

**WOMEN IN NATION-MAKING:
A DOMESTICATED REFORMATION OF THEIR VOICES, BODIES AND SELVES**

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For my parents, for their support in my dream and for encouraging me to always think independently

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Abstract

This paper seeks to look at the history of nation-making in the subcontinent and the role and voices of women as their own subjectivity undergoes reformation in the process. I hope to find the female narrative through the application of certain sociological theories to three novels. The look into these novels will bring out the female voice and its relation to the emerging of a new nation.

Introduction

"The Silence-heart of mother India

Longs for world-illumination

And not for world-information"¹

-- Sri Chinmoy

Re-readings of the Indian national history have spawned debates about the real connection between the people and their nation. It has questioned whether the nation-state can address the multiplicity through class, gender, ethnic and religious groupings of its citizens adequately. Ranajit Guha and his colleagues have drawn attention to the need for the representation of the subaltern classes in Indian nationalism.² This compels us to reread the history of the birth of Indian nation-state and along with it, to seek the missing voices of marginalized groups in the dominant bourgeois stream of history.

This approach helps us discover the absence of female narratives. In the injection of the history of Indian nation-making the female subjectivity, the product of a very male gaze, constructs women as the *other*. This history is the aim of the thesis. This thesis, therefore, seeks to present the relationship between women and nationalism in order to find the relationship between women

¹ Sri Chinmoy Library, <<http://www.srichinmoylibrary.com/books/1176>>

² Ranajit Guha "On Some Aspects of the Historiography of Colonial India" ed. R. Guha and Gayatri Spivak (New York: Oxford, 1988)

and the rise of the nation, to identify woman's voices in this history and to show how female identity is moulded to create the new woman of the new nation. The social reform movements, which centred on women, will form the backdrop for this understanding. The tragedy of women's participation and placement in the annals of nation-making will be followed through a readings of Rabindranath Tagore's *Ghare Baire* (1915), Bapsi Sidhwa's *Ice-candy-Man* (1988) and Tahmina Anam's *A Golden Age* (2007). These readings will analyze the role of women in nationalism and the formation of a feminine "self." The use of fiction will allow me to take a look at the voices of women in their narration at the time of the birth of new nations and their construction as the new women of the new land. As the modernist writer, Joseph Conrad puts it, fiction is the closest readers can reach to reality:

"Fiction is history, human history, or it is nothing. But it is also more than that; it stands on firmer ground, being based on the reality of forms and the observation of social phenomena, whereas history is based on documents, and the reading of print and handwriting -- on second-hand impression. Thus fiction is nearer truth."¹

In order to understand the individual's relationship with the nation, I first ask "What is a Nation?" To which social critique Ernst Renan would say, "A nation is a soul,"² This refers to an indefinable passion to belong to a community, or what Benedict Anderson defines as "self-determination." It is when someone says that

¹ Wikipedia: Joseph Conrad, J. Notes on Life and Letters. (London: J. M. Dent, 1949)

² Ernest Renan "What is a nation?" in Homi Bhabha *Nation and Narration* (Routledge, London, 1990) 19.

they are part of a nation that they simply become a part of it. Benedict Anderson says that we all live in *The Imagined Community* because "the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in their minds of each lives the image of their communion."¹ Therefore, the point here is that a nation is imagined – to which the question "how is it imagined?" is relevant. The question is how is it imagined and whether in the national imagining women have a place in the national discourse or not?

The tricky question here though is that if everything is imagined, the work of fiction, which is already a product of the imagination, is then the imagination of the imagination. And so when we dig into the illusion of the illusion, the characters produced in such literature become excessively distant and detached from reality, in Platonic terms it is "twice removed from reality." This perhaps already complicates my search for women's voices. The female "speech" which I will be searching within the subaltern will therefore be a complicated process, which again problematizes the way we read Indian nationalism.

Simon During in his "Literature, – Nation's other?" reviews the idea of patriotism and in the depiction of pro-nation characters in fiction, he shows how in the end there is no "real" human persona or voice given to these characters,

¹ Benedict Anderson *The Imagined Communities: Reflections on the origin and spread of Nationalism* (Verso, 1983) 12.

who stand as ideals to the rest of his/her people: "An actual person [in fiction] becomes an icon of a particular kind of universal modernizing [...]"¹

During clearly states the limitations of his understanding of Third World countries. Unlike places like India, "Here [in the West] nationalism can retain a link with freedom in allowing us to resist cultural and economic imperialism."² This comment, lightly thrown in by During, is what makes Indian nationalism a difficult and interesting history to read. The colonial power had deeply hegemonized the land to a point where the new India places women in a very uncertain position between tradition and modernity represented by the East/West dichotomy. And since During shows us how fiction was a product of nature, nation and the individual merging together, we find that the voice of the character or "narrative voice" become a universal voice rather than an expression of the struggling individual.

The amorphous nation of India, through an assertion, can only be kept together with power and certain assembled ideologies. Where does the power come from and who makes a nation a nation? According to During, the nation is whatever the nation makes it and this, in its vagueness, he shows as:

¹ Ibid, 142.

² Homi Bhabha *Nation and Narration*: "Literature – Nationalism's other" (Routledge, London, 1990) 139.

"The civil Imaginary is an attempt to order what Steele calls, "the uncontrollable jumble of Persons and Things."¹

And so, the real "truth" about the characters is marginalized by the "modern domination of the life-world by style and civility." "Their 'truth' or falsity' is secondary to the task of representation itself."²

In India these "assembled ideologies" yield contradictory messages. Social reforms that were once centred on women in the mid nineteenth century or during the period of the Bengal renaissance came suddenly to an end. Reforms such as the one of *sati* and advocacy of widow remarriage were led by personage like Rammohun Roy and Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar. So, indeed by the end of the 19th Century, when the debate on nationalism was at its height it is puzzling to find that such public debates on women had disappeared.³

That reforms around women were incomplete can be seen through "resurgence of widow-immolation in parts of northern India"⁴ in the 1980's. The number of murders, rapes and killings for dowry has also accelerated, and when such issues are brought to court, they are regarded as "private family matters."⁵ This word 'private' becomes very vital as we look at how Partha Chatterjee

¹ Ibid

² Ibid, 144.

³ Partha Chatterjee "The Nation and Its Women" in *The Nation and Its Fragments: Colonial and Post Colonial Histories* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1993) 116.

⁴ Kumkum Sangari and Sudesh Vaid "Recasting Women: An Introduction" *Recasting Women: Essays in Colonial History* (New Delhi: Kali for Women, 1989) 3.

⁵ Ibid, 3.

shows us through his examination of the role of women within her 'private' homes, a product of the "nationalist resolution of the woman question." One can see how each literary text draws the domestic into the nationalist in the public domain as women are confined within the domestic sphere.

Partha Chatterjee's essay "The Nationalist Resolution of the Women's Question," provides an understanding of what Indian nationalism meant. In this essay, he challenges the woman question by showing how women coped with societal changes themselves. Gulam Murshid says that modern Bengal can be seen as a product of a "penetration of western ideas,"¹ which had limited success as India suddenly began, at the same time, to glorify its past, and "defend everything traditional."² So we find here a drastic change in events as new ideologies enter and expectations start changing. Chatterjee shows how people adjusted to the concept of a 'new India.' He does this by first defining the set of ideas that was put forth by the nationalist discourse.

What we see here is that India, in trying to formulate its identity did what any subject in the process of its construction does; it rejects the "other." To Indian Nationalism British materialism is the constructed "other." The problem of course is that it creates an emerging Indian middle-class. So there is an effort to resist Colonial power, at the same time understand and match the colonizer's strength and then overthrow it. "For he knows that he is not an animal; and it is precisely

¹ Partha Chatterjee "The Nationalist Resolution of the Women's Question" in *Recasting women: Essays in Colonial History* (New Delhi: Kali for Women, 1989) 234.

² Ibid, 234.

at the moment he realizes his humanity that he begins to sharpen the weapons with which he will secure its victory,"¹notes Franz Fanon in "Concerning Violence."

So, the "selecting" of certain western values was important. Here lie the problematic questions: Who decided what to take and what not to take? Why is it that men, who had a wider sphere of activity, exposed themselves to the material world while women who remained indoors had to maintain tradition? The answer is given by a simple demarcation of Private and Public spheres, which shows that while Britain had conquered the outer material domain they had failed to conquer the inner world headed by women. So by not being able to influence these women, Britain had failed to conquer the inner "self" of India. But why did the identity of the woman's question dissipate as the nineteenth century progressed.

