

Personal and National Destinies in Independent India

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*A Study of Selected
Indian English Novels*

By

Rositta Joseph Valiyamattam

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To India, My Motherland...

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PREFACE

“After such knowledge, what forgiveness?”
— T.S. Eliot, ‘Gerontion’

The study of Indian English literature and of Indian politics during my graduation and post-graduation days reinforced my keen interest in the Indian citizen and the Indian nation. The fact that my PhD Research Director, Prof. B. Parvathi nurtured a passion for the nation proved extremely providential. This gave me the impetus to pursue my dream of a literary study directly relevant to my country. After several intense discussions, we decided upon a study of how the life and destiny of the individual and the life and destiny of the nation-state in independent India, are presented as being intricately intertwined in select Indian English novels.

The need for such a study, especially in these times of global turbulence, vast inequalities and deep conflicts, wherein the ideal of democratic nationhood is under serious threat, is attested to by several significant facts. At the outset, historians and scholars are unanimous about the marked paucity of comprehensive studies on the socio-political history of post-independence India, especially from the perspective of and documenting the contribution of the masses. Secondly, the Indian novel in English has always been a faithful mirror of changing individual and national lives and sensibilities, deeply concerned with the nation’s destiny. Transcending native language barriers, it has formed a truly Indian literature that expresses the quintessential soul of the nation. Thirdly, the novels selected for this study have been published in the 1990s and after. The Indian English fiction of this period deserves greater analysis not only for its foregrounding of the Indian experience on the global stage, but also for its deeper amalgamation of personal and national histories. Distinctions between the private and the public or political, the elite and the ordinary disappear as these novelists attempt to defy conventional hegemonies and rewrite contemporary history from the viewpoint of the marginalised. The post-1990 era is a turning point in Indian history, marked by the influence of economic liberalisation and globalisation and by the deeper involvement of the individual citizen as a more active and powerful agent on the national scene. Hence, the 1990s and the new millennium provide a

vantage point for a retrospective view of national events since independence, from an objective distance.

The novels selected for the study present a wide cross-section of Indian national life from 1947 to date. They are - Gurcharan Das' *A Fine Family* (1990), Arun Joshi's *The City and The River* (1990), Rohinton Mistry's *A Fine Balance* (1995), Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* (1997), Meher Pestonji's *Pervez-A Novel* (2002), Kiran Desai's *The Inheritance of Loss* (2006), Vikas Swarup's *Q & A* (2006) and *Six Suspects* (2008), David Davidar's *The Solitude of Emperors* (2007), Aravind Adiga's *The White Tiger* (2008), Manjula Padmanabhan's *Escape* (2008) and, Tarun Tejpal's *The Story Of My Assassins* (2009). These novels encompass almost the whole of India from North to South and East to West, from villages to metropolises. They comprehensively depict varied epochs in Indian history from Partition and Independence to the latest national developments. Their protagonists who live in the shadow of or directly engage with these national events are men, women and children, ruling elites and poor masses, minorities, subaltern groups and middle-classes. The common strand uniting these novelists is the conscious use of national history and the fine balance of the private and the public, rooted in their own deep involvement with national issues.

This book seeks to examine and evaluate, with reference to these novels, the intermingling of the personal and the national in a developing young nation-state, the presentation of post-independence national events and epochs, the interface between and roles of citizen and government, post-colonial issues, and the role of literature in national life. Apart from the introduction and conclusion, the book has been divided into five chapters, corresponding to the different periods in the history of independent India dealt with in each novel. Each chapter begins with a brief introduction to the historical period covered and its presentation in the Indian novel in English. This is followed by an analysis of the specific novels from three broad angles: the personal and the national, documentation of national history, and the artistic perspective. The analysis concludes with a review of critical opinions and secondary sources, followed by my views vis-a-vis the intertwining of the personal and the national in the novels.

Critiquing twelve novels by eleven different writers against the vast and complex canvas of sixty-nine years of the history and politics, culture and economy of independent India was quite a challenge. Added to this was the difficulty in procuring, deciding on and sifting through the apt secondary sources for a multi-disciplinary study of very recent fiction. The interviews and correspondences with my novelists were highly rewarding

and memorable, reassuring me that my research was headed in the right direction. The first to respond was top diplomat Vikas Swarup, author of *Q&A* (of the Oscar-winning *Slumdog Millionaire* fame). He explained how his novels sought to present a microcosm of India and her complex contradictions by employing emblematic universal figures and polyphonic narrative devices. He affirmed the role of literature in becoming the voice of the voiceless and injecting a new perspective into the narrative of national development. Yet, his regard for the individual freedom of every artist was evident. He clarified that his books did not have a message but did have a conscience. Writing to veteran writer, thinker and management guru Gurcharan Das (a fatherly figure) turned out to be a truly unforgettable experience. In a lengthy telephonic interview, while speaking of his craft and concerns as a writer, he delved into the nuances of representing independence, Partition and the early years of nation-building in his novel. His faith in the Indian middle class and entrepreneurs remained intact. He emphasized the need for the citizen to be responsive to even the smallest social issues and to follow the path of *dharma* which he described as the right action at the right time. Deeply concerned over the corruption in the Indian polity, he opined that writers also have a responsibility to rouse national conscience.

