political

upheavals around her and finally, by her own awareness about sexuality and gender roles. On the other hand, *The Nowhere Man* depicts gradual progress of a lonely soul towards identity crisis, which is caused by conflicting racial relations. Need to belong to a known set of people for asserting self-identity and desperate attempts to hold on to this 'known' world haunt both Lenny and Srinivas. For Lenny, the word 'nation' has no meaning as she identifies herself with the people of diverse communities around her. For Srinivas, his nation is a remote haven; now existing only in his memories. Thus, both novels underline the fact that 'nation' is an ambiguous and abstract ideology that exists in an individual's imagination and in his or her desire to belong to 'our' people. This desire persists irrespective of the issues created by gender and race, while the problematic of nationality and narration meets a point of tragic convergence.