In a reference to Bankimchandra, Partha Chatterjee tells us in his chapter "Women and the Nation": "Self-interested men are mindful of the improvement of women only to the extent that it furthers their self-interest."² This, he points out is the trouble with looking for the voices of women in nationalist discourse. They really have no voices, these women, embodying themselves as *Bhadramahilas* were seen as threats, as they were doing away with the role of the traditional Hindu woman. Authors like Michael Madhusudan Dutt, Din Bandhu Mitra, and

¹ Franz Fanon "Concerning Violence" in *The Wretched of the Earth* (Middlesex (UK): Penguin Book, 1985) 33.

² Quoted in Partha Chatterjee "Women and the Nation," in *The Nation and Its Fragments: Colonial and Post Colonial History* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1993) 135.

Upandranath Das too ridiculed women who tried to imitate a memsahib-like behavior:

"[The women] only read books, sew carpets and play cards. What is the result? The house and furniture get untidy, meals poor, the health of every member of the family is ruined."¹

-- Bhudev Mukhopadhyay

Therefore, the "new woman"² would paradoxically reject Western modernization and would be a balance of tradition and would not be "fond of luxury."³ Her education would be guided towards the role of a better mother and wife. As Radharani Lahira wrote (1875): "Of all the subjects that women might learn, housework is the most important."⁴ Kundamali Debi notes: "If you have acquired real knowledge, then give no place in your heart to memsahib like behavior."⁵ In consequence the new woman had to be educated to take up her new role in the newly formulated home. As her home is being reformed, she is also required to understand and submit to those changes.

These quotes show us how the "new woman" placed herself within the new nation. My paper questions whether these are the only voices that we need

¹ Quoted in Partha Chatterjee "The Nationalist Resolution of the Women's Question" in *Recasting women: Essays in Colonial History* (New Delhi: Kali for Women, 1989) 241.

² Partha Chatterjee "The Nation and Its Women," in *The Nation and Its Fragments: Colonial and Post Colonial Histories* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1993) 123.

³ Ibid, 123.

⁴ Quoted in Partha Chatterjee "The Nation and Its Women," in *The Nation and Its Fragments: Colonial and Post Colonial Histories* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1993) 129.

⁵ Ibid, 129.

to hear while looking at Indian nationalism. Those who could voice themselves in the national discourse were the "reverse of the 'common' women who was coarse, vulgar, loud, quarrelsome, devoid of superior moral sense, sexually promiscuous, subjected to brutal physical oppression by males."¹ It seems that she is no longer visibly part of politics because her presence seems to provoke distraction to the national imaginary, may be of a sexual disturbance for the men. This means two things: that a greater control over women's sexuality needs to be exercised, which results in a greater repression of female subjectivity and that a certain form of women's speech was locked away for good.

The chapter "Women and the Nation," shows autobiographies or *smrtikatha*² (stories from memories) that concentrate more on the context of making a nation than the writing of the "self." I find this to be exactly what During had suggested about the 'idol' characters of a National discourse.

Rassundari Debi's story, as noted by Chatterjee, is of one who was provided education by Christians. She later finds herself wanting to learn how to read in order to read religious books. Her modernity is constructed by the West and this leads her to feel like a trapped "bird in a cage."³ This, entrapment in the male dominated society show the agony of her situation which critics like Jyotirindranath Tagore and Dineshchandra Sen seem to overlook. They glorify

¹ Partha Chatterjee, "The Nationalist Resolution of the Women's Question," in *Recasting women: Essays in Colonial History* (New Delhi: Kali for Women, 1989) 244.

² Partha Chatterjee, "Women and the Nation," in *The Nation and Its Fragments: Colonial and Post Colonial Histories* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1993) 138.

³ Ibid, 141.

the mother and goddess persona in her but overlook the image of entrapment. She, too, feels empowered in both the roles of mother and goddess, "My mind seemed to have acquired six hands"¹ which hold on to her children, her knowledge of gods and the moon. She wants to be a better mother, a true believer and projects herself as a goddess. She has a "simple and unselfconscious charm"² and suits the role of a "traditional Hindu women."³

But where is the self in all this? Can she not exist as a mere "human being" or more precisely, a woman? What this overlooks is the initial feeling of discontent. Her identity gets suppressed within the identity of those who she is related to. She is either the mother, wife, sister or daughter of someone or in their understanding of networks and belonging. All these relationships are constructed within the patriarchal family by which the woman's identity is suppressed and subordinated. The "inner" voice, the one that talked about being trapped in a cage, is not freed even in this new discourse.

The 'new woman' was ridiculed as imitating western culture and put into contrast to traditional women. Railasbasini Debi (1830- 95) talks about her husband's job in the East India Company. She defines her own status by her husband's. She has none of her own. She complains about the unhygienic habits

¹ Quoted in Partha Chatterjee "The Nation and Its Women," in *The Nation and Its Fragments: Colonial and Post Colonial Histories* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1993) 142.

² Quoted in Partha Chatterjee "The Nation and Its Women," in *The Nation and Its Fragments: Colonial and Post Colonial Histories* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1993) 143

³ Ibid, 143.

of traditional women who are "confined at childbirth"¹ and have no manners and education. Her social acceptance revolves around her reading of English literary texts, as well as her religiosity. Bringing change within this home seems to become the priority here.

"The home, I (Chatterjee) suggest, was not a complete but rather the original site on which the hegemonic project of Nationalism was launched."²

The "I" here suggests the part Chatterjee plays to involve himself in domestic politics. This personalizes the essay setting a more conversational tone to it

While the stories above are of those women who are socially accepted there's only one autobiography by a woman whose identity is removed from the emerging Indian middle-class society. The *memoirs* of Binodini (1863-1941) tell her journey from the slums to the theatre. This is also a study of betrayal and disappointment. A rich admirer of hers broke the promise to name a theatre after her; her teacher refused to accept her memoirs unless it was titled "the great moral lesson in the insightful life of an ordinary prostitute" and her daughter was not accepted in any school. Binodini remains an outsider, who even though she caters up to the cultural needs of the upper class in their quest for a nationalist culture, could not be placed within that cultural formation. Her sexual and social positioning kept her eternally marginalized.

¹ Ibid, 141.

² Partha Chatterjee "The Nation and Its Women," in *The Nation and Its Fragments: Colonial and Post Colonial Histories* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1993) 147.

All signs of gender marginalization is noticeable in her story. While the memoirs placed her in a subordinate position even in this era of social change, she nonetheless is able to speak of her desires for men. Her profession allows, in fact, compels her to expose her sexuality. So Binodini's discussion of women's position, imagined by the annals of nationalism, poses a threat to the upper class. She is therefore the "other" in her own land - the "other" of the "other." This displacement of the woman to the margins points to the lack of "people's" voices in the narrative of Indian Nationalism. Ranajit Guha finds that mainstream Indian history has failed to recognize the politics of the people, and Binodini's narrative is an exceptional one in this context, giving us a glimpse into the many unheard stories.

Western constructions of Eastern women had defined her as the exotic passive being potent with a threatening sexual power. If both men, the male coloniser and the emerging national Indian male subjects construct Indian women as a threat, it is fair to say then that the Indian male and the Western gaze position women similarly. Women are placed as "cultural signifiers", but in their "inner domain of sovereignty"¹ keeping them confined to the domestic private sphere.

¹ Partha Chatterjee "The Nation and Its Women," in *The Nation and Its Fragments: Colonial and Post Colonial Histories* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1993) 152.

Chatterjee has located the figure of the emerging realm Indian women in the home – world dichotomy. Let us then look at the other essay that tries to decipher the women's voice in Indian nationalism and history.