Corresponding with Ms. Manjula Padmanabhan, versatile artist and Aristotle Onassis prize-winning playwright was a challenge. This rebel writer, who emphasizes looking at the national narrative from the crucial feminine stance, was exceedingly modest and believed that it is the prerogative of the critic or researcher and not the author to interpret the text. David Davidar, much-beloved editor, publisher and author was generous in his detailed and enlightening answers to my queries about his novel *The Solitude of Emperors*. He opined that being a citizen demands positive, conscientious engagement with social and political issues. He asserted that despite the indifference and persecution to which writers are subjected, they should hold up a mirror to the sins of omission and commission of the powerful.

Receiving words of encouragement from the rather elusive Rohinton Mistry, the famous Parsi novelist based in Canada, was a thrilling experience. He graciously welcomed my interpretation of his novel *A Fine Balance*. Meher Pestonji, noted social activist turned writer, overwhelmed me with her friendliness, goodwill, and the time and efforts she put in to send detailed replies to each of my queries. She emphasized that the central protagonist of her novel *Pervez* was one of those few conscientious citizens who choose to become agents of social change during times of national upheaval. She also welcomed the fact that sixty years after

freedom, Indians have finally begun to assert themselves as citizens of a democracy, taking responsibility for local governance and forcing those in power to become accountable.

In the final analysis, all the selected novelists try to grasp the grand narrative of India with empathy, honesty and precision, carefully balancing art and realism, human existential drama and national chronicles. Their novels testify to the amazing resilience of the masses in a nation wherein the commoner is rendered helpless by an often corrupt mighty polity. What stands out is the assertion of the individual will over uncontrolled powers and unfavourable circumstances. They salute the heroic struggles of ordinary Indians in times of extraordinary transformation. Their sensitivity makes them rise above mere documentary to note the pattern behind the events in Indian public life, to critique the functioning of Indian democracy, to counter colonial legacies and neo-colonialism by narrating the subaltern and highlight both the achievements and the failures of the citizen and the government.

The narratives of the personal and of the national are inseparable from each other. The texts that are the subject of this book advocate an inclusive, humane, cosmopolitan nation-state with a strong moral core instead of aggressive or elitist nationalism. They represent an era of painful awareness, anxiety and interrogation, an attempt to keep the soul of the nation alive. By exposing the harsh realities of the times, they give new directions and inspiring goals to a hungry nation.

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This book is the fruit of the dreams and desires of those who have urged and inspired me to do better each time.

My deepest feelings of gratitude are towards my PhD Research Director, Prof. B. Parvathi (Retd.) former Head, Department of English, Andhra University for her wonderful, inspiring guidance, for her warmth, affection and unstinting support. She has been a Guru and a role-model who has taught me not only about literature but also about life.

I am grateful to the University Grants Commission, New Delhi for awarding me a Research Fellowship which enabled me to devote myself wholeheartedly to research.

It has been my privilege to pursue research at the Andhra University, one of the oldest and most renowned universities in India, and especially in the department of English which has rendered yeoman service to the field of Indian Writing in English. I wish to thank all the faculty members, staff and fellow research scholars, for their support and warmth.

I am deeply indebted to the novelists who are part of this study – especially Mr. Gurcharan Das, Mr. Vikas Swarup, Mr. David Davidar, Ms. Meher Pestonji, Ms. Manjula Padmanabhan, Mr. Rohinton Mistry for being extremely gracious and replying to my queries and offering me the privilege of interviewing them. I shall always cherish those golden moments.

While working on this project, I had the good fortune of interacting with eminent professors, scholars and researchers at varied literary forums like the Researcher's Association, Cuttack and Dhvanyaloka, Mysore. I thank Prof. B.K Das, Prof. M.Q. Khan, Prof. G.K Das, Prof. Rupin Desai, Prof. C.N. Srinath and Dr. Ragini Ramachandra for all the inspiration and encouragement. My heartfelt gratitude to Rev. Dr. Jacob Kani former editor Indian Currents, Delhi and founder-editor of Youth Action, Indore, the editors of Muse India, Hyderabad, Dr. Ravi Nandan Sinha, Editor, The Quest, Ranchi, Dr. G.S. Balarama Gupta, Editor, Journal of Indian Writing in English and Prof. Prabhat Singh, Dean, School of Languages and Literature, Central University of South Bihar, Gaya, for the opportunity to publish research papers and articles in their esteemed journals and anthologies.

It is my pleasure to thank the librarians and staff of Dr. V.S. Krishna Library, Andhra University, the SCILET library, Chennai, the Public Library, Visakhapatnam, the Mysore University Library, the EFLU

library, Hyderabad and the library at Dhvanyaloka, Mysore. A big thanks to the staff at Ashok Book Centre and Pages Book Shop, Visakhapatnam for their wonderful collection of books, for procuring texts for me and bearing with me.

The warmth, appreciation and motivation offered by my current workplace are priceless. I am extremely grateful to the management, faculty, staff and students of GITAM Institute of Management, GITAM University, Visakhapatnam.

I remember with gratitude all my teachers at school and college, especially those to whom I owe my love of English language and literature. Special thanks to Prof. D.J. Chaudhari (Retd.), Government Vidarbha Institute of Science and Humanities, Amravati, Maharashtra, for his faith in me and for being my favourite teacher. I am ever grateful to my late grandaunt Rev. Sr. Treasa Peter JMJ, my uncles Rev. Br. C. D. Michael MSFS and Rev. Fr. Jose Edassery MSFS, and my aunt Rev. Sr. Rositta SH for their prayers and assistance.

A big loving Thank You to my father Prof. Joseph Valiyamattam and my mother Dr. Elsy Joseph Valiyamattam for being the centre of my universe, for always being there for me, for their sacrifices and incredible love, guidance, encouragement and help. I shall always cherish my beloved little sister and best friend Georgitta's priceless assistance as the perfect sounding board for all my ideas. I fondly remember the seemingly endless hours of typing, editing and formatting that we put in together. I owe everything to my family without whom this book would have been impossible.

