

I D E N T I T Y C R I S I S

"The widespread preoccupation with identity, therefore, may be seen not only as a symptom of 'alienation', but also as a corrective trend in historical evolution... Artistic creation goes beyond complaint and exposure, and it includes the moral decision that a certain painful identity consciousness may have to be tolerated in order to provide the conscience of man with a critique of conditions, with the insights and with the conceptions necessary to heal himself of what most deeply divides and threatens him, viz., his division into what we may call 'pseudo-species'".

(Erik Erikson, Identity, Youth and Crisis) P.234

As has been examined in the preceding chapter, racial consciousness forms the theme of almost all the black writers of the U.S. Jean Toomer, Richard Wright, Ralph Ellison, James Baldwin and Ernest Gaines write about the blacks whom they know only too well. All their fictional characters are trapped in the internally colonized world of the white man. They are victims of white oppression and racial prejudice. Their main concern is their manhood. That is why perhaps most of them are young and rebels. Bigger Thomas in Native Son, the unnamed hero of Invisible Man, John in Go Tell it on the Mountain, Rufus in Another Country, Leo Proudhammer in Tell Me How Long the Train's been gone, Fonny in If Beale Street Could Talk are all young, black, sensitive and rebellious. They are all talented but are victims of circumstances beyond their control.

Like most American fictional characters, they are individualists and they have goals which are within the reach of the whites but are denied to the blacks in the racist world of America. While the white individual pursuing his goals has a support system and a reliable community to fall back upon in the hour of need, the black protagonist being oppressed does not have a worthwhile system. Even his past has been denied to him. The traditional role of a community as Erikson points out, is the orientation of a child toward a complete "life plan with a hierarchical order of roles as represented by individuals of different ages."¹ This hierarchical order determined by the

1. Erik Erikson, Identity, Youth and Crisis
(New York : Norton & Coy, 1968), P.161.

colonizer is not within the reach of most of the colonized black American protagonists. Like Fate in the classical tragedy, their colour and their being born black, "the alignment of a personal disability with an external circumstance,"² makes us feel the inevitability of the predicament of the black heroes.

The central character in Invisible Man sets certain goals before him. He does not achieve these goals, is undercut and deceived because of his blackness. His desire to attain an identity of his own, which here happens to be different from his communal identity as represented by Ras the Destroyer, makes him reject his past, home and communal values, despite his wanting us to believe otherwise. This in turn results in an identity crisis which becomes all the more acute in his case as he is an adolescent growing into an adult.

Rufus Scott in James Baldwin's Another Country isolates himself from his community in pursuit of some individualistic goals; "He had fled, so he had thought, from the beat of Harlem, which was simply the beat of his own heart. Into a boot camp in the South, and onto the pounding sea."³ His memory of the boot camp days is not pleasant as there too he was assaulted and insulted by a white officer. Being black, he could not do anything in the matter. As a reaction to this exploitation of

2. Roger Rosenblatt, Black Fiction, (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1973), p.10.
3. James Baldwin, Another Country (1963; rpt. London: Corgi Books, 1973), p.5 All references are to this edition.

his blackness, he develops anger, a rage against everything, even against Leona, the white girl who gives him love. But Scott is incapable of love. All that he feels is desire and no love for Leona. After having made love with her, he hopes she would say nothing. But, "It was so wonderful", she said and kissed him. And these words though they caused him to feel no tenderness and did not take away his dull, mysterious dread, began to call desire (emphasis added) back again."

(p.17). The "mysterious dread" that he feels is the dread of the colonized, which a sensitive oppressed colonized like him feels. It is there in the collective unconscious psyche of the colonized. Even while making love with Leona his subconscious mind is preoccupied with the dread of the white god : "And, shortly, nothing could have stopped him, not the white God himself, nor a lynch mob arriving on wings."(p.17)

Rufus, an adolescent on the threshold of adulthood struggles for an identity and therefore experiences profound panic. More so, because being colonized, he is a wretched of the earth : "The question of identity is a question involving the most profound panic - a terror as primarily as the nightmare of the mortal fall." The question of identity in his case takes a different dimension. The wretched of the earth are so much preoccupied with other problems that the question of identity usually does not exist in the way it exists for others : "The question can scarcely be said to exist among the wretched," asserts Baldwin, "An identity is questioned only when it is menaced, as when the mighty begin to fall, or when the wretched

begin to rise."⁴ Rufus's identity crisis does not get resolved because he as an individual lacks the resources that his community possesses but are denied to him because he has cut himself away from it.