Post-colonial theorist, Gayatri Spivak's "Can the Subaltern Speak?" divides this project into a sort of "fourfold" division. At first she mentions the problems of the Western subject and through the post-structural theory of Foucault and Deleuze finds the "subject" still playing its dominant role, where the Subaltern is still in the position of "object" or "other." While re-reading Marx, she looks at the formation of class identification as not just an essentialist notion (that is with one role and identity) but through the modern concept of "meta-narrative," it is seen as a subjectivity that has multiple suppressions such as race and gender and so on. The third part of the essay argues that the western intellectual produces those subjects that allow its economic expansion. Spivak refers to economic, political and social oppression as well. In the fourth part of this essay, she does a close reading of *sati* (Widow Immolation) to analyze the discourse of the West to analyze the possibility of speech that the subaltern woman can acquire within that framework.¹

As my paper deals with the problems of the voice of Indian women in narrating Indian nationalism, the last part of her essay is very important. We need to remind ourselves that the law was composed by Britain, where the first

¹ Wikipedia: Power-Knowledge <<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Power-knowledge>>

legislation of Hindu law "[was affirmed] without the assent of a single Hindu."¹ The "Minute on Indian Education" (1835) declared that "We must at present do our best to form a class who may be interpreters between us and the millions we govern; a class of persons, Indian in blood and colour, but English in taste, in opinions, in morals, and in intellect."² This again revives the change in social status and the authority imposed on the colonized people. "If, in the context of colonial production, the subaltern has no history and cannot speak, the subaltern as female is even more deeply in shadow."³

Spivak shows the impossibility of deciphering the "speech" as it is impossible to bring to light oppressed and obliterated consciousness. Women's speech has to be read in context and the context is one that subordinates them. Simone de Beauvoir had said, "one is not born a woman, one becomes one." Hence, it is impossible to define woman's thoughts by overlooking at what society has contributed to the construct of her thoughts, or as Elizabeth Fox Genovese writes, "the contribution of the bourgeois-democratic revolutions to the social and political individualism of women,"⁴ cannot be ignored.

Secondly, it becomes difficult to accept what the author has to say about intellectuals being the mediator of these unheard voices, "if given the opportunity

¹ Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?" *Colonial Discourse and Post-colonial Theory* (Columbia University Press, New York, 1994) 93.

² Bureau of Education. *Selections from Educational Records, Part I (1781-1839)*. (Edited by H. Sharp. Calcutta: Superintendent, Government Printing, 1920. Reprint. Delhi: National Archives of India, 1965) 107-117.

³ Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak "Can the Subaltern Speak?" *Colonial Discourse and Post-colonial Theory* (Columbia University Press, New York, 1994) 83.

⁴ *Ibid*, 91.

will always speak and can speak and know their conditions."¹ A school of thought suggests that one cannot speak for another unless they have had similar experiences. For instance a man may try but can never really express the *exact* reaction of a woman. If the only way these women can be known is by being represented by others such as the intellectuals who must "unlearn" the female privilege to represent those on the other side, a gap between reality and representation can easily bring about another set of false representation within the nation itself.

In simple terms marginalized women have no way to voice their resistance and on the other hand, most of those who do are already in a position where they are separated from the harsh realities of the subaltern "other." This is where Spivak meets its own limitations.

History indeed tells us that "the civilizing mission" targeted women in India as well as in other colonized lands. Spivak says, "Imperialism's image as the establisher of the good society is marked by the espousal of woman as object of protection from her own kind."² Conquered societies are marked as inferior, and one of the hallmarks of this inferiority is the condition of its women. In India emphases on practices such as *sati* as *purdah* helped to create such an impression. Women are both the targeted and invisible "objects" of political forces.

¹ Ibid, 78.

² Ibid, 94

Spivak's "free will" concentrates on the quest in the ritual of *sati*. She talks about social and religious meaning of *sati*: "As long as the woman as wife [*Stri*] does not burn herself in the fire on the death of her husband, she is never released [*mucyate*] from her female body."¹ Where is the agency of the women herself? The word "liberty" therefore is disguised under the notion of "devotion" to the husband. Her will is expiated from her body. Here, her body is separated from her mind, and if she chooses to commit *sati*, her mind is seen to be pure as her body burns.

Spivak shows the economic reasoning behind *sati*, as widows are usually allowed half the share of her dead husband's property. Her death would mean a better life for the other members of the family. And secondly, by conflating *sati* with suicide, Spivka points out the differences in concepts of suicide. If a girl commits suicide, exercising her will it would be considered an insult to her family. On the other hand, dying for her husband (forced on many widows) she is seen to be holy and held up as an example of selfless devotion to her husband. When she is *willing* to die it is seen as a horrendous decision, but throwing herself into fire for her husband is constructed as a blessing. As the writer concludes towards the end:

"Between patriarchy and imperialism, subject-constitution and object-formation, the figure of the woman disappears, not into a pristine nothingness, but into a violent shuttling

¹ Ibid, 99

which is the displaced figuration of the third world woman caught between tradition and modernization."¹

This of course brings us to the seemingly heroic act of "white men saving brown women from brown men." The true competition is between the modern western man and traditional Indian man. Women are mere excuses in the struggles.

The example Spivak provides is of Bhuvaneswari Bhaduri, who was "involved in the armed struggle for Indian Independence."² This girl commits suicide and as she was menstruating at the time of her death, it rejects the possibility of an unwanted pregnancy. Spivak suggests the possibility of her being too old and not yet married as another reason for suicide. Whatever the case, what we need to understand is the pain that had no other solution but death.

In addition, Ania Loomba, in her analyses to "Can the Subaltern Speak?" draws out the fact that through some writings of widows we fail to find their agency or as she calls it "oppositional consciousness"³ She, unlike Spivak, takes the writing of a Hindu widow (1889) where the widow describes the conditions of those who choose not to perform *sati*. After explaining the slow(er) death that these widows undergo due to social and family pressure, the widow writes:

¹ Ibid, 102

² Ibid 103

³ Ania Loomba, *Colonialism/ Postcolonialism* (Routledge, London and New York, 1998) 236.

"The British government put a ban on the custom of *sati*, but as a result of that several women who could have died a cruel but quick death when their husband dies now have to face an agonizing slow death."¹

Though the widow offers the explanation for the "widow's desire of death" she herself had chosen to live. Ania Loomba also brings out the limitations of the "subaltern". According to Loomba, there were many upper-class women where they learnt to write and read, participated in anti-colonial nationalism and so forth and yet, spoke very little against both the British Raj or the indigenous patriarchal society. Perhaps this was because they didn't want to lose their privilege. Could these women be referred to as "Subaltern?" Even within the subaltern there is a division amongst people who can speak and who cannot. Some simply chose not to express their experience of oppression.

Finally, I find myself compelled to echo Spivak's assertion that "the subaltern cannot speak." So, I conclude this introductory chapter with Loomba's questions at hand for which there are vague or no answers. The relationship between women and anti-colonial resistance therefore becomes a disturbed and an unclear discourse:

"[...] which group constitutes the subalterns in any text? What is their relationship to each other? How can they be heard to be speaking or not speaking in any given set of materials? With what effects? Rephrasing the questions in this way enables us to retain

¹ Ibid, 237

Spivak's insight regarding the positioning of women in colonial discourse without conceding to colonial discourse what it, in fact did not achieve – the erasure of women."¹

-- Lata Mani

In the next chapter I will attempt to understand the theories explained in the introduction and how far they are visible in the pages of literature.

¹ Quoted in Ania Loomba, *Colonialism/ Postcolonialism* (Routledge, London and New York, 1998) 236.

Chapter 2

Of two minds and never the Self

"To me the female sex is not the weaker sex; it is the nobler of the two: for it is even today the embodiment of sacrifice, silent suffering, humility, faith and knowledge"¹

— Mahatma Gandhi

Swadeshi literally means "of our own country." The *swadeshi* movement was a nationalist movement meant to boycott British goods and buy homemade products. The British would suffer, while the local industries would grow, with less competition from imported goods. But what was conceived as a non-violent non-cooperation movement soon turned violent and ugly, owing to the heavy handed policies of the British Raj, and willful "meddling" by self-seeking and sinister *bhadraloks*, the result of which we find the suffering in many of the female characters in Tagore's novels.²

In this chapter, I will venture into the analysis of one such character, Bimala, who is torn between her husband, a representative of old India yet modern as he wants to liberate his wife, and her new lover, the changing India, which in this narrative, is tossed between the two worlds. I will try to locate her speech and her 'self' in this tripartite novel. It is here that I will ask how far she is

¹ Wikipedia, Gandhi.

² Mohammad Quayaum, "Review of Rabindranath Tagore: *Ghare Baire*," http://www.muktomona.com/Articles/rabindra_probondho/Quayaum_on_tagore.htm Date Visited: 12.02.08

in control of her social resetting and will attempt to understand why her social emancipation is not possible.