Above all, my eternal gratitude to God Almighty, who has been merciful to me always. All true wisdom comes from and leads to Him.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The greatest knowledge and the greatest riches man can possess are India's by inheritance; she has that for which all mankind is waiting.....
– Sri Aurobindo

1.1. The Fundamentals

Often enough, the life of a nation has been shaped by its writers and philosophers. Art can never separate itself wholly from social concerns. A work of art may shatter comfort zones and initiate a painful and more meaningful process of thinking and growth. The socially committed artist stands as a beacon amid the darkness of human life. Indian English writers have always, directly or indirectly engaged with contemporary social, political and economic realities. The degree of their involvement might have differed, but they were never shut up in ivory towers while their brethren strove with real life.

Indian English novelists have chronicled the history, socio-political consciousness, changing culture and traditions and socio-economic concerns of India, in the colonial, post-colonial and post-independence eras. While national events occupy centre-stage in some novels, they are merely used as a backdrop in others. At times, it is impossible to separate the fictional element from contemporary national history. The interaction between national events and private lives, as reflected in the Indian English novel, makes for a stimulating study. In this context, this book focuses on how the life and destiny of the individual and the life and destiny of the nation-state in post-independence India, are presented as being intertwined, in select Indian English novels.

The twelve selected novels have been published in and post-1990. Set in post-independence India, they span a period dating from 1947 to the present. These are - Gurcharan Das' *A Fine Family* (1990), Arun Joshi's *The City and The River* (1990), Rohinton Mistry's *A Fine Balance* (1995), Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* (1997), Meher Pestonji's *Pervez-A Novel* (2002), Kiran Desai's *The Inheritance of Loss* (2006),

Vikas Swarup's *Q & A* (2006) and *Six Suspects* (2008), David Davidar's *The Solitude of Emperors* (2007), Aravind Adiga's *The White Tiger* (2008), Manjula Padmanabhan's *Escape* (2008) and, Tarun Tejpal's *The Story Of My Assassins* (2009). The study of the aforementioned novels, attempts to address the following concerns:

- i. Defining 'personal destiny' in post-independence India.
- ii. Defining 'national destiny' in post-independence India.
- iii. Studying the inter-mingling and intertwining of the personal and the national in free India. This involves examining the mutual interaction between private lives on the one hand, and, major national events or the socio-political forces, mechanism and philosophy of the nation-state on the other hand. An attempt has been made to examine the novelists' views of the roles and interface of government and citizen.
- iv. Evaluating the fictional representation of post-independence national realities and thereby critiquing the selected novels as historical documents and post-colonial studies which chronicle India and her people in the post-independence era.
- v. Assessing how the selected novels help in understanding a complex nation and exemplify the multi-dimensional role of literature in national life as interface between the private and the public.

Thus, this book deals with those specific instances wherein the life-histories of the individual and the nation-state are woven together. The aim is to examine how recent Indian English fiction has highlighted this process of intertwining. Such an examination is based on certain fundamentals such as - human life and politics, nation, state, government, citizen, and civil society.

Individual life is inevitably related to politics. The word 'politics' is derived from the Greek 'polis' which literally means 'city-state'. In his *Politics*, Aristotle declared that 'man is by nature a political animal' and human beings can live the good life and attain a just society only within a political community. Politics is the art of government and social control through the making and enforcement of collective decisions.

The nation is a central principle of political organization. Nations are cultural entities of people bound together by shared values and traditions, common language, race and culture, religion and history, and usually occupying the same geographical area. Benedict Anderson called the nation an 'imagined community' created by the spread of printed literature and mass media, while Anthony Smith views nationhood as a mythical

symbol which resolves modern rootlessness by offering a collective heritage and identity (Ray 525-534). While the nation is an enigmatic, indefinable idea, nationalism is one of the oldest and most powerful ideologies. It can be harnessed positively as in anti-colonial struggles or employed destructively as in the world wars. The ideal conception of the nation is building a just and free society.

Closely related to the idea of the nation is the concept of the state. In political theory, the 'state' technically implies a human association having four essential elements- population, territory, government and sovereignty. The state has changed its form over time, from the Greek city-state, ancient and medieval kingdoms, monarchies, to the liberal democracies, military dictatorships and communist states of today. There are various theories relating to the origin, nature and objectives of the state. The Social Contract theory assumes that the state is the result of a voluntary covenant for social security on the part of primitive men emerging from a state of nature. The Liberal theory believes that the state is created by free individuals and its power is subject to protecting the rights of citizens. The Marxist theory holds that the state is an instrument of class domination and will disappear when classes disappear. The Welfare State theory focuses on the duty of the state to ensure social justice, especially for the marginalized.

The term 'nation' is often used as a synonym for state. But the nation is an idea which can exist even without being contained within a state.

The state cannot function without a government which exercises sovereign powers and is charged with the maintenance of peace and security. The government machinery consists of the legislature, the executive and the judiciary. According to noted economist and political thinker I.M.D. Little, the people constitute the sovereign state and governments must be accountable to them in accordance with the Constitution. Governments are merely agents of the state (Jalan 232).

