

N. MANIKHO**The Different Facets of Nationalism through Time: A Literary Review****Abstract**

India's feeling of nationalism arose mainly during the struggle for freedom from the British rule. The term nationalism when we look at it from the Indian perspective does not have a close resemblance to that of the other European countries. India is a land of diversity and we often say it with pride but, underneath all this pride, there are conflicts which arise due to caste, gender, colour, race, religion, and region.

Keywords: Facets of nationalism, India's diversities, Eugene Kamenka, Dalit Literature, Postcolonial Literature.

The Different Facets of Nationalism through Time: A Literary Review by N. Manikho**Introduction**

The term nationalism was coined by Johann Gottfried Herder in his work which was published in 1774. This word later gained currency during the nineteenth century.¹ Nationalism is the feeling of the citizens of a nation to feel connected, love and feel a sense of belonging with their nation. According to Eugene Kamenka, "Nations arise by historical accident, that is as the

1 Savich, Carl. "The Development of Modern European Nationalism: Social Darwinism and Scientific Racism". 2008.
<http://www.serbianna.com/columns/savich/073.shtml> (Accessed August 10, 2016).

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result of various factors”.² Likewise, the Indians began to realize that the only way to drive out the foreign rulers was to unite all the states if we were to achieve freedom. The first seed of nationalism was planted into the Indians psyche during the Revolt of 1857. With the advent of education, people began to realize the importance of nationhood and the need to unite the states as a nation. The feeling of nationalism and patriotism gained momentum when Mahatma Gandhi was leading the Indians in the freedom fighting. However, it was a difficult time as the caste system was very strong during those days and this made the freedom fighters more difficult to unite the people who were from different castes and different religions. In Rabindranath Tagore’s view on Indian nationalism, he said that the reason it was harder for nationalism to be effective in India was not due to the political reasons but because of social circumstances.³ The social set up of our country is such that there is such a big gap between the rich and the poor, between the high and the low class, between the upper caste and the lower caste, etc. which makes it hard for the people to be collectively called as equals. Without equality in the society, there is lack of common interest and common goals; the society gets divided as a result of conflict of interest. But despite all these shortcomings, the freedom fighters were able to unite the country and bring out the country from the grasp of foreign rule.

2 Kamenka, Eugene. “Political Nationalism – The Evolution of the Ideas”. *Nationalism: The nature and Evolution of an Idea*. Ed. Eugene Kamenka. New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1976.

<https://archive.org/stream/nationalismnatur00kame#page/n7/mode/2up> (Accessed August 10, 2016).

3 Tagore, Rabindranath. *Nationalism*, New York: The Macmillan Company, 1917. https://archive.org/stream/cihm_65826#page/n9/mode/2up (Accessed August 15, 2016).

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Nationalism in pre-independence India

The scenario in pre-independence India was bleak and dark. The states were divided into kingdoms and there were constant wars among the kings in India before the British came. The foreign oppression opened the eyes of the Indians and the feeling of nationalism started to arise in the hearts of the people. Caste system had a firm hold on the psyche of the Indians which hindered the unity of the people.

In Raja Rao's *Kanthapura*, we see that Moorthy, a brahmin tries to unite the people but the people from his own caste shunned him for mingling with the pariahs. Even Moorthy's own mother refused to talk to him after he started going to the pariahs houses regularly. Moorthy tried to break the very shackles which divided the people from uniting as one but, the majority of the people were not willing to come out from their shell of ignorance. Moorthy being a follower of Mahatma Gandhi, took the initiative to bring unity among the different caste in his village, Kanthapura but, the high castes were not willing to step down from their pedestal. Moorthy became an untouchable in his very home,

*"And Moorthy sits in the kitchen threshold and eats like a servant, in mouthfuls, slowly and without a word. And when he has eaten his meal, he goes and washes himself at the well, and Narsamma munches her food alone in the kitchen, while tears run down her cheeks. 'Oh this Gandhi! Would he were destroyed!'"*⁴

Caste system had a firm grip on the Indians, Hindus in particular. This led a mother and her son to become strangers that they don't even eat their meal together because the mother being a high caste