The novel *Ghaire Bhaire*, translated by Tagore as *The Home and the World* (2002), deals with the experiences of three characters during the volatile period of *swadeshi*: Nikhil (whose name means "free"), a benevolent, enlightened and progressive *zamindar* (landlord); his childhood friend and a selfish but charismatic nationalist leader, Sandip; and Nikhil's wife, Bimala ("pristine"), who is happy at the outset in her traditional role as a zamindar's wife but who, encouraged by her husband, steps out of home to better acquaint herself with the world and find a new identity for the Indian woman.

At the sight of Sandip, she emotionally trips, fluctuates between him and her husband, until she returns home bruised and humiliated but with a more mature understanding of the home/self and the world/other. Again, her return home is a very definite decision of the "New India" where the women were placed in their "inner domain of sovereignty," a place away from the men's world. The title of the novel itself signifies the private-public demarcation and Bimala's return to her home in the end of the novel justifies Partha Chatterjees theory of the "proper" placing of the "new Indian woman" within nationalist discourse

Bimala, torn between the two worlds of the men, not knowing for sure what should be her guiding principle – signifies Bengal tottering between the two possibilities: Nikhil's vision of a harmony of individuals and nations and Sandip's radical, parochial and belligerent nationalism, which cultivates an intense sense

of patriotism in individuals. 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. Tagore's critique of Indian nationalism shows us the similar danger of the tension and conflict between tradition and modernity. Tagore, himself, on one hand claimed that it was the politics of nationalism, "which in every country has lowered the standard of morality, [and] given rise to a perpetual contest of lies and deception, cruelties and hypocrisies."¹ But when the *swadeshi* movement broke out in Bengal, in the wake of its partition in 1905, Tagore soon found himself at its whirlpool: writing songs, giving speeches, and taking part in mass rallies. Amartya Sen draws a parallel of the conflicting 'new India' with Tagore himself.

"To get on familiar terms with the local people is a part of your education. To know only agriculture is not enough; you must know America too. Of course if, in the process of knowing America, one begins to lose one's identity and falls into the trap of becoming an Americanised person contemptuous of everything Indian, it is preferable to stay in a locked room."²

It is precisely this locking up in the room which projects another parallel with Bimala journeying back to her home after learning the trauma of her

¹ Mohammad Quayaum "Review of Rabindranath Tagore: *Ghare Baire*"
<http://www.muktomona.com/Articles/rabindra_probondho/Quayaum_on_tagore.htm> Date Visited: 12.02.08.

² Amartya Sen <http://nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/literature/articles/sen/index.html> Date Visited: 01.03.08

rejection in the outside world. Therefore, Bimala's coming out into the "living room" for the first time is that same gesture of both India coming out into a new setting as well as Tagore himself learning to cope with new changes. All three are therefore anxious for a new longing for form and they come to a "realization of the vision of a nation-making."¹ This displacement is therefore the unsolved mystery of the woman who is identified with the emerging nation.

In order to locate her voice, we need to first look at her narrative and understand how far it is her own thoughts and how far it is an imitation of the men she is surrounded by. The narrative is structured in the form of diary entries written by the three characters. This technique allows the reader to see the events in multiple perspectives.

When we focus specifically on Bimala, we find her narrative overtaking the others in length but perhaps saying little of her 'self'. She is, at the beginning however, sure of her positioning in the world. The "cage"² that she is in is has more meaning for her than the "universe"³ but she claims that the men outside her domain know little of "what the household stands for. In these matters they ought to follow womanly guidance"⁴ She has understood the private-public dichotomy suggested by Partha Chatterjee very well and has even placed her husband above herself for "can there be real happiness for a woman in merely

¹ Timothy Brennan "The National Longing for Form" in Bill Ashcraft, Gareth Griffiths, Helen Tiffin, *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader* (Oxford, 1995) 170.

² Rabindranath Tagore *Ghaire Bhaire*, translated as *Tagore Home and the World* (Rupa. Co. New Delhi, 2002) 9.

³ Ibid, 9.

⁴ Ibid, 11.

feeling that she has power over a man?"¹ The internalization of a male dominated ideology is already seen here. Her time period demands from her the recovery of the "traditional women" where her eternal past shapes her contingent present.² The *bhadramahila* in the making is therefore an English educated Indian traditional woman. This fits Chatterjee's understanding of the changing domestic Bengali scene.

Her voice, however, remained focused until the sudden force of Swadeshi came knocking at her door plunging right into her "heart." She isn't, however, clear about how the movement started. She hears it cry from a distance thus showing both the gap of *her* presence in the movement as well as the ambiguity of the Nationalist movement to all its women. We can relate this to Ranajit Guha's analyse of the failure of Indian Independence to acknowledge "the contribution made by the people on their own"³ in the ways that people were not included in it.

From here on until her realization of the pendulant game being played on her, she is given two versions of speech. One is of her feeling torn between the uncertainty of the two worlds, and the second is a language of meaning as she echoes celebrating the *shakti*⁴ in herself.

¹ Ibid, 5.

² Kumkum Sangari and Sudesh vaid *Recasting Women: An Introduction* (Kali for Women, New Delhi, 1989) 10.

³ Ranajit Guha "On Some Aspects of the Historiography of Colonial India" *Subaltern Studies* (New Delhi) 3.

⁴ Parvati or Durga or Shakti, the consort of Shiva, is perhaps the most important goddess of Hindus. She is a multi-dimensional goddess and comes in many names projecting the various powers within her.

While she feels entrapped in a "whirl," she is confused and experiences "intoxication" in her obsession with Sandip. She seems to oscillate as the two men await her decision. Nikhil awaits to hear her say "I am myself"¹ which never happens, but to which he wants to reply "aren't you mine?"² Sandip gazes at her every step to know whether she can "advance or retreat."³ This movement also comes too late. Not only do these men speak for her as they gaze upon her, her own voice remains locked while it struggles to represent the New India that is trying to fashion a new femininity. Again, we find the criticism Tagore foresaw of the struggling India that tried to unify itself through the *swadeshi* narrative. "He wanted Indians to learn what is going on elsewhere, how others lived, what they valued, and so on, while remaining interested and involved in their own culture and heritage."⁴ This duality in thinking, in splitting the "self" provokes a dangerous construction of identity as it rests on uncertain principles:

"My mind used to be full of contradictions when they talked thus. On the one hand I was eager that my husband should win in argument [...] on the other it was Sandip's unabashed pride which attracted me so."⁵

Torn between rationality and passion, loyalty and attraction signifies the disturbance in India's Nationalist history. Tagore describes this as the "pride

¹ Rabindranath Tagore *The Home and The World*, (Rupa. Co. New Delhi, 2002) 56.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid, 66.

⁴ Amartya Sen < http://nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/literature/articles/sen/index.html > Date Visited: 01.03.08

⁵ Rabindranath Tagore *The Home and The World*, (Rupa. Co. New Delhi, 2002) 66.

because of their nervous desire to turn themselves into a machine of power, called the nation."¹

When she does speak of her "desire", she positions herself in the guise of a goddess just as Sandip constructs her. She calls herself the "queen," Sandip calls her "Queen Bee", she wonders if "Sandip Babu [would] find the *Shakti* of the Motherland manifest in [her]?"² She sees the tongue of fire in Sandip as he sees the fire in her red-bordered sari. She wants to see herself as the symbol of mother earth, the goddess and the central voice of India. In the end, she is flattered and beguiled by Sandips' spirit yet in sincere devotion, "Listening to his allegories I had forgotten that I was plain and simple. I was shakti."³

Bimala's sexuality is awakened by Sandip. The passion she embodies makes her want to "burst bonds."⁴ Sandip recognizes the golden border of her sari as if it was "her own inner fire flaming out."⁵ The red ribbon in her hair represents the mess and tension of which she is in the center and within which she is dislocated. Bimala's sexuality – desire and longing – is moulded, stoked and lighted by Sandip's insincere words. So where does the power of speech lie? Despite being given a speaking voice, Bimala remains passive, is manipulated and made to dance to Sandip's music. Where does "free will" and agency lie?

¹ Rabindranath Tagore, *Nationalism*, (Rupa, Co, New Dehli, 1952) 428

² Rabindranath Tagore, *The Home and The World*, (Rupa. Co. New Delhi, 2002) 19

³ Ibid, 96.

⁴ Ibid, 18.

⁵ Ibid, 40.