At the centre of the concepts of nation and state stands the citizen. A citizen is a member of a political community, entitled to its rights and encumbered with its duties. The Republican model based on the views of Aristotle, Cicero, Machiavelli and Rousseau considers citizenship to be an office wherein law-making and administration in the interests of the highest public good is the primary business of the citizen. The Liberal ideology describes citizenship as legal identity, a set of rights passively enjoyed by the citizen whose primary business is private. In modern democratic states, citizenship is exercised both actively and passively, though high levels of involvement or public-spiritedness are unusual. Modern history proves that the health of a democracy depends on the

ethics of its citizens. However, the fullest expression of citizenship also requires a liberal, democratic welfare state structure.

Civil society is a vital mediating structure between government and citizens, especially in a democratic state. These non-government initiatives challenge abuse of power, cultivate patriotism, and empower individuals and communities to help the government in ensuring public welfare. As B.N. Ray puts it, "...the civil society debate is...about...civic virtue and civic engagement, about what role the ordinary occupations and pre-occupations of citizens play in the public sphere and in building the good society, about the function and place of the associations that make up modern societies. A...vibrant civil society gives the state moral depth and political vitality, even as a justly constituted state creates the conditions in which all its citizens can build a rich world of networks and associations" (Ray 421,437).

An examination of all the above concepts demonstrates that the 'political' and the 'personal' are closely intertwined. Yet, people often feel threatened by the idea of political forces intruding into personal life. However it is now established that participation of all citizens in public life is the essence of freedom, through which the state can be bound to the common good.

1.2. The Story of India

Before focusing on the fictional representation of people's lives in independent India, it would be useful to outline the history of the Indian nation-state. India is the world's largest democracy, a land of snow peaks and tropical jungles, over twenty official languages, twenty-two thousand dialects and over a billion individuals of every ethnic extraction known to humanity, where illiterate masses co-exist with the world's top scientists and engineers, where teeming hi-tech cities thrive alongside countless villages, where both non-violence and bloodshed are everyday realities. Shashi Tharoor asks, "What is the clue to understanding a country rife with despair and disrepair, which nonetheless moved a Mughal emperor to declaim, 'If on earth there be paradise of bliss, it is this, it is this, it is this'? How can one portray the present, let alone the future, of an ageless civilization that was the birthplace of four major religions, a dozen different traditions of classical dance, eighty-five political parties, and three hundred ways of cooking the potato?" (Tharoor 7-9). Nevertheless, Mark Twain wrote, 'India is...the One land that all men desire to see, and having seen once, by even a glimpse, would not give that glimpse for all the shows of all the rest of the globe combined.' (qtd. in Rai and Simon

Epigraph). And Jawaharlal Nehru mused, ‘She (India) is a myth and an idea, a dream and a vision, and yet very real and present and pervasive’ (qtd. in Tharoor 7-9).

India’s hoary recorded history dates back to at least 2500-2000 BCE. India was a cultural idea and a vision of vast wealth that lured foreign conquerors and travellers– the Aryans, Central Asian tribes, Mughals, Persians and Iranians, Arabs and Chinese, Portuguese, French, Dutch and British – to name only a few. India was never a single cultural or political entity and there was or is no single theory of Indian nationalism. Before the British came, she was home to numerous kingdoms and principalities. The British rulers were convinced that there was no Indian nation in the past; nor would there be one in the future. At the same time, the nationalists sought to unite Indians across all divisions and construct one Indian nation.

British rule, formally established in 1857, chained India to the capitalist order designed for the benefit of the colonizers. The improvements in transport, communication, education, bureaucracy and army were negated by the tyrannical and racist approach, the massive pauperization and illiteracy, destruction of native agriculture and industry and draining away of resources. Above all, the British rulers, fearing the unity of the Indian people, sought to “turn province against province, caste against caste, class against class, Hindus against Muslims, and princes and landlords against the national movement” (Chandra 22).

The Indian struggle for freedom from British rule was largely based on the Gandhian principles of truth (*satyagraha*) and non-violence (*ahimsa*). This mass-based national movement established the notions of popular sovereignty, civil liberties, parliamentary democracy and representative government. It visualised a self-reliant economy that would be pro-poor, pro-agriculture and pro-industry. It was committed to secularism and religious and cultural freedom. Even as it sought to eradicate casteism and oppression of women, it created the idea of an integrated nationhood strengthened by a diverse heritage. It also advocated a foreign policy that opposed fascism, imperialism and racism. Rooted in tradition and abreast of the latest global developments, it bequeathed to India a tradition of healthy debate and reconciliation of varied political ideologies. Its leaders were drawn from every region and walk of life - rightists and leftists, revolutionaries and oppressed castes, tribals and native princes, spiritual leaders and religious ideologues, rebels, reformers, conservatives and moderates. Men and women like Dadabhai Naoroji, Gopal Krishna Gokhale, Lokmanya Tilak, Mahatma Gandhi, Subramania Bharati, Bhagat Singh, Chandrashekhara Azad, Jawaharlal Nehru, Subhash Chandra Bose,

Sardar Patel, Rajendra Prasad, C. Rajagopalachari, Acharya Narendra Dev, Jayaprakash Narayan, Kasturba Gandhi, Sarojini Naidu and so many others embodied selfless patriotism.

Freedom was won at last by the blood and sacrifices of thousands. However, the British policy of divide and rule finally led to the bloody carving out of the Muslim nation of Pakistan from India. The British handed over power on 15 August, 1947. Jawaharlal Nehru the first Prime Minister of free India, delivered his timeless 'tryst with destiny' address to the nation on the midnight of 14 August, 1947. The Constituent Assembly paid rich tributes to the martyrs and freedom-fighters and to the father of the nation Mahatma Gandhi. The whole of India burst into untrammelled, irrepressible celebration.