4 Rao, Raja. *Kanthapura*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press. 1989: 45.

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thought that she would also be polluted like her son, Moorthy as her son had been mingling with the pariahs. When Moorthy and all his future generations were ex-communicated by the Swami, the mother could not bear being ex-communicated that she allowed herself to be frozen to death. It was not just the ex-communication which hastened the death of Narsamma, it was also the surrounding and people around her who had been constantly hurling insults at her. Narsamma being an old woman of sixty-five had no one with whom she could share her problems, the anxiety and sadness took a toll on her health before her death. The main theme in *Kanthapura* deals with the fights of the Indians for freedom but underneath all that, it also deals with the conflict of caste system in India. It is ironic that even though Moorthy had been helping the pariahs, he still felt confused when he first entered a pariah's house and he imagined that the gods were angry at him. However, we can take this as the first step taken by Moorthy towards his liberation from the shackles of social evils. Later on in the novel, we see that Moorthy had a firm belief in the words of Mahatma Gandhi which made him to suppress his anger even when he was drenched when a high caste woman squeezed her wet clothes on his head and called him a pariah. He just said to himself that he should love even his enemies; which were taught to him by Mahatma Gandhi.

The issue of caste always arises in India when we discuss about almost any topic as this social hierarchy is ever prevalent. In *Kanthapura*, even when the people had begun to unite and think that they belong to one nation, there still exist some sort of differentiation between the higher caste and the lower caste. When the Panchayat was formed in the Kanthapura village, the people had gathered at the temple in the village to make their vow. We see that the higher caste went into the temple whereas, the pariahs (the lower caste) stood outside in the courtyard even when

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they were making their vows.⁵ When the country was filled with the feeling of nationalism, the high castes were reluctant to let the country be free of the British rule as they feared that their status which they enjoy would be taken away from them.

“But, what I fear for tomorrow is not the disorder in the material world, but the corruption of castes and of the great traditions our ancestors have bequeathed us. When the British rule disappears there will be neither Brahmin nor pariah, vaisya nor sudra – nay, neither Mohomedan nor Christian, and our eternal dharma will be squashed like a louse in a child’s hair.”⁶ (93)

There is also another incident where we see that the upper caste were reluctant to let go of their status even in the height of nationalistic feeling.

“Moorthy, in-lit and bright, says softly, ‘You are all with us?’ and we cry out, ‘All! All!’

and ‘You shall harm no one?’ – ‘None! None!’ – ‘You shall go to the end fearlessly? –

‘All! All!’ – ‘And there shall be neither Brahmin nor pariah?’ and the pariahs shout out,

‘Mahatma Gandhi ki jai!’⁷ (131)

This also throws light on the hypocrisy of the people. All the people agreed and replied positively to whatever Moorthy asked them but when he asked if there would be neither brahmin nor pariah, the Brahmins were silent and only the pariahs’ voices were heard while answering to this question. They called themselves as the followers of Mahatma Gandhi but they were

5 Rao, Raja. *Kanthapura*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press. 1989: 79.

6 Ibis.

7 Ibis.

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not willing to do away with the very barrier that was dividing the nation apart. The conflict between nationalism and caste can be seen very clearly from this incident. Everyone wants to bring a positive change to the society but when the propose change is going to negatively affect the privileges which the higher caste or class enjoys, those in the higher hierarchy begins to reject the very idea which they themselves had proposed. This is one of the very reasons which are hindering the nation from moving forward to become a developed nation.

Joginder Paul's, *Beyond Black Waters* is another novel which deals with the theme of nationalism in pre-independence India as well as the present age. This book is written in the perspective of the Muslims who were also inmates of the prison Kala Pani in the Andamans. The protagonist, Baba Lalu witnessed a lot of the freedom fighters being sent to Kala Pani for going against the British rules. They were sent here so that they would be excluded from the rest of the people in the mainland India. The protagonist, Baba Lalu was sent to this prison for a crime which he had not committed. The British had maximum authority over the colonized countries and the misuse of power by them was rampant those days. People were falsely accused of crimes they had not committed and were sent to prison without proper investigation. Those people who praised the freedom fighters were also sent to the prison, Kalapani, "All he had done was lavish praise on Bhagat Singh and his companions in one of his books."⁸ Baba Lalu had been at Kalapani Prison for many years and he had begun to feel comfortable but, he admits, "No matter how comfortable the in-laws' home is, bibi, one feels confined and tied down."⁹ (27) We can compare this to the

⁸ Paul, Joginder. *Beyond Black Waters*, Translated by Vibha S. Chauhan, New Delhi: Penguin Group. 2007: 17.

⁹ Ibis.

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freedom fight movement which was gaining momentum during this time. People will never experience the true sense of freedom and there will always be a thought that they are under constant watch by a higher authority as long as India is under the British rule. The writer had cunningly spoken his heart out through the use of metaphors.