John Grimes in Go Tell it on the Mountain on the other hand, resolves his identity crisis, first because he is firmly rooted in the black church community which serves as a resource and inspiration for his 'ego identity'. Moreover, he does not deal with the world of the White oppressor directly. Besides the fact that he himself has the potentialities needed for becoming a black Evangelist minister. He achieves a sound ego identity because he can strike a balance between his own 'potentiality' and his culture's ability to actualize it: "For sound ego identity to come into being there has to be a good balance between the individual's potentialities and the culture's ability to actualize them"⁵ maintains Erikson. Richard, John's real father, in the same novel, many years ago had accidentally blundered into the world of the white oppressors, commits suicide because he cannot tolerate the humiliation to which he is subjected by the white policeman.

Fonny, in If Beale Street Could Talk like Richard is young and is in love with a black girl. He, again like Richard, is individualistic and ambitious. He too like Richard is subjected to imprisonment on a false accusation (Richard of Stealing and

4. James Baldwin, The Devil Finds Work, an Essay

(New York : Dial Press, 1976), P.77.

5. Erik Erikson, Identity, Youth and Crisis, P.134

Fonny of Raping a white woman) and is subjected to great humiliation by the White cops in jail. But Fonny when released from the jail goes back to his family accepts his place in his community while Richard Commits suicide because he had left his family and community somewhere in the South and the girl he impregnated could not even share this secret with him. Fonny too in the course of the events in the novel passes through the stages of identity crisis and identity confusion (as discussed in the subsequent chapters) and has attained an identity when he tells Tish: "Listen, I'll soon be out. I'm coming home because I'm glad I come, can you dig that?"⁶ He 'came' back to his own world Sans white reference symbols and values perhaps abandoning his ambition to become a sculptor for ever.

Leo Proud-hammer on the other hand, leaves his black family and community for good in order to be an actor. He as a matter of fact leaves all worthwhile community, black or white in order to experience art which for him is a liberating experience beyond race, beyond colour and forms a community of experience of its own. Barbara, his white girl friend too leaves her people in Kentucky in order to realise her dream of becoming a star. She falls in love with Leo and accepts him with all the limitations of race, colour and also the fact of his being bisexual. She tells Leo : "Well, I hope you like

6. James Baldwin, If Beale Street Could Talk

(New York : Dial Press, 1974), P.193.

having a sister, a white incestuous sister. Doesn't that sound like part of the American dream? (P.238) Leo and Barbara try to live this "American dream", through acting, an art which liberates them all - black or white. Lata snubs the white racist cops who take Leo to the station: "Fuck you, "she said, "Fuck you. You goddamn Nazi."(P.227) Madeleine, Saul, Jerry all feel extremely sorry for Leo, their black boy. But the person who really makes the maximum sacrifice is Barbara. She is humiliated by the black when she walks with Leo through the streets of San Fransisco to reach Saul's house. "you hussy! you nigger-lover! you law-down, common, low class, poor white slut!" shouts a black old woman (p.245). But Barbara like Leo pockets all this. Barbara and Leo both have nothing in common with their families. They cannot share their world with their families and communities as both, the white and the black are racists in their own ways.

It is here, more than anywhere else, that Baldwin tries to penetrate into the minds of both the colonized and the colonizer, the blacks and the whites, particularly by analysing the attitudes of the families of Leo and Barbara. By liberating both Leo and Barbara from the colours of their skins, he seems to suggest an individual salvation. None the less they feel trapped even on the top of the mountain, where they make love with each other : "I seemed to know that night, "confesses Leo, "that we were

trapped, trapped no matter what we did: we would have to learn to live in a trap" (p.308). They both live in the trap of racism transcending it every now and then.

Unlike John Grimes and Fenny, Leo resolves his identity crisis not by going back to a physical community of the black American but by living in the community of experience of the life of an artist. Leo realises this fellowship and says, "There really is a kind of fellowship among people in the theatre and I've never seen it anywhere else, except among Jazz musicians. Our relationships are not peaceful and they certainly are not static, but in a curious way they are steady." (p.266).