Ancient India is supposed to have no equivalent of the term 'government', only of the term 'state'. Kautilya's *Arthashastra* outlines the theory of a seven-organ institution of state including kingship, ministry, population, territory, fort, treasury, sceptre and ally (Singh and Saxena 38-40). The modern Indian state is the product of nineteenth-century British capitalism in its imperialist phase. It has also been influenced by pre-colonial civilizations and the nationalist renaissance. It combines "sovereign democratic republicanism, multicultural secularism and democratic developmentalism" (Singh and Saxena 38-40).

The Constitution of India which is the foundation of the modern Indian nation-state and is the longest written Constitution in the world, has evolved from millennia of rich civilizational heritage and the chequered history of over hundred years of struggle for freedom. Framed by the Constituent Assembly of India under the chairmanship of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, the Constitution came into force on 26th January 1950 and declares India to be a sovereign, socialist, secular and democratic republic. The Preamble to the Constitution solemnly resolves to secure to all citizens justice, liberty, equality and fraternity. The Constitution provides for a parliamentary democracy based on universal adult suffrage. According to Granville Austin, its conscience lies in its commitment to the Fundamental Rights of the citizens and the Directive Principles of State Policy, thus synthesizing individual liberty and public good (Chandra 54). The Constitution envisages India as a federation with a strong centre. The Indian Legislature or Parliament consists of two houses –the *Rajya Sabha* or the Council of States and the *Lok Sabha* or the House of the People. The *Lok Sabha* is directly elected for a period of five years. The Executive power of the Union is vested in the elected President, who is the constitutional head of the state. But these powers are to be exercised in accordance with the advice of the Union Council of Ministers headed by

the Prime Minister, the leader of the majority party in the *Lok Sabha*. The Judiciary consists of a single hierarchy of courts headed by the Supreme Court which acts as the interpreter and defender of the Constitution.

Independence represented a new epoch and vision for India, but was only the beginning of a long journey towards overcoming centuries of backwardness. The people of India started off with confidence and determination following the ideals of the glorious freedom struggle. The immediate goals were to consolidate the unity of India while recognizing its immense diversities and to establish socio-economic justice and equality within a democratic political framework. Many predicted that, owing to the immense diversities, political unrest, poverty, illiteracy and casteism, Indian democracy would be short-lived. Yet, drawing on its libertarian heritage, India overcame its crisis of governability to march towards a better future. Over the decades, with the degeneration in the polity, enthusiasm and expectations have often turned into dejection and apathy. Yet, the achievements of the Indian people augur well for the future of this great country. Historian Sunil Khilnani writes, “Since its inauguration amidst the intense drama, excitement and horror of 1947, the public life of independent India has presented a scene of vivid collective spectacles and formidable individual characters, of unexpected achievements and unforgivable failures” (Khilnani 1). Despite enormous challenges and divisive forces, the idea of a united, democratic India retains great tenacity. India remains a paradox beyond classification or definition.

1.3. Personal and National in the Indian English Novel

In the context of the preceding facts, it is worth exploring the intricate relationship between the personal and the national in the Indian English Novel. The novel, as a literary genre, has a great and unique potential to reveal and critique the contemporary consciousness, crises and hopes of peoples and nations. While historians often focus on the famous and the powerful, novelists fill in the gaps and fissures in the conventional narration of history. They present alternative versions of history that are found on the margins of history texts, the stories of ordinary individual lives impacted by national history and vice-versa.

The Indian English novel originated against the backdrop of British colonial rule and the native Indian Renaissance in the nineteenth century. Therefore, like most post-colonial writing, it consciously or unconsciously took the form of national history. Authentic representation of the natives and of the nationalistic resistance to colonialism became one of its chief themes. Such post-colonial concerns continue to influence even contemporary

Indian English novels. They reflect how even after formal independence, colonialism continues through the capitalist global economy and the native ruling elites, as also, how ordinary citizens are pitted against neo-colonial forces which favour the wealthy and the powerful. Thus, right from the colonial era to the present, Indian English novelists have effectively expressed the hopes and despair of the nation, baring its myriad identities, complexities and paradoxes. They seek to evolve a humane, cosmopolitan nationalism, to celebrate diversity and radical democracy, to canonize and offer strategies of resistance to the subaltern.

The connection between personal life and national concerns has been prominent in the Indian English novel from its inception. Among the earliest novelists were the Bengali writers Ishwarchandra Vidyasagar (1820-1891) and Bankimchandra Chatterjee (1838-1894) who harkened back to a glorious past to escape colonial stagnation and forge a vibrant national identity. However, after the 1857 Revolt and with an increase in anti-British nationalist activities during the twenties, thirties and forties, Indian novels began to be increasingly pre-occupied with Indian aspirations for freedom and the freedom struggle. Into this category fall Bankimchandra Chatterjee's patriotic, anti-imperialist *Anandamath* (1882) containing the song *Bande Mataram* that became the war-cry of the Indian revolution, Sarat Chandra Chatterjee's (1876-1938) powerful novels of pro-downtrodden social realism, and Rabindranath Tagore's novels- *The Home and The World* (1919) dealing with the revolutionary anti-colonial Bengal of 1905, *Gora* (1923) reflecting the Indian Renaissance and *Char Adhyay* or *Four Chapters* (1934)- a love story set against political fanaticism.