What nationalism means today

The independence of India brought about a lot of chaos in the country because of the partition of India into Muslim and Hindu states. There was a lot of division within the country based on religion in post-independence India. There was constant strife between the different religions soon after the partition. According to Popati Hiranandani, in her short story, “When I Experienced the Simultaneity of Life and Death...”, she compared the other communities who were from Sindh other than the Muslims as thieves fleeing their own nation in the night for fear of being killed.¹⁰ Those who remained were killed mercilessly,

“Sindhi Sikhs were made to assemble in a temple. Muslims doused the entire area around the temple with kerosene and set it ablaze. About a hundred and sixty Sikhs were burned inside the temple!”¹¹

The Sindhis, the Bengalis and the Punjabis and all those who people who experienced partition feels that they were uprooted from their motherland and this creates a void in their hearts. The other people who had never experienced this would feel some

10 Hiranandani, Popati. “When I Experienced the Simultaneity of Life and Death...” *Unbordered Memories: Sindhi Stories of Partition*. Ed. Rita Kothari. New Delhi: Penguin Group. 2009: 10.

11 Hiranandani, Popati. “When I Experienced the Simultaneity of Life and Death...” *Unbordered Memories: Sindhi Stories of Partition*. Ed. Rita Kothari. New Delhi: Penguin Group. 2009: 11-12.

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sympathy and pain for them but, it cannot be compared to these people who have lost their birthplace and their motherland forever as the countries are now divided by “borders”. Even after escaping to India from being killed in Pakistan, the people were required to bring legal papers which had to prove how much property they had lost in Pakistan. Those people who had no papers were denied the right to claim for compensation from the Indian Government.¹² Before the partition, Kale Khan, who lived in the borders of Afghanistan would “walk in and out of Afghanistan as if there existed no boundaries between the two countries.”¹³ Man-made boundaries have begun to affect the people’s mentality and we have begun to make boundaries even in our psyche. There is lack of love and the oneness that people once felt longer exist as people in the present generation thinks only for oneself.

“People live miles away from each other, enclosed in their own cages. Since they meet only over the phone, they tend to forget what the other person looks like.”¹⁴ (68)

The feeling that we all belong to the same nation has begun to fade into oblivion. Brotherhood and sisterhood has lost its meaning in the modern world as everyone is engrossed with their own lives. Socialization in the traditional sense has begun to fade as technology has taken over and society has lost its touch even when we talk about love and sympathy. Mahatma Gandhi “laid so much stress on brotherhood between the Hindu, Muslim, Sikh and Christian.” But, “the Hindus, Muslims and Christians

12 Bharti, Narayan. “The Claim”. *Unbordered Memories: Sindhi Stories of Partition*. Ed . Rita Kothari. New Delhi: Penguin Group. 2009: 107-111.

13 Paul, Joginder. *Beyond Black Waters*, Translated by Vibha S. Chauhan, New Delhi: Penguin Group. 2007: 58.

14 Ibis.

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out there have no hesitation in slitting each other's throats"¹⁵ for the tiniest misunderstanding or issue. Whenever any misunderstanding arises, the past atrocities committed by this community or that community are dug up and more hatred is thrown into it.

In *Beyond Black Waters*, we see that the justice system in India is easily manipulated and there is no true sense of justice as Mohammad Ali, the second son of Baba Lalu sadly confesses the truth about Indian justice system to Mr. Pittson. Ali goes on to say that when a person speak out the truth about anything, those people in authority misinterpret that truth as a confession for the crimes the speaker had committed and uses against him or her. The innocents and the poor are helpless when it comes to legal system according to the views of Ali. There is a sad truth to our reality and present age as well when Mohammad Ali said, "Truth is what he will suffer punishment for, throughout his life."¹⁶ (51). The very words which Mohammad Ali said befell on him as he was blamed for instigating the shooting resulting in the death of Seth Girdhar's man. The truth was that the police fired shots blindly and had killed the man but, the police turned the whole incident around and blamed the helpless and innocent people. This is what we call as justice in our nation.