Todd in Ellison's short story "Flying Home" too has an identity problem. His ambition to be a flier is ironically expressed through the image of "the oxen making queer, prehistoric shadows against the dry brown earth." (p.205).

Todd has always thought of flying as an act through which he can define his identity. The first time he sees a plane he wants to have it. He wanted to play with a toy airplane when he was a child: "Some little white boy's plane's done flew away and all I got to do is stretch out my hands and it'll be mine!" (P.212). But it is not all that simple in the colonial situation of black America.

By juxtaposing Jefferson's fantasy of flying in the heaven with Todd's real flying experience Ellison through the use of irony makes Todd grow emotionally and intellectually mature. Jefferson tells the young ambitious flier "But they told me I better come down 'cause as colored folks had to wear a special kind' a harness when we flew. That was how come

they wasn't flyin. "(p.208). This 'harness' of racial diseumination is what Todd has forgotten about.

Todd first thinks that Jefferson is an old ignorant Negro who would not understand his ambitions. It is only when Jefferson narrates to him his fantasy of flying that Todd who first felt humiliated, now feels a "silence of understanding flutter between them" (p.211). This community of feeling puts him back in the safety of his childhood world, which obviously had no white reference symbols. Now they talk about Daney Graves the whiteman who owns the piece of land where the crash takes place and many blacks have been killed by him. Todd then realises his colonized status and feels one with Jefferson. His sense of isolation disappears when he remembers "his mother through empty streets where black faces peered from behind drawn shades" in a sort of reverie or dream (p.215). His becoming conscious of his identity is a painful process as he gains it through an encounter with experience and also by making a sense of his racial past.

Ellison here reveals various stages in the development of his identity by prying into Todd's mind: "He felt a sharp need to tell the old man what he felt. But that would be meaningless. If I tried to explain why I need to fly back, He'd think I was simply afraid of white officers. But it is more than fear... a sense of anguish clung to him like the veil of sweat that hugged his face" (p.204).

Shifting his point of view from third person narrative to first person and also by using the cinematic technique of juxta-posing the present with the past, Ellison captures the linear expansion of Todd's consciousness to depict the attainment of his identity.

The problem of black identity in the racist America is also the basic theme of Ellison's Invisible Man, a detailed discussion of which appears in the next chapter alongwith the other existential characters of Richard Wright. One common feature of all the black protagonists is that they are mostly adolescents getting into adult-hood.

Thus we find that all these black characters are adolescents entering into manhood, a very critical stage in a person's life for solving his identity problems. These problems get complicated because they live in a colonized society which is sick, petrified and static. It fails to supply them adequate identity: "A society fails to supply adequate identity when symbols are disturbed to the extent that they no longer give reliable reference points...which people can locate themselves socially, realise themselves sentimentally, and declare (to self and others) who they are."⁷.

Because of the inadequacy of the black community to supply its young members with proper identity, the protagonist passes

7. Orrin E. Klapp, Collective Search for Identity.

(New York : Holt, Reinchart & Winston, 1969), P.VIII.

through "identity crisis" in the Eriksonian sense of the term.

While it is the question of the identity crisis of an individual that worries the black American novelist, his African counterpart takes up the question of collective identity. It has its justification in the fact that colonialism was a naked reality in Africa, though it is camouflaged under the garb of racism in black America. Hence while Achebe is concerned with the life of the people of Umuofia and their traumatic experience of confrontation with European colonization, Baldwin's world is confined to the streets of Harlem which is always a scene of racial tension.

In traditional African society, an individual is a part of the corporate life of the community. His individualism, if any, is looked down upon by others as it happens in the case of Okolo who tries to find out the meaning of 'it' of life. Chief Ozongo and the village elders think that his individualistic pursuit in search of a meaning of 'it' of life threatens their position. They see to it that he is exiled from their community. The interesting point that Okara in this novel, The Voice, is trying to make is that no one except Tuere, a girl who is branded as witch, takes Okolo's search seriously :

"Some of the townsmen said Okolo's eyes were not right, his head was not correct. This they said was the result of his knowing too much book, walking too much in the bush, and others said it was due to staying too long by the river.