According to M.K. Naik, in the 1930s, there was a sudden flowering of Indian English fiction with the rise of Mahatma Gandhi on the national scene (Naik 7). The influence of the Gandhian age is seen in K.S. Venkataramani's *Murugan the Tiller* (1922) based on peasant life and *Kandan the Patriot* (1932) dealing with the civil disobedience movement in the thirties. Mulk Raj Anand's novels like *Two Leaves and a Bud* (1937), *Untouchable* (1935) and *The Sword and the Sickle* (1942) focus on the plight and reactions of the downtrodden oppressed by upper castes, the rich and the British rulers. Raja Rao's *Kanthapura* (1938) sensitively portrays the response of Indian villages to Gandhi's non-violent revolution.

Even after independence, novels continued to document the influence of national events such the freedom struggle, the holocaust of the Partition, the tumultuous merger of the princely states and the assassination of Gandhiji, on individuals and communities. Bhabani Bhattacharya's *So*

Many Hungers (1947) deals with the impact of the 1942 Quit India movement and the great famine of the forties in Bengal. Mulk Raj Anand's *Private Life of an Indian Prince* (1953) refers to the integration of the princely states into free India. K.A. Abbas' *Inquilab* (1955) focuses on the Gandhian revolution in the 1920s and 1930s. R.K.Narayan's *Waiting for the Mahatma* (1955) is imbued with the Gandhian persona and mass-movement. Khushwant Singh's *Train to Pakistan* (1956) mirrors the horrors of Partition in the Punjab while his *I Shall Not Hear the Nightingale* (1957) depicts the pre-partition days in Punjab. Kamala Markandaya's novels mostly deal with the socio-economic and socio-cultural crises in India just before and after freedom. Nayantara Sahgal's *A Time to be Happy* (1957) refers to the freedom struggle during the 1940s.

However, as Carlo Coppola observes, "Post-independence literature, especially fiction, was forced to account for a perplexing reality. On the one hand freedom had been won..... But on the other hand, writers and intellectuals generally felt that the only change effected by independence was the change in the colour of the exploiters' skin. Writers varied widely in their reactions" (Coppola 3). Disillusioned, many either moved to the left or turned away from national themes to private introspection. Yet, if there were failures in the early years of nation-building, there were also remarkable achievements. Hence, Viney Kirpal opines that most novelists moved from national scenes to personal quests owing to the sense of well-being generated by India's economic, scientific and industrial growth (Kirpal xix). But, later events were to alter the essentially 'esthetic' stance. The sixties and seventies wars with China and Pakistan, the Naxalite movement, the Emergency of 1975-77, the clash of powerful political leaders and popular agitations occasioned an outpouring of patriotic literature. Many novels such as K. Nagarajan's *The Chronicles of Kedaram* (1961), Manohar Malgaonkar's *The Distant Drum* (1960), *The Princes* (1963) and *A Bend in the Ganges* (1964) and Chaman Nahal's *Azadi* (1975), continue the tradition of remembering the colonial rule, the freedom movement and the achievement of independence. Bhabani Bhattacharya's *Shadow from Ladakh* (1966) reflects India at the time of the Chinese invasion in 1962. Nayantara Sahgal's *This Time of Morning* (1965) portrays the corridors of power in the sixties, while her *Storm in Chandigarh* (1969) refers to regional conflicts in the same era. Sahgal's *The Day in Shadow* (1971) and *A Situation in New Delhi* (1977) reflect decay in the national polity, violent popular agitations and Naxalite insurgency. Arun Joshi's *The Apprentice* (1974), set against the backdrop of the Indo-Chinese war in 1962, is a strong indictment of the corruption in public life in India of the sixties and seventies.

The 1970s and 1980s were turbulent periods and shaped a new Indian consciousness. The 1980s novels have been influenced by the economic crisis, the Emergency, the Green Revolution, the assassination of Premier Mrs. Gandhi, the anti-Sikh riots, regionalism, separatism and fundamentalism. These novels are cosmopolitan and rebellious in form and theme, employing fantasy and sarcasm to face harsh realities. National and international politics is the favourite theme and the displaced modern man is the favourite protagonist. The protagonists are insecure and sceptical on account of the tremendous power that reposes in governments. Against the backdrop of the national Emergency which had emphasized the need to be eternally vigilant about liberty, these novels reflect an urgency to expose false political versions of Indian history and a realization of the citizen's crucial role. Women's liberation, national harmony and the challenges of globalization are other dominant themes.

Among the novels published in the eighties which parallel personal and national lives are Chaman Nahal's *The Crown and the Loincloth* (1981) relating to the Gandhian age and Salman Rushdie's post-modernist *Midnight's Children* (1981) - an extraordinary allegory of Indian history from 1919 to 1977. Nayantara Sahgal's *Rich Like Us* (1985) documents the nation during the Emergency, while her *Plans for Departure* (1985) and *Mistaken Identity* (1988) go back to the colonial era. The post-emergency era, the Janata party government and the separatist movements of the 1980s find place in Pratap Sharma's *Days of the Turban* (1986) and Rafiq Zakaria's *The Price of Power* (1987). Amitav Ghosh's *The Shadow Lines* (1988) revolves around the trauma of Partition in Bengal. Shashi Tharoor's *The Great Indian Novel* (1989) is a mythical, satirical allegory of Indian history from the freedom movement to the Emergency. Gita Mehta's *Raj* (1989) portrays the life of the royalty in British India.

The novels selected for this study belong to the 1990s and thereafter. During this period, while new novelists like Chetan Bhagat, Aravind Adiga, Arundhati Roy, Kiran Desai, Manju Kapur, Allan Sealy, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, Jhumpa Lahiri, Manjula Padmanabhan and others rose to international acclaim, older novelists like Salman Rushdie, Anita Desai, Shashi Deshpande, Githa Hariharan, Amit Chaudhari, Amitav Ghosh, Upamanyu Chatterjee, Vikram Seth, Vikram Chandra, Gita Mehta and others also earned fresh honours. They have given a new identity and universality to Indian English literature.