Let us examine Tagore's short story *The Broken Nest* at this point. This story centers around the wife at home, Charu and her disarticulation as the educated middle class female Indian. At first she doesn't want to write fiction, but when she does, it becomes an imitation of Amal's writing:

"Whatever she wrote became exactly like Amal's writing; when she compared it, she found that some parts were quoted word for word from him. Those were the only good portions; the rest was amateurish"¹

This imitation of the other man in the wife's life seems to be a recurring theme that only projects the limitation of the 'self' of the women. In *The Home and the World* too we find that Bimala is incapable of thinking on her own. She sees "darkness" when left in her bedroom and so the 'muddle' in her mind shows the discomfort of her 'self' when making her own decisions. Her agency is thus ridiculed. "For the *bhadralokh* may represent the mind, and women the heart and the heart requires improvement, is questioned and manipulated"²

Looking into the complex psychosexual position occupied by Bimala, we find it hard to distinguish her from the land and the image of the goddess. This pushes her psyche out of the picture and replaces it with illusions of occupying a platform that must be both worshipped and fought for. Female sexuality has always been deployed towards the maintenance and reproduction of social

¹ Rabindranath Tagore *The Broken Nest*, Translated by Mary M. Lago, (University of Missouri Press, Columbia, 1971) 77.

² Kumkum Sangari and Sudesh vaid *Recasting Women: An Introduction* (Kali for Women, New Delhi, 1989) 10.

inequality. Bimala with no children of her own is projected as the mother of both her home and the Indian land.

What she is torn between is the manifesto of the id in Sandip and the superego of the moral Nikhil. As she clings to one side more than the other, she becomes destructive.

What she becomes instead is an "idol" as Daring had described it. She becomes mother India and an image with three dimensions – the mother (without a child, the land and the goddess) amongst which her own identity is repressed or not even questioned.

"I would make my country a Person, and call her Mother, Goddess, Durga, - for whom I would redder the earth with sacrificial offerings."¹

She is the Sita that awaits Ram in the beginning of the novel. She is then transfigured and disillusioned into the Durga but ultimately becomes Kali – "I am a worshipper of Kali, and one day I shall worship her, setting Bimala on the altar of Destruction,"² says Sandip.

The complex merging of sexuality and power projected to divinity is both a disturbing combination as well as one that destroys the human life within Bimala. She is finally anything but a human being. She thus needs to be protected from

¹ Rabindranath Tagore *The Home and The World*, (Rupa. Co. New Delhi, 2002) 25.

² Ibid, 80.

the outer world, or she will bring destruction and this again is symbolized through the spirit of the land that is her:

"Possibly this is woman's nature. When her passion is roused she loses her sensibility for all that is outside it. When, like the river, we women keep to our banks, we give nourishment with all that we have. When we overflow them we destroy with all that we are."¹

Therefore if she is the land over which the men exist, then their access to her becomes their access to the land and its ownership. "The power which wins these women is the power of the mighty men"² It is through her "the subject and the object" within that the competition between the men is exercised or tested. It is through the colonial depiction of the colonized as a violated female body which is replaced by the "violated female body" of the land that needs to be saved. As Fanon recalls it, decolonization is simply the replacing of one species of men with another.

On the other hand, Sara Suleri, in her analyses of *A Passage to India*, shows the homoeroticism between the male colonizer and the colonized male and their intimacies, which regulate the boundaries of the colonial space. We can suggest the same symbolic Anglo-Indian narrative when it comes to the binary of the traditional moral man, Nikhil and the greedy Sandip of the changing India. This friction is clear through the exchange of knowledge between these two men.

¹ Ibid, 42.

² Ibid, 37.

This exchange decides Bimala's position. The friction takes places in the living room – which again is neither in the heart of the home nor in the alien world. The call into the women's quarters are made by the women but the 'invitation' to the living room or the "central space" is the invitation of one male to another which is then transformed on the body of the desired woman.

In *A Passage to India* Adela must experience "a delusional rape" and thus her body becomes the "legal space" over which the men can conflict. In *The Home and the World*, Bimala becomes the "Queen" that needs to be impressed, the mother that needs to be served and the land that needs to be conquered. And in this push and pull, she finally exclaims her "want of Sandip [...] today" which ultimately destroys the "music" between her and her husband. Aziz takes Fielding into his confidence, allowing Fielding to look at his deceased wife's photograph, thereby lifting the veil within which the Indian woman must otherwise be confined. Here Bimala, whose face has always been veiled away from other men, is also unveiled by Nikhil to Sandip.

India is the land -- "a very remote object" -- that could not be represented through the English language, and that could be viewed only through "a very false and cloudy medium"¹ is Bimala too – complicated, uncertain and mysterious.

These adjectives define the relationship between Sandip and Bimala as well. The seduction-play and emotional dilemma/manipulation is surfaced and

¹ Sara Suleri, *The Rhetoric of English India*, University of Chicago press, 1992, 27.

the first intimate moment between the two is described as "vibration" and "intoxication." These metaphors signify the danger that the nationalist movement contains. The meeting in semi-darkness, which is especially highlighted in Satyajit Ray's Film *Ghare Baire*, suggests the darkness and secrecy of the anti-colonial struggle especially in the homes. In the *Broken Nest* too, we find that Charu and Amal waltz their secret world in from the inner domain. The secret-coming together that arouses the passion and fire is what Tagore has foreseen as the destruction of India, the fragmentation of the whole nation, where one is the deceiver and the other deceived. The tension, which alerts the fear-desire binary between the two, is both post colonial as well as a sign of the uncertainty of the emerging nation. The secrecy is however also the silences of the woman who cannot come out and speak her desire, not only because she is unsure but also because this has the potential of unleashing a destructive power, bringing the "Kali" within her. The good-bad woman dichotomy is strong. We see it in *The Broken Nest* for example when "even after Charu realize that Amal's absence is the cause of her grief, she rationalizes her emotion by sorrowing over the fact that she seemed to go away angry."¹

The more successful relationship, therefore, in the novel is the one between Bimala and Amulya. This is one of a mother and son; he awakes the mother within her. It is her tragedy that even this acceptable relation adds to her tragedy. She bakes a cake as if waiting for a rebirth as she realizes her mistakes. She is most certain of her actions when she tells Amulya not to steal,

¹ Rabindranath Tagore *The Broken Nest*, Translated by Mary M. Lago (University of Missouri Press, Columbia, 1971) 31.

not to kill but to sell her ornaments, a part of herself. This devotion to the "truth" that everyone seeks in the novel becomes one of sacrifice. Thus Bimala performs her proper duty at last. "I have passed through fire" she says "What was impure in me has burnt to ashes."¹ She has achieved a symbolic *sati*. The killing of her "self" is therefore the purest act she has done in the entire novel.

In her freedom she is forced into the inner home, where she happily becomes the subordinate to her forgiving husband. The freedom or emancipation she sought outside this home was only deceptive and illusion. Her relationship with Sandip therefore is an illusion and not the "truth." The truth is a blurry element, which India is seeking in its reformation and search for Independence. A nation is what it wants to call itself and yet in doing so there is tension, danger and frustration.

"[...] but who live under the delusion that you are free are every day sacrificing your freedom and humanity to this fetish of nationalism."²

Bimala is unable to discover herself without submitting to either of the two men. When she finally recognizes the falsity of Sandip, it becomes too late to save Nikhil.

Her step into the material outer world deceives her just like the imaginary world that Charu and Amal build together remains illusionary till the end. These images only show that perhaps a woman's truth lies only in her dreams. Freud's

¹ Rabindranath Tagore *The Home and The World*, (Rupa. Co. New Delhi, 2002) 197.

² Rabindranath Tagore, *Nationalism*, Rupa. Co. New Delhi, 1952) 422.

psychoanalytic theories will show that our unconsciousness is the place where the true desires lie suppressed. Perhaps the closest we can come to a woman's voice is in Sultana's craving for a world that rejects patriarchal oppression:

"Men, who do are at least are capable of doing no end of mischief, are let loose and the innocent women are shut up in the *Zenna*! How can you trust those untrained men out of doors."¹

The reversal in roles brings out Sultana's voice that cannot be uttered in the real world. Her vision is locked inside a dream, drawing parallels with Bimala's empowerment which is locked inside her home. "Our religion is based on Love and Truth. It is our religious duty to love one another and to be absolutely truthful."²

If this is the case, then Bimala's journey from her room to the living room and back is a cycle that simply traces readers the journey of Indian nationalism, the *Swadeshi movement*. "The general situation [of women over time] was one of suppression and domination within the grounds of a patriarchal system"³ and so is the case here. Bimala's voice is therefore not located in the outside world and it is never clearly uttered within the home either.