"So the town of Amafu talked and whispered : so the world talked and whispered...all because he dared to search for 'it". (p.23

His search isolates him totally from his community. He starts living with Tuere on the outskirts of the town. Finally he sacrifices his life but to no avail. His dead body alongwith that of Tuere is tied to a canoe. They are given no burial. No tears are shed. The canoe with the two bodies is drowned into a whirlpool : "And the water rolled over the top and river flowed smoothly over it as if nothing had happened." (p.127). Nobody afterwards ever seems to have talked about Okolo, the 'voice'.

Jomo Kenyatta, as quoted by David Cook, says in Facing the Mount Kenya that in the Kenyan society "an individualist is looked down upon with suspicion and is given a nickname 'nwebongia'- one who works only for himself and is likely to end up as a wizard... In Gikuyu community there is no really individual affair, for everything has a moral and social reference."⁸ The remark is equally applicable to the other African communities too.

As the novel is mainly concerned with the life of an individual, his achievement, his behaviour, his errors, etc., the African novelist therefore also deals with the individual protagonists. In Western fiction an individualist is a representative figure, while in African fiction, he is an exceptional figure : "In the Western novel...it is the loneliness of the protagonists which makes them typical or representative, whereas in the African novel the aloneness of the hero makes him exceptional."⁹

8. David Cook, African Literature : a View
(London : Longmans, 1977) p.4.

9. Ibid, p.15-16.

Almost all the individualistic characters of Achebe are exceptional to the communal life of Africa. Ngugi has practically no individualistic characters in the Western sense of the term. Most of the Aluko characters are 'black white men' who are divided in their minds about their responsibilities to themselves and to their societies. Soyinka's characters, on the other hand are more Westernised and are therefore individualistic.

Achebe's individualistic characters, too are being pulled by two opposite drives—the communal and the individualistic. Things Fall Apart, therefore moves at two levels : "the level of Okonkwo, the intense individual with a passionate belief in all the values and the traditions of his people, and that of Umuofia,"¹⁰ the collective consciousness of the Igbo community. Similarly the tension in Arrow of God is built around the meglomaniac pursuits of Ezeulu's ambitions and the responsibilities he owes to his community. Obi's Western education in No Longer at Ease makes him "commute between the corporate world of an integrated society and the lonely world of the individual consciousness."¹¹ Odili in A Man of the People too is confused about his loyalties to his society and to himself.

Like Obi and Odili, Udo Akpan (One Man One Matchet), Arade Moses (Chief the Honourable Minister) and Titus Oti (Kinsman Foreman) are all divided in their loyalties to their communities and to their individualistic pursuits. Like Obi again, they are all

10. Ernest A. Champion, "The Story of a man and his people : Chinua Achebe's Things Fall Apart," Black American Literature, Forum, Vol.8, No.4 (Winter, 1974) p.273.

11. David Cook, p.84.

Western educated men and therefore find it difficult to adjust themselves to the fictional Nigerian world which is corrupt and has no place for individualistic pursuits.

All the young 'interpreters' in Wale Soyinka's The Interpreters are Westernised and individualistic. They live like outsiders in Lagos and have cut themselves away from their natural communities. Their individualistic artistic pursuits fails as they are living in an essentially tribal society which is governed by communal ethic.

In the African fictional world an individual has to bow down to the will of his community:

Arrow of God Concludes with this remark : "So in the end only Umuaro and its leaders saw the final outcome. To them the issue was simple. Their god had taken sides with them against his headstrong and ambitious priest and thus upheld the wisdom of their ancestors- that no man/^{however} great was greater than his people; that no one ever won judgement against his clan" (p.230).

Umuaro as Molly Mahood has ably argued "is a community in the normative and probationary sense of the word "the five Englishmen living at Okperi, six miles away are a "non - community" as they are divided from each other by class and also by the official protocol. They live in an artificial group without women and children. They do not like the Nigerian climate. Their "alienation" from the land and its people "sharpens our awareness of the solidarity and social cohesion of African life."¹²

12. Molly Mahood, The Colonial Encounter: a Leading of Six Novels, (London : Rex Collings, 1977), P.38-39.

For the African, Umuaro is an extended family to which all the villages belong. They share each other's pains and pleasures. An individual has his place within well defined limits. Limits which are not to be ignored.