Novels of the nineties and thereafter, according to Prof. Viney Kirpal, continue the engagement with personal and national histories. They narrate sagas of men and women, families and communities against the backdrop of political power-struggles, casteism and communalism, extremist and

secessionist movements, criminalization of politics, corporate globalization and so on. They continue shocking linguistic experiments and defiance of conventional history, focussing on multiple views, fragmented identities and social pariahs. There is an impulse to deconstruct national history from different perspectives and liberate it from imperialist discourses. Such novels embody attempts to map the nation through individual memories. They represent the anxieties of an entire generation trying to cope with complex social changes (Kirpal 56-62). They are, according to Prof. Jasbir Jain, part of "...Indian literature rooted in Indian reality no longer conscious of the use of English, and crossing over from solid upper middle class positions to explorations of the life of the disadvantaged and marginalised categories....Boundaries between class and class, and between the personal and the political have collapsed" (Jain 18-19). More significantly, the nineties and the new millennium provide a vantage point for Indian English novelists to view post-independence national events from an objective distance.

Among the novels published in the nineties and the new millennium, Chaman Nahal's *The Salt of Life* (1990) and *The Triumph of the Tricolour* (1993) portray the Gandhian age. Rohinton Mistry's *Such a Long Journey* (1991) refers to national politics in the 1970s. Khushwant Singh's *Delhi* (1992) has references to Sikh separatist politics. Vikram Seth's *A Suitable Boy* (1993) paints Nehruvian India of the 1950s. Mukul Kesavan's *Looking Through Glass* (1995) has references to the freedom movement. Upamanyu Chatterjee's *The Mammaries of the Welfare State* (2000) is a pungent satire on bureaucratic corruption in contemporary India. With regard to the novels selected for this study, family sagas as in Gurcharan Das' *A Fine Family* (1990) and Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* (1997) filter national history through private perspectives and foreground the marginalised. There is an attempt to analyse or rewrite received history as in the narratives of partition in Gurcharan Das' *A Fine Family* or those of the Emergency in Rohinton Mistry's *A Fine Balance* (1995). Politicisation of religion is a major concern and there is a strong sense of guilt not only about narrow-mindedness but also about collective and individual passivity. This is evident in Meher Pestonji's *Pervez* (2002) or David Davidar's *The Solitude of Emperors* (2007) that re-live the Ayodhya dispute of the 1990s. Diasporic writing as in Kiran Desai's *The Inheritance of Loss* (2006), while challenging the colonial canon, depicts the anguish of the displaced citizen in the era of globalization. In the novels of Rohinton Mistry, Kiran Desai and Arundhati Roy, there is a simultaneous shift from the national to the international, questioning the very idea of a definite Indian identity, and, from the national to the

regional, to small towns and downtrodden sections. The acute concern with the degeneration of national life, with injustice and inequality in the wake of a capitalist world order, pervades novels such as Adiga's *The White Tiger* (2008), Tarun Tejpal's *The Story of My Assassins* (2009) and Vikas Swarup's *Six Suspects* (2008).

All in all, the Indian English novel has been remarkably successful in integrating individual life with public life and reflects the pride in national achievements as also the greater disillusionment with national failures. While there is still hope in the humane, democratic spirit and great potential of the Indian masses, there is also a tremendous sense of rage and despair with regard to the polity and the elite that has largely failed the nation.

1.4. Putting the Study in Perspective

The novels selected for this study present a comprehensive picture of personal and national destinies in independent India. They have been classified thematically and chronologically as follows –

A] From Partition and Freedom to the Emergency (1947-1975)

Famous thinker, management guru and writer Gurcharan Das' novel *A Fine Family* (1990), chronicles the parallel lives of a middle-class family and of a young nation from 1947 to the 1970s. The sagas of Partition and Independence, of nation-building in the 1950s and 1960s and the turbulence of the 1970s, are seen through the eyes of several generations, as both family and nation struggle to build a new future. Acclaimed Canada-based Parsi novelist Rohinton Mistry sets his novel *A Fine Balance* (1995) in the 1960s and 1970s. The dark years of the Emergency directly shape and influence the lives of the central characters who belong mostly to the lower classes. They embody the resilience of the Indian citizen in the bleakest circumstances. Thus, these two novels comprehensively depict the interface between private and public lives in the nation-state in-the-making from the 1940s to the 1970s.

B] The Rural Microcosm: Geopolitics during the Turbulent Decades (1960-1990)

Booker Prize winning novelist and social activist Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* (1997) is set in the 1960s and 1970s. It focuses on the impact of Communist politics, oppressive feudalism and casteist orthodoxy on the underprivileged in a remote South Indian village. Kiran Desai, another Booker winner and diasporic writer, in her *The Inheritance*

of Loss (2006) depicts the interaction between insurgency, separatist politics, immigration, globalisation on the one hand, and, the lives of citizens in the underdeveloped, volatile North-Eastern region on the other, during the 1960s to 1980s. These two novelists look inward into the remotest rural regions of the nation and examine the impact on private lives of the national turbulence from the 1960s to the 1980s and document the reactions of the commoners to the regionalism, secession, extremist politics and caste/class conflicts which threatened to tear the nation apart.