¹ Rokeya Sakhawat Hossein *Sultana's Dream* in Galpa (Writers.ink, Dhaka, 2005) 19.

² Ibid, 26.

³ Ibid.

Chapter 3

Of innocence to Ignorance

"I am told that there is an unwillingness on the part of their (female victim's) relatives to accept those girls and women in their *homes*. This is a most objectionable and wrong attitude to take and any social custom that supports this attitude must be condemned"¹ [my italics]

-- Jawaharlal Nehru

It has been more than 60 years since the partition of India and Pakistan. The violence that had marked what should have been a glorious moment of Independence from the British is recorded in statistics and official documents. These documents need to be brought to life. This can be done by listening to the voices of ordinary people whose lives were caught up in the mayhem, especially in my thesis, the voice of women. As I leave behind an upper class female figure locked betrayed in her home in the last chapter, I hope to venture into the lives of women of a different status and era. In this chapter I will look at the novel *The Ice-Candy-Man* (1988) written by Bapsi Sidwa. The prominent figures in this text are Lenny, a polio-effected girl and Ayah, her maid. Their journeys mirror each other as they mirror the formation of the nation-state to independence where the journey is marked by violence. The ultimate rupture in their relationship parallels the India-Pakistan divide.

¹ Urvashi Butalia *The Other Side Of Silence* (Penguin, Delhi, 1998) 160.

To start with, Lenny's position as a handicapped child brings to the fore an innocent and yet *abnormal* point of view. It seems that the story about the nation-state is always told from a different angle and her angle is one that we expect to be very distant from the 'real' world. Her disability, which Col. Bharucha claims has been brought to India because of British colonization, makes her dependent on others. To her status of a young girl, indeed of a child, is added her disability. And as such, a greater gap between narrator and narrative is created, adding to the further slipping of representation and reality.

Yet, I search for a voice I hope that is uninterrupted because of the innocence and hence the *truth* that I am seeking. The truth in her speech, however, does lead to the tragedy of Ayah's rape and the revealing of Ice-Candy-Man's hypocrisy. The truth unveils the bloodshed behind nationalism. As Partha Chatterjee has shown, the relation between women and the nation state is negotiated through the domestic space. It is here where I hope to understand the true relationship between women and nationalism, and to locate the female voice, which may emerge from within these sites.

However, the very title of the novel takes the narrative away from Lenny. The story is one that revolves around her home, her family and her land and yet it is given an abstract title of a man whose name we never find out, whose sexualized love for Ayah disturbs us and so placing his symbolic image on the cover of this fiction already blocks Lenny's own identity. Thus decentring of

Lenny from her own narrative helps to highlight the gendered power relations. Why is it that Lenny tells the story yet her name is veiled behind the cover? Added to this is also the point that the narrative is by a young passive girl. Why is it that the Ice-Candy-Man gets a title but no real name? Are they both then in dislocation – their positions mirrored in ambiguity?

The Ice-Candy-Man is also the means through which both Ayah and Lenny receive information about the outside world. This, seemingly, linear transfer of the story from public to private, through a man and then through a seven year old, leaves behind missing elements of reality. The truth becomes fragile and this fragmentation of the real politics in the men's world leads Lenny to believe that the Ice-Candy-Man is a "savior in [the] hour of need" and yet within seconds Lenny realizes that she has betrayed Ayah.¹ This failure to understand the situation highlights the distance between the female subject and the discourse of nationalism. Although Lenny is very aware of the trauma that surrounds her, in her private home she fails to understand the hypocrisy of men. She reminds us of Bimala at this point.

Besides the fact that politics is retold to women at home by men, Ranna's separate story told within Lenny's foregrounds the tragedy of women in nationalist discourse even more than Lenny's story. Again, Lenny narrates it to us but the first hand contact with such brutality comes from Ranna. "[H]e saw

¹ Bapsi Sidhwa *Ice-Candy-Man* (Penguin Books, New Delhi 1989) 182.

babies, snatched from their mothers, smashed against walls and their howling mothers brutally raped and killed.¹

Such images can then only be reflected in Lenny's dreams and imagination but she does not encounter such incidents till the incident in her own home. Until then she can only have an illusion about the social destruction taking place outside her home. Her vision of the possibilities of the nationalist movement simply mimics what she hears from others. "The whispers of women comforting each other – of women softly weeping"² echoes in Lenny's dreams like "the slogans of the mobs."³ This echoing is first a mirroring of the story told by a male figure and secondly it is the closest she is allowed into the world of violence.

What becomes important then are gender relations. Lenny's relationship with her Cousin even at such a tender age is highly sexualized. She, the naïve female and he the teacher represent the strong male dominated hierarchy and power. "I ask Cousin"⁴ and "I never learn,"⁵ says Lenny. In contact with various male figures such as Col. Bharucha, who examines her leg, "private world is rudely popped"⁶ for Sidhwa describes their interaction as sexual where he dominates over her body. The "private" can mean her narration, Lenny's, which is

¹ Ibid, 207.

² Ibid, 203.

³ Ibid, 213.

⁴ Ibid, 92.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid, 34.

a retelling of the layers of others voices. It can also be the invasion over her body from the doctor. She also has feelings that she cannot name for her Cousin.

Finally, it is the transformation of her body into puberty and the growth of breasts that reflects any the changing structure of the new nations yet to be born. "I am a Pakistani in a snap."¹ Her lack of understanding of how she has suddenly come to a new identity reflects Bimala's own uncertainty to how the *Swadeshi* movement had started and her new role in it. Lenny's contact with Cousin is based on her lack of certainty about currents events and their causes. He seems to be exerting some power over her.. This force in power for shaping woman's mind and knowledge is comparable to shaping of the new nation by men in the political world.

It is important to note that never makes her feelings for her Cousin clear until she rejects him in the end. Her relationship with Cousin therefore parallels that between Ayah and the men in her life.

"Holy men, masked in piety, shove aside their pretences to ogle her with lust. Hawkers, cart-drivers, cooks, coolies and cyclists turn their heads as she passes, pushing my pram with the unconcern of the Hindu goddess she worships."²

The many admirers from various backgrounds "Hindu, Muslim, Sikh, Christian" mirror the diversity of India that nevertheless build up the unity of India.

¹ Ibid, 140.

² Ibid, 3.

The centre becomes the woman, "only the group around Ayah remains unchanged. Hindu, Muslim, Sikh, Parsee are, as always, unified around her."¹ Thus Ayah becomes the state, the land that must be tickled and seduced with the "toes", the land which must be won over, and the divisions which must be united.

The fragile unity around her is of course at a constant state of breaking as India itself breaks up. "Such talk helps clear the air ... but for your sake, we won't bring it up again."² Although I am drawing a mirror image of these two bodies, the women – Ayah and Lenny – are themselves divided by class, caste and communal divisions - these women and the nation-state – I have to constantly keep the differences between the two in focus.

Although Lenny is constantly surrounded by Ayah's world, she doesn't belong there. Her youth permits her to be with the Subalterns, but her manner and her speech, which is very much silenced by her surrounding, will never allow her to truly represent the Subaltern.

"Adi can swear and it's a big joke. Rosy can curse and look cute. Papoo can let fly a string of invective compared to which the tongawallah's invective sounds like a lullaby, and manages to appear stunningly roguish. And I cannot even say a damned 'damn fool' without being told it doesn't suit me."³

¹ Ibid, 97.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid, 48.

The novel produces at least two worlds—views and suppression. One is the restriction to which Lenny's voice and the voice of the middle-class woman is subjected, and two is Ayah's position. While the two mirror each other, Ayah represents the other of a different *category* of people in this united land. In fact Lenny is a Persian, neither a Hindu nor a Muslim, between which the fight for Independence is taking place. Her position therefore more marginalized in the nationalist movement and her position is further dislocated.