Similarly Umuofia in Things Fall Apart has an identity of its own : "It is unified by an Ibo consciousness."¹³ Kate Turkington points out all the strong points and the weakness of the Ibo society which has security and stability in a collective way, dualism, a harmonious culture, music, wisdom and communal ethic. Here, Sehese seems to suggest that "the traditional Ibo society had an inherent flexibility, but the society was unable to evolve naturally because of its forced and direct confrontation with an alien culture."¹⁴ This loss of basic structure due to colonialism is examined in the novel, a detailed examination appears elsewhere in this dissertation. Though Okonkwo in the hero of the novel Achebe is not so much concerned with his consciousness what is really concerned with is the African concept of collective consciousness rather than the primary Western idea of an individual ethic."¹⁵

Like Achebe, Ngugi also relates the story of a community that falls apart under the pressure of colonial forces in his

13. G.D.Killam, The Writings of Chinua Achebe.

(London : Heinemann, rev.ed., 1977), P.16.

14. Kate Turkington, Chinua Achebe : Things Fall Apart.

(London : Edward Arnold, 1977), P.34.

15. Ibid, P.18.

Weep Not Child, though unlike Things Fall Apart he deals with the recent past, more specifically of 1950s and the rise of Mau Mau in Kenya. He takes the reader in confidence by using the second person pronoun, "you" in the novel through the village of Mahua and its neighbouring town Kipanga and tells the story of disintegration of Ngotho family and "adjacent communal life which nourishes it and can only be the foundation of the collective consciousness."¹⁶

Similarly in Ngugi's A Grain of Wheat, "If there is any main character in the novel, it is the village of Thabai itself—the communal consciousness."¹⁷ Here, Ngugi shifts the point-of-view from "you" to "we". Thus most of the scenes are told by the communal consciousness of the whole village looking at most of the characters from the view point of the entire community.

His The River Between, though a love story from the Western point of view is basically the story of two tribes: Kameno and Makuyu of the Kikuyu land in Kenya, and their rivalry because one tribe has adopted Christianity, the religion of the colonizer and the other still values its age old religion and customs. Individual characters of Gikonyo and Mumbi too are archetypes¹⁸ of the mythical Adam and Eve of the Kikuyu people.

16. Charles R. Larson, The Emergence of African Fiction

(Indiana Univ. Press, 1972), p.134.

17. Ibid, P.263

18. David Cook, p.104.

T.M. Aluko takes up the problem of the grafting of the religion of the colonizer in Nigeria in his One Man, One Wife. His basic theme, however, is the theme of modernity vs tribalism in his fictional world. A detailed discussion of his novels appears in the following chapters.

Thus we can safely conclude that Ngugi, Achebe and Aluko are basically concerned with the life of their communities that crumbles under the pressures and pulls of colonialism and all that goes with it: an alien religion, Western education, 'black-white man', a social structure based on individualistic values, a system of government and an economic order based on consumer economy and a new order of civilization technologically advanced.

Klapp argues that the identity problems of a society depend upon the stage of its advancement. He divides the human society in three categories on the basis of its technological advancement: traditional or tribal, transitional and technologically advanced societies. A traditional society with a closely knit village, tribal and family life faces no or very few identity problems and hence it is very stable. But a transitional society with extensive introduction of technology makes a population mobile and urban oriented. Their movement from villages to cities in search of job opportunities also gives 'psychological mobility' to the people but it weakens group solidarity. This movement also creates an "explosion of expectations".¹⁹ The transitional society,

19. Orrin E. Klapp, Collective Search for Identity, P.329.

therefore, faces the problem of redefining its identity. The individual in this society is divided in his loyalties to himself and to his community. He too therefore faces identity problems at the individual level.

The identity problems, however, multiply in a technologically advanced society with a high standard of living and leisure. Though technology "has a mystique of its own - of science, chrome and efficiency,"²⁰ it has, however, not evolved any reference symbols to help replace the rituals of a traditional society. This lack of rituals in the technologically advanced society, has "deprived an individual of messages of reassurance."²¹ He, therefore, seeks this reassurance in finding an identity in a profession, or career or even by joining a group activity which helps him participate in a collective search for identity.