Mahatma Gandhi stressed on ahimsa or non-violence and it helped in freeing the nation from the British rule. But, when we look at the situation in Manipur and when we look at how Irom Sharmila have fasted all these years, it does not seem to have much effect on the government and the government gives a blind eye to it. The AFSPA (Armed Forces (Special Power) Act), 1958 have done a lot of harm to the people in the north-east India

15 Paul, Joginder. *Beyond Black Waters*, Translated by Vibha S. Chauhan, New Delhi: Penguin Group. 2007: 76-77.

16 Ibis.

instead of bringing about peace. The people in authority (police and army) would kill any people that they suspect of being a militant without any proof and gives an excuse that those people who had been killed were a part of a militant group.¹⁷ The atrocities committed by the army in north-east India are countless. In Temsula Ao's *These Hills Called Home: Stories from a War Zone*, we see that the army or those in authority raped the women and killed the innocent people for no reason. This can be seen in "The Last Song", "the young Captain was raping Apenyo while a few other soldiers were watching the act and seemed to be waiting for their turn."¹⁸ The mother came rushing to her daughter's aid but, she too was seized by another soldier and was gang raped to death. Civilians were shot dead by the armed soldiers and those people who had died were reported as underground rebels.¹⁹ (34)

The mainland Indians are ignorant about the people of north-east, they think that we are from another country. According to Louis Althusser, the State controls the administration and as result, the administration (schools) imparts knowledge on a child. The educational system in India focus only on the mainland India and the tribal areas such as the north-east Indians are not included into the syllabus and this is partly to be blamed for the ignorance faced by the people of the Mainland Indians. The people from the north-east face discrimination and alienation when they go to the mainland India to study and are treated differently by the mainland Indians. This was a personal experience when I was studying in Hyderabad, one day an auto

17 Karnad, Raghu and Grace Jajo. "Confessions of a Killer Policeman". 2016. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/jul/21/confessions-of-a-killer-policeman-india-manipur> (Accessed July 22, 2016)

18 Ao, Temsula. *These Hills Called Home: Stories from a War Zone*, New Delhi: Zubaan. 2007: 28.

19 Ibis.

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driver tried to take extra money from me and my sisters while we were travelling from Necklace Road to Gachibowli. We had agreed on the fare beforehand and when we reached our destination and paid the said amount, he asked for more money, but we refused. Then, he shouted, “Yeh Hindustan Hai!” to which I retorted back, “Hum lok bhi Hindustan hai.” We were treated as outsiders and we were not considered as part of the nation just because our looks are different when compared to the people from the mainland India.

We call our nation as our motherland but, do we really respect our mothers? We should ponder over this question as there is so much inequality based on gender. In Premchand’s *The Co-wife and Other Stories*, we see that the four sons in “A Widow with Sons” cheated their own mother and did not show any respect or regard for their mother soon after the death of their father. This is very much prevalent in our society today; children have very less respect or no respect at all for their mothers. Our mothers carried us in their womb for nine months and nursed us till we could fend for ourselves but, we see in our society today is ungrateful attitude shown by the children towards their mothers. In “The Child”, a widow who had gotten married more than once is compared to a piece of bread which is half-eaten, “Gangu had seen a piece of bread and was rushing towards it. He didn’t care that the bread was half-eaten, dry, and unfit to eat.”²⁰ In the “Two Graves”, Dr. Ramendra who is an educated man and considered himself as a liberal person had so much restraints on his wife, Sulochana. He refused to let her even meet her own cousin sister whom he considered as a morally tainted woman because of her profession out of fear of what other people may think of their family.

20 Premchand, Munshi. *The Co-wife and Other Stories*, Ed. & transl. by Ruth Vanita, New Delhi: Penguin Group. 2008: 209.

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Our nation will never progress unless we step out from our narrow-mindedness and accept the society as it is. We celebrate Independence Day every year on 15th August but, it is ironic that there are a lot of restraints that still bounds us especially when we look at the conditions of women in India. No matter how educated we are, we will never progress as one nation until and unless come to a full realization that all men are born equal and until we truly accept this fact. As Rabindranath Tagore says, “Each individual has his self-love. Therefore his brute instinct leads him to fight with others in the sole pursuit of his self-interest. But man has also his higher instincts of sympathy and mutual help.”²¹ Therefore, let us act like human beings and let us allow our higher instincts guide us in our journey which we call, life and contribute in helping our nation move forward. Mahatma “Gandhi tried to develop an Indian nationalism based on plurality and synthesis which not only tolerated and respected but positively cherished diversity and differences.”²² Therefore, let’s not these ideals of our Father of the Nation become a mere ideology but, we should practice his ideology and make our country a developed, a civilized and a better nation.

21 Tagore, Rabindranath. “Nationalism in India”. *Modern Indian Thought: An Introduction*. Anand Prakash (Ed.), Delhi: Worldview Publications. 2006: 9.

22 Yadav, S. R. “Nationalism”. *Reading Gandhi*. Ed. Surjit Kaur Jolly, New Delhi: Concept Publishing Company. 2006: 223.

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<https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/althusser/1970/ideology.htm>
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