Lenny is with Ayah when exposed to the men, Lenny is like Ayah when exposed to Cousin, but she is never Ayah because she is trained to be a middle class educated girl, comparable to the Bengali *bhadromahila*. Ayah is the subaltern woman who is left out of the nationalist discourse. In Partha Chatterjee's "Women and the Nation" Railasbasini Debi (1830- 95) shows disgust to the unhygienic conditions of traditional women "confined at childbirth"¹ The autobiographies he deals with the "other" women even when she is part of the same nation. These create divisions between women themselves and the subaltern or other woman becomes a threat to the middle class narratives of the nation.

Sara Suleri in her "The Feminine Picturesque" shows the threat or "distraction" the native women posed to the colonizers. Chatterjee notes how these lower class women in the public sphere become sexual commodities for

¹ Partha Chatterjee "Women and the Nation" in *The Nation and Its Fragments: Colonial and Post Colonial Histories* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1993) 146.

the native men and so Ayah's position viewed from this vantage point, places her equally within this sexualized sphere. As Ayah's body is placed as a commodity, which can be fought over, her voice is effectively obliterated. And so in this female narrated novel, the voice of the "other" women is missing similar to other such literary voices. This can be compared to Christophine in *Wide Sargasso Sea*, who appears in the background, but whose voice can really not be deciphered.

"Christophine is tangential to this narrative. She cannot be contained by a novel which re-writes a canonical English text [...] in the interest of the white Creole rather than the native."¹

Similarly, the writing of a novel in the interest of a young middle-class girl's struggle in the making of a nation-state cannot include the voice of the Subaltern woman.

While Lenny is finally able to say no to Cousin, thereby asserting agency, Ayah undergoes rape, marries the Ice-Candy-Man and then after the presence of Lenny's grandmother, is able to voice her desire to go back home. Her will can be expressed only after violent act of dismemberment have occurred.

"How will you govern a country when you don't know what goes on in your own house"² asks the doctor in the beginning of the novel. And the failure to protect Ayah is therefore the failure to protect the home, the nation:

¹ Gaiyatri Spivak, "Three Woman Text", JSTOR.

² Bapsi Sidhwa, *Ice-Candy-Man*, Penguin Books, New Delhi, 1989, 12.

The nation had failed to protect its women, and the failure had to be rendered unproblematic by destroying historical records about the raped women and locating the women in the national imagination as the bearers of *ijjat*. Literary connections have been drawn between rapes and the failure of the nation-state to deliver its promises of democracy and secularism.¹

The train of dead women, the almost *Sati* like ritual of Muslim women in the mosque getting ready to "burn themselves" for honour and the silence of the women who survive creates an aura of silence around the violence episode that marked the nation-making exercise.

Ayah is one of those 75 000 women raped during partition. She is the "missing woman" who brings disgrace to her community. The question is however, what community is she part of? Is she part of Lenny's world? Perhaps not, since Lenny feels awkward when she finally meets Ayah after her abduction. Lenny feels threatened when in contact with the dancing girls or prostitutes, a world that Ayah has become a part of after her abduction. "I have never seen women of this class with cropped and frizzed hair: nor using the broad and comfortable gestures of men." It is here she finds men "cleansing themselves after urinating" or what is referred to as the "national pastime" that signifies a symbolic sexual power men exercise over the land and over their women.²

¹ Rubaiyat Hossain, 'Birangonas' Heroic Women or the Shamed Ones: The Ambiguous Figures of Bangladeshi National History, University of Pennsylvania, 2006

² Bapsi Sidhwa, *Ice-Candy-Man*, Penguin Books, New Delhi, 1989, 259.

The female body becomes a sexual threat, a platform that must be battled over, used and abused. Because impregnating the women of the other community makes her give birth to children of the man's religious community. It is therefore "a constant reminder of the violation of the women, of the fact that she had had sex with a man of the other religion"¹ and she will give birth to his children. This becomes the only means through which the Ice-Candy-Man can win Ayah and the only way that she cannot reject him because of the force he has exercised over her has silenced her forever:

"The last thing I noticed was Ayah, her mouth slack and piteously gaping, her disheveled hair flying into her kidnappers face, staring at us as if she wanted to leave behind her wide-open and terrified eyes."²

And so Ayah's voice is obliterated to a point where she cannot even scream and we never hear what happens to her, we only listen to Ice-Candy-Man's intention to "protect her." This is what Butalia calls the "ambiguous phrase"³ which is unclear, uncertain and voiced through someone else. Her abduction and her shame which prevents her from coming back to Lenny's home and her desire to ultimately go to her own village where her family is likely to reject her is the "double dislocation"⁴ where Ayah's voice is never clearly uttered.

¹ Urvashi Butalia, *The Other Side of Silence* (Penguin Books, New Delhi, 1998) 161.

² Bapsi Sidhwa, *Ice-Candy-Man*, (Penguin Books, New Delhi, 1989) 184.

³ Urvashi Butalia, *The Other Side of Silence*, (Penguin Books, New Delhi, 1998) 127.

⁴ *Ibid*, 163.

It is important to remember that Lenny manages to reject her Cousin whereas Ayah has to marry the Ice-Candy-Man after being raped by other men. The gap between the voices of the educated upper class compared to the lower working class cannot be bridged. The story told by the "intellectual" who tries to represent the Subaltern women convey her voice. Therefore, as I try to understand the relationship between the position of women and nationalism, I realize that the narratives of an entire population who suffered during the birth of the nation is missing. These sufferings are silenced while the suffering of the middle class limits the understanding of national independence of women's participation in the nation making movements, "what clearly is left out of this un-historical historiography is the *politics of the people*,"¹ says Guha, to which Spivak adds the missing voices of the subaltern women.

The rape of woman that marked the nation-making movement brings out the class divisions between women in the nation. Therefore along fragile lines, which echo the fall of its citizen subjects are mirrored in the breaking of the woman's body, the train full of women's breast is a symbolic revenge and the aggression marks the dismantling of the terrain and well as the people.

How far can we generalize the relationship between women and the nation-state? Do we have to surrender to Chatterjee's private/public divide?

¹ Ranajit Guha *Subaltern Studies* "On Some Aspects of the Historiography of Colonial India," (Rupa. Co. New Delhi, 2001) 4.

The obliteration of women's voices somehow represents all that remains unsaid in the history. Her body becomes a reminder of the invasion of her territory. It is again important to note that the female sexuality poses a danger to others is because of the "impurity" that might result from it. If I take the social critique's Spike V Peterson's idea that women are symbolically, culturally, and biologically reproducers of the nation, it is then worthwhile to mention that a child born of woman from a man of another nation disturbs the reproduction of a pure race. She, the baby factory, must therefore close doors to outsiders.

The bond between women and nation is thus reduced to an essentialist ideology:

"Women's reproduction capabilities to literally reproduce the nation, as well as the symbolic significance of the socio-cultural construction of 'woman,' play an integral part in creating a synthesis of national moreal identity, which ultimately distinguishes the members of one nation from that of another."¹

¹ Rubaiyat Hossain 'Birangonas' Heroic Women or the Shamed Ones: *The Ambiguous Figures of Bangladeshi National History*, (University of Pennsylvania) 2006.

Epilogue

Venturing into different time frames, I plan to end my thesis by looking at where women and their relationship to the nation stand in more recent times. 1971, and the nine months of brutality, bloodshed, and the birth of the new nation, the birth of Bangladesh can be seen as a mirror image of a woman reproducing a child. As I look more and more into the foregrounding of the woman's body and the diffusion of her mind into a state of chaos, I find it harder even in a most contemporary text *A Golden Age* (2007) to locate a voice that is certain of itself. In retrospect I plan to look at '*Ekatturer Din Guli*' or 'Memories of Blood and Fire,' (1990) written by Jahanara Imam and translated by Mustafizur Rahman, in order to give rise to a debate between facts versus fiction and discuss whether the two genres, different from each other, can at least bring me closer to the women's speech.

Of Blood and Fire is an autobiography, in fact a diary. The easy flowing narrative style and the daily journal entry format makes it easy to trace the historical events, which are layered with everyday details of domesticity and of Dhaka city during the months of war. It is through its journal entries and the treatment of a mother that we find woman's sole duty as keeping her home together. Women's domestic role in the time of war and the merging of public/private brings in a problematic development. As Jahanara's son brings his friends, who also participate in the Liberation War, to his home, the house becomes a threatening space. Jahanara Imam is nationally recognized as

'*Shahid Janani*' or 'Mother of the Martyr' because she started a program in 1990 to bring the war criminals of 1971 to trial and organized a young group called '*Projonmo Ektattur*' or Generation '71 to revisit and recover the true history of 1971.