While the black American fictional characters live and have their being in a technologically advanced society, their African counterparts portray the picture of either a tribal society (Things Fall Apart, The River Between, etc.) or a "transitional" society (Arrow of God, A Man of the People, Weep Not Child, A Grain of Wheat and all the novels of T.M. Aluko) in their fictional work. Even the traditional society that they paint is no more going to remain what it was because of the colonial forces which have attacked it. It is already crumbling and falling apart as the

20. Orrin E. Klapp, Preface, P.VIII.

21. Ibid, P.123.

forces against which it is fighting are unequal.

In a "transitional society" both the individual and the community are under great stress and feel the need to redefine their identities individually and collectively. Being heirs to two worlds they face a dilemma and a crisis. The individual, mostly a 'black white man' faces the problem of redefining his place in his society. The community too tries to adapt and adjust itself to the emergent social organization and economic order. The colonial world in which they live has "disturbed their identity symbols to the extent that they no longer give reliable reference points to locate themselves socially, realize themselves sentimentally and declare (to self and others) who they are".²² The point can be well illustrated by looking at Njoroge in Deep Not child who attaches so much importance to education that when he is denied this, he tries to commit suicide because he believes that he has lost his identity for ever. It is only after having passed through various stages of identity crisis that he finally achieves an identity of his own. Meanwhile he also crosses over to adulthood from adolescence.

Similarly Muthoni in The River Between attains an identity by rebelling against her father's brand of christianity and getting circumcised. She declares, "Waiyaki, tell Nyambura . I see Jesus. And I am a woman, beautiful in the tribe..." (p.61). Her words are

22. Klapp, Preface VIII.

indicative of a resolution of the identity crisis that her community of the Kikuyu Christian Church at that period of history face. It signifies that "a people's religion and a people's way of life must be one; each must grow out of the other. Either one in itself is incomplete."²³

Nwoye, Okonkwo's son in Things Fall Apart, after struggling for a few years seems to have resolved his identity crisis, when on being asked for his father was, he replies to Obierika, "I don't know. He is not my father," said Nwoye, unhappily." (p.131). Okonkwo too does not own his son anymore as Nwoye joins the Christian missioneries against his wishes.

With everything gone, Okonkwo takes his own life because something crucial to his existence had disappeared from his society. He refuses to live in a community where he cannot retain his sense of identity. The communal identity of the Ibo society is also under an attack of colonialism and its allies.

Ezeulu in Arrow of God, like Okonkwo and Obi individuates himself against the collective wisdom of his clan and fails.

Most of the Indian novelists writing in English do not have a set theory of colonialism. They as a matter of fact do not deal with a typical colonial situation. The white characters like Narayan's Principal Brown are mostly peripheral. East-West encounter in their fictional world takes the form of cultural encounter. It does not form a part of daily life as it does in the case of Africans or black Americans. This happens primarily because the colonial experience

23. Llyod Williams, "Religion and life in James Ngugi's The River Between" in African Literature To-day No:5 (1970), p.64.

of India was much different from the experience of Africa or black America.

While the British gained a strategic base for the expansion and maintenance of their empire and a ready market for their goods and commodities they also learnt about an ancient culture and religion as well as a rich variety of customs, manners and languages of the Indian peninsula. The Raj brought internal political and economic unity to India. It also unwittingly brought the railway train, the printing press and other technological innovations and appliances to India like other colonies. However, only a small group of people were directly influenced by the thought of Europe "for India clung to her own philosophic background considering it superior to that of the West" remarks Nehru in Discovery of India, "The real impact and influence of the West were on the practical life which was obviously superior to the Eastern."²⁴ A large majority of people however did not feel any impact in terms of their life style or way of thinking. The British and the Indians lived in two different worlds. There was nothing common among them.

Religion played a very important role in keeping in contact the Indian pedigree. While christian missionaries had a roaring business in the African market, they did not have much impact on India. Except for some tribals of the Eastern Himalayan ranges and the social outcastes of North and South India, Indians generally maintained their original religions. In some cases it was done with a vengeance even. As a child, R.K. Narayan learned to love the Hindu gods because the chaplain of the christian mission school

24. Jawahar Lal Nehru, India Rediscovered, (ed.)

C.D. Narasimhiah, (New Delhi: Oxford Univ.Press,n.d.),P.183.

that he attended in Madras chose to ridicule them: "I was thinking the other day why is it that I cannot write a novel without Krishna, Ganesa, Hanuman... Do you suppose I have been trying to settle my score with the old boy?"²⁵ asks Narayan. Ancient Hindu religion again has provided a philosophy of living to an average Indian. Social stratification to a large extent is based on the caste system which too is dictated by the Hindu ethos.

British colonizers like their predecessor Moguls did not disturb the social stratification of 'Varna' system as it helped them maintain their political and cultural hegemony. Some British rulers actually encouraged this division of society as it was very handy in explaining the superiority, of the white race like that of the Brahmins in the Hindu 'Varna Dharma'.

So, while colonialism disturbed the social structure in Africa by changing the religion of the people, in India the change was more perceptible in the economic and political life of the people. The institutions of family and religion, as discussed in chapter one, became calcified and petrified resulting in blocking the dynamics of social structure. Caste system which now justified itself through racism made the Indian society sick and stagnant. The Hindu society thus tended to become non-flexible, rigid and even tradition ridden as can be seen in Anand's novels, particularly, Untouchable and Coolie.

. Quoted in Molly Mahood, The Colonial Encounter (London : Rex Collings, 1977), p.173.

With the introduction of European technology, the Indian society changed itself from traditional to the transitional stage in the Klappian sense of the term. So, in this transitional and to some extent technologically advanced society the question of identity attained a new significance while a large majority of Indians remained "institutionally committed", some of them felt "alienated"²⁶ under the impact of the British Raj. The reasons for this kind of alienation unlike their African counterparts were cultural. Hence their search for identity—collective or individual tends to be psychological or philosophic in nature. A detailed analysis of the 'double consciousness' of the Indians and of bi-culturalism and marginality of the fictional characters is done in the following chapter.

Raja Rao's Ramaswamy in the Serpent and the Rope shuttles between the East and the West, past and present, Hinduism and Buddhism, materialism and spiritualism before he comes back to India to live there finally, marking the end of his search. His homelessness which is both physical and metaphysical ends when he attains a spiritual identity. Similarly Padmanabha Iyer the South Indian Brahmin protagonist of Comrade Kirillov fiddles with many identities before he resolves his identity crisis and woos communism and becomes a Marxist intellectual. He leaves his South Indian home first to practise Theosophy at Adyar, Madras, India,

26. Orrin E. Klapp, p.40-50.

then goes to London to become a Leftist Writer as "Intelligence in England pays" he informs us, "and if you are an Indian the British left has the kindest conscience. It washes its sin in pure Hindu water". (p.23). But soon he discovers that his home should really be in Russia and so he studies Russian in addition to German, French and other languages he already knows. By now he has changed his name to Comrade Kirillov. Towards the end of the novel we learn that he has gone to Moscow and then to China to study and write about some obscure Marxist dialectical problems. His son, Kamal whose mother, a Czech, is dead now, has come to live with his grand father in India.

While the homelessness of Ramaswami is more in the nature of a spiritual quest, with Kirillov it takes the form of an intellectual quest with political under and over tones. But both Rama and Kirillov are emotionally attached to India - a spiritual and geographic entity. The India to which they feel attached is the India of Kalidasa, Bhaskara and of the Brahmanic tradition going back to the Vedic days. They unlike Achebe's Obis, Ngugi's Nyamburas and Aluko's Akpans do not have to make a deliberate search for a pedigree. It is too much there to be without it.

But as both of them are expatriate Indians not living in the present day India, they feel alienated and are therefore emotionally spent up. Their search for identity is individualistic. They live in their own worlds of metaphysics or dialectics isolated from their physical communities.

Govindan Nair, the hero of The Cat and Shakespeare, like Rama

and Kirillov keeps himself busy with metaphysical problems. But he has a wonderful equanimity of mind by which he can live both in the corrupt world of the war time ration shop in colonial India as also in the metaphysically real world of the Upanishads. He lives in contemporary India being exploited politically, economically and socially by the colonial forces. He has developed a philosophic non attachment that rare quality of mind advocated in the Bhagwat Gita (a detailed discussion of his development appears in the next chapter). His jumping over the wall symbolically represents his power of transcendence from the mundane reality to the intricacies of Indian metaphysics. Though living in colonial India, he has his being in the traditional Hindu community which is stable and has not undergone much societal change. He has no identity problems at all because he realizes himself fully within the traditional Hindu culture.

Like Raja Rao's Govindan Nair, Narayan's heroes do not feel alienated. They like Baldwin's and Achebe's heroes have a physical space, Malgudi where they live and have their being. "Malgudi is thus a continuous social fabric in space and time."

Narayan in his Malgudi novels, maintains Kaul, observes the comedy of colonialism: "Just as the true tragedy of colonialism lay in the culturally untouched but economically ravaged Indian countryside, the true comedy of this same historical fact was to be observed in the small town."²⁷ Elaborating his view, he says

27. A.N. Kaul, "R.K. Narayan and the East West Theme" in Meenakshi Mukherjee (ed.), Considerations (New Delhi: Allied Publishers, 1977), p.43-65.

that the Indian small town is a 'product' or a 'by-product' of the 'colonial situation' and Malgudi is a typical example of this process.

A common situation in Narayan's later novels is that a Western educated man, usually a university degree holder, intrudes the otherwise placid world of Malgudi and disturbs its peaceful atmosphere." He represents the colonial or "neo-colonial" (as Molly Mahood calls it) forces which have attacked the small, yet a very powerful community of Malgudi. "The personal and social orderliness of this world is disturbed by the intrusion of H. Vasu, M.A. Taxidermist"²⁸ in The Man Eater of Malgudi. To Sastri, Vasu is a Rakshasa, a demon. Nataraj calls him a prince of darkness. Like Jagadish in waiting for Mahatma, Vasu misleads Nataraj and thus intrudes the community of Malgudi." Between them (Vasu and Nataraj) the two characters act out the psychological processes of colonial rule as they have been analysed by Mannoni and Others... the tensions of a dependancy relationship... Nataraj in his dealings with Vasu, fluctuates between shrillness and servility: exactly the behaviour that... arose from the colonial situation itself."²⁹

Vasu's intrusion in Malgudi also signifies the intrusion of modern capitalism and technology in the "transitional society" of Malgudi. Like Achebe, Narayan here examines the implication

29. Molly Mahood, P.106.

of this intrusion. He again like Achebe, is conscious of the strengths and weaknesses of the Malgudi community. While Achebe's world falls apart as it cannot hold at the center, Narayan's world like that of Shakespeare's last plays gets disorderly only to restore order at the end: "The course of the various stories (in Narayan) reminds us repeatedly of Shakespearean comedy. The movement is from order to disorder and back again."³⁰ Malgudi community has the vital strength of absorbing the shocks of colonialism as it has not disturbed it so much as its ^{its} African or Black American counterparts. The Hindu ethos had already absorbed the shocks of the Moguls and other invaders and had yet survived. The colonials, like Naipaul himself "had learned to live with the idea of subjection". They lived in their "lesser world" pretending that it was whole and blissfully forgetting that it had been shattered by the colonial forces. In the novels of Narayan, Rao and Anand the British conquest is like a fact of life. The British are felt only through their institutions: the bank, the mission school, the railways. Narayan's lesser world in his earlier novels of "small men, small scheme, big talk, limited means, appears whole and unviolated,"³¹ maintains Naipaul. But in the Vendor of Sweets "comedy fails and the writer's fictional world collapses" as it has been damaged by the "intrusion of alien elements" - a kind of naked colonialism. Jagan's flight therefore is "an act of despair"³² maintains Naipaul who calls

30. Ibid, p.93.

31. V.S. Naipaul, India : A wounded Civilization.

(New York : Alfred A. Knoff, 1977), p.11-13. .

32. Ibid, p.34.

it a failure of Hinduism, which is in a state of confusion due to modernism.

Jagan's failure to grapple with the realities of the modern world is not a failure of an individual whose personality is lopsided and who fails to recognise the forces changing India from a transitional society to a technological civilization. His world crumbles as he cannot compromise with the highly individualistic aspirations of his son and daughter-in-law, more so because they are the agents of Neo colonial forces like the American multinationals. Jagan's complete failure to understand the story writing machine which Mali tries to manufacture at