C] The Urban Dilemma: Religion and Politics in the 1990s

Journalist, activist and novelist Meher Pestonji's *Pervez* (2002) and famous editor-publisher David Davidar's *The Solitude of Emperors* (2007), turn the spotlight on the city. The period is the 1990s - the era of economic liberalization when the lethal mixing of religion and caste with politics had resulted in the rise of fundamentalism. These novels chronicle the response of the urban citizens to the politics of communalism that changes their lives constantly.

D] Understanding Contemporary India: The Wider Canvas Post-2000

Aravind Adiga, Vikas Swarup and Tarun Tejpal have been acclaimed for their novels. Adiga's Booker-winning *White Tiger* (2008), Swarup's *Q&A* (2006) (made into the blockbuster movie *Slumdog Millionaire*) and *Six Suspects* (2008), and investigative journalist Tarun Tejpal's *The Story of my Assassins* (2009) broaden the canvas to encompass both the cities and the villages of India, from North to South and East to West. The setting is India in the new millennium, marked by incredible progress, appalling poverty and a decadent polity. Characters from every walk of life cutting across barriers of age, gender, class, caste and creed - shape and are shaped by the changing contours of the Indian nation-state. The response of the citizens to forces that increasingly alter their fates is effectively captured.

E] Charting a Vision for the Future

After dealing with novels that cover almost all major national issues from 1947 to the present, the study concludes with two novels which do not point to a specific territory or epoch but are extremely suggestive of current Indian realities and also chart a vision for the future. Much-admired playwright Manjula Padmanabhan's novel *Escape* (2008), about a dystopia marked by the tyranny of cloned Generals, extermination of women and Nature, and ultra-modern nuclear technology, is a powerful portent. Sahitya Akademi Award winning novelist late Arun Joshi is

famous for his psychological and philosophical fiction. His *The City and the River* (1990) analyzes intensely the roles of the rulers and the ruled. It views the state as a necessary evil but attaches great value to the reformatory role of the individual and presents spiritual politics as a lasting solution to the abuse of power and wealth. Thus these two novels are an allegory of the past, present and future, predicting the possibilities of the post-modern state and preparing the citizen to face these challenges and establish a just, humane, progressive nation.

A critique of the interface between personal and national destinies as seen in national literature, is basically an attempt to document history from the perspective of the masses, departing from conventional elitist versions. The need for such a study, especially in these times of global turbulence, vast inequalities and deep conflicts, wherein the ideal of democratic nationhood is under serious threat, is attested to by several significant facts.

Historians are unanimous about the paucity of comprehensive studies on the history of post-independence India. Ramchandra Guha observes, "...the history of independent India has remained a field mostly untilled. If history is 'formally constituted knowledge of the past', then for the period since 1947, this knowledge practically does not exist" (Guha xxiii, xxiv). A proper reading of modern Indian history may be the panacea to massive inequalities, degenerating polity, regional, religious and casteist divisions and an absence of rapid growth.

Secondly, in present times, the destinies of the individual and of the nation-state are increasingly and inevitably intertwined. As in other developing countries, the dual responsibilities of maintaining order and promoting development have led to a highly interventionist role for the state in India. Thus, establishing a separation between the public and private spheres becomes difficult. Hence, the role of the individual in public life assumes greater significance. The Indian Constitution names the people as the source of all power. But, the concentration of power in the hands of the ruling elite, rising levels of political mobilization and the vast gap between the commitments and the capabilities of the state, lead to conflict between state sovereignty and popular sovereignty. A truly democratic order can emerge only when power conflicts are worked out with the active intervention of the masses and not through social engineering from above. An analysis of the interface between citizens and public institutions as also of the role of civil society, highlights factors responsible for the poor performance of the state machinery and the areas in which citizens and governments can collaborate to bridge the gap

between the formal theory and actual practice of democracy.

Finally, despite much scepticism, the role of literature in national life must be emphasized. The Indian novel in English has always been a faithful mirror of changing individual and national lives and sensibilities. The dilemma of the contemporary writer is captured poignantly by author and activist Arundhati Roy who writes, "Isn't it true...that there are times in the life of a people or a nation when the political climate demands that we – even the most sophisticated of us – overtly take sides?...I believe that in the coming years, intellectuals and artists will be called upon to take sides, and this time, unlike the struggle for Independence, we won't have the luxury of fighting a 'colonising enemy'. We'll be fighting ourselves. We will be forced to ask ourselves some very uncomfortable questions about our values and traditions, our vision for the future, our responsibilities as citizens, the legitimacy of our 'democratic institutions', the role of the state, the police, the army, the judiciary and the intellectual community" (Roy 197-198). Again, to quote Justice Markandey Katju, "Today India thirsts for good literature...Art and literature must serve the people. Writers and artists must have genuine sympathy for the people and depict their sufferings...they must inspire people to struggle for a better life...to create a better world, free of injustice. Only then will people respect them" (Katju, *The Hindu* 11). The novels selected for this study, which critique the individual and the nation in tandem can offer a vital roadmap for the future, especially in these troubled times.

Historian Sunil Khilnani writes, "...the history of independent India appears as the third moment in the great democratic experiment launched at the end of the eighteenth century by the American and French revolutions....The Indian experiment is still in its early stages, and its outcome may well turn out to be the most significant of them all....India's experience reveals the ordinariness of democracy – untidy, massively complex, unsatisfying but vital to the sense of a human life today" (Khilnani 4,8-9,207). Therefore, it becomes crucial to understand the causes of the swings in India's fortunes, the simultaneous adulation and condemnation her democracy attracts and explore why she has failed to fully realize her potential.

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