A Golden Age, written by Tahmima Anam, and its fictional narrative by Rehana takes us to 1971, and Rehana, a widow, struggles just like the real-life Jahanara Iman to keep her children and household together. The breaking apart of these characters, of their homes and the fragmentation of the domestic space becomes a mirror image of the nation and its destructions and reformations.

It is the loss of Rumi, Imam's son, in the war that remains the crux her narrative. In *A Golden Age*, Sohail, Rehana's son, comes back, unable to bear the brutality of the war and yet victorious because he was part of it and could rejoice in Independence.

How is the relationship of these women with their children portrayed? These mothers echo each other as they fear the loss of their infants who, in the time of war, are willing to sacrifice them for another mother – the nation. "My children are no longer mine,"¹ says Rehana in the beginning of the novel as she loses custody over them and yet she builds her home from scratch so that she

¹ Tahmima Anam *A Golden Age* (John Murray (Publishers), Great Britain, 2007) 5.

can" save her children."¹ The effort to keep the children however becomes a failure:

"Your children are not your children
They are the sins and daughters of Life's
Longing for itself"²

Like the longing for the national form and the struggle to become part of that *Imagined Community* of the nation, the household goes through a momentary break up and a final reunion:

"You have their bodies but not their souls
For their souls swell in the house of tomorrow
When you cannot visit
Not even in your dreams"³

Two issues emerge from here. For one, the position of women in the nation-state is that of being cultural reproducers is nullified. Imam's son describes this as a "fools paradise" that Jahanara is in. Her lack of understanding of her son's passionate love for the nation can be read in a Freudian psychosexual manner. Her son deepens the futility of a mother's choice during nationalist movements along with her lack of control over the nationalist discourse that she is not a part of. And so secondly, the role of "war mothers" that Imam had taken on so proudly, limits woman to the position of motherhood – good mothers allow sons to go to war in the service of the nation. "I shut my eyes

¹ Ibid, 16.

² Jahanara Imam, *Of Blood and Fire*, Translated by Mustafizur Rahman, The University Press Limited, Bangladesh, 1990, 77.

³ Ibid.

and said slowly, "No, I don't want that. All right, I give in. I sacrifice you to the cause of the nation. You may join the war."¹ She has to give up her own offspring when the greater mother – the nation – needs them. The narrating of the nation involves much bloodshed and so the giving away of her child means she no longer shapes them. The nation has taken over. The fictional narration of *A Golden Age* echoes that reaction of the autobiographical narrative of Jahanara Iman, placing the two mothers in similar categories:

"There was something unmistakably foreign about him [Sohail] now, as though some other hands had begun to shape him, hands not as loving or as tender as hers. She couldn't help thinking back to the years he had been with Parveen. *My children have not always been my children*"²

The home, the centre where the sons "plan their operations"³ and her identity of that of "just a housewife"⁴ is no longer of her own making only, other public discourse have taken over. This is evident as the children force their mothers to believe in the national struggle and to understand the benefits of the social world that the war will bring about. Rehana has to give up her own mother tongue in the process and it is her children who drive her to this decision. "Rehana's tongue was so confused for these changes; she could not give up her love for Urdu, its lyrical lilts, its double meanings, and its furrowed beat."⁵

¹ Ibid, 66.

² Tahmima Anam *A Golden Age*, (John Murray (Publishers), Great Britain, 2007) 99.

³ Jahanara Imam, *Of Blood and Fire*, Translated by Mustafizur Rahman, (The University Press Limited, Bangladesh, 1990) 149.

⁴ Tahmima Anam, *A Golden Age*, (John Murray (Publishers), Great Britain, 2007) 86.

⁵ Ibid, 47.

Language, identity, the home and the world, are all part and parcel of the struggle that takes place during the violence that makes the birth of the nation. While the home is being invaded by nationalist discourse and war, while the public/private dichotomy is not being held, the role of women, and especially mothers, as maintainers of the home continues.

The constant guarding of the home and supplying the food, or supporting the Major/soldiers fits into Peterson's understanding of women being "sustainers" of her nation. "Imam's narrative of 1971 is filled with information about how she kept the household together by keeping extra rice stock, ensuring adequate water supply, knitting sweaters for freedom fighters and, finally, letting go of her elder son to join the movement."¹

Silvia, Rehana's neighbour's daughter, in *A Golden Age*, too reverts to her home, even into *purda* and spirituality as Sabbir marches into war. Her lack of engagement with the political situation, according to Maya, shows the escaping into a world of spirituality. Silvia identifies her role in the time of war through religion. She says, "I want to believe in something greater than myself."² Her retreating into tradition is a viable way for the women of the newly-emerging nation and Maya's stepping forward to modernity perplexes Rehana. Rehana seems to stand in the middle, a middle aged widowed housewife, Rehana's

¹ Rubaiyat Hossain 'Birangonas' *Heroic Women or the Shamed Ones: The Ambiguous Figures of Bangladeshi National History* (University of Pennsylvania) 2006.

² Tahmima Anam, *A Golden Age*, (John Murray (Publishers), Great Britain, 2007) 249.

daughter, as these two women occupy opposite poles in the nationalist discourse. The balance between the two is the body of Rehana herself. She is confused, uncertain and yet she comes out as the hero of the home, the leader of spiritual unity, and a persona of the motherland. "...women weren't supposed to lead the prayer. But she went to the curtained window that faced west, and the boys lined behind her."¹ This is a wonderful image of modernity and tradition, of a spiritual self, which in this scene has taken on a highly public space.

Maya and her engagements with the Liberation struggle reminds us of the putative role that Bimala plays in *The Home and The World*. The "new educated woman" who moves to India in order to play a larger role in the War, is shown to be a stronger persona, as she marched with brooms. And yet there is something disturbing about Maya's passion. She is shown to be manlier than the other female characters in the novel. Her lack of interest in saris, her drive to join the men shows how feminine roles have become very shaky. The war change women in such a way that their sexuality becomes threatening, as there is a hint of lesbianism:

"She [Sharmeen] hated men. She hated them! She hated sex, did you know that? She never had sex. Everyone else did, but not her."²

Ascribed feminine features are obliterated, and more manly women emerge from this violence. Her stay in India, with other females in Calcutta, cannot be

¹ Ibid, 112.

² Ibid, 123.

gendered, and it projects this thought. "The girl-boy beamed at Rehana,"¹ says the narrator. There is a strange sexuality in this, which does not match with Mayas passionate nature male-like figure and two, the hiding of her sexuality, whether it is because her rejection of a male dominated society or because her body becomes a threat to herself and her family, shows that women have to suppress their identity and what results is ambiguity.

Rehana's body evolves and emerges in a form that is compelled to resort to the man-woman and prescribed roles. Her sexual entanglement with the Major occurs in a dark room, in hiding. The tension and passion of this new relationship mirrors the movement of the nation as a whole.

Loyalty to husband and home is set off against the silent passionate involvement with a freedom fighter. In Rehana's case, the opposite seems to happen. As her role of mother and housewife is threatened and taken away from her. Rehana's journey to the dark room can be seen as a parallel to her journey – A Bengali national identity. The old saris - the beauty of her other mother tongue has to be given up and the sexual intimacy with the major represents her journey to the new land.

Her body is the desired body that can be compared to Bimala's and the abused body of Ayah mirrors the deformation and reformation of the land that is new, uncertain and yet is somehow kept together in its fragile state. Rehana is

¹ Ibid, 112.

similarly oscillating between these uncertain positions as she tries to keep her family and herself together:

"Rehana regarded the saris and tries to recall the feeling they had given her, of being a once enveloped and set free, the tight revolutions of material around her hips and legs limiting movement, the empty space between blouse and petticoat permitting unexpected sensation – the thrill for a breeze that has strayed strange places, the back, the exposed belly. It was the bringing together of night and day, the sari: as it concealed the skin, it also released it, so that one body, one woman, would know something of the complications of her sex.¹

And so in this thesis, as I look into three different time frames of nation-making and the voices of the women who participate in this discourse, I find them surrounded in the sphere of their homes, dismantled and reconstructed by the social reforms outside it. In this, the question of the woman's voice in the making of her nation, shows the ambiguity of her position and the disappearing of the female narrative lost in the world politics.

¹ Ibid, 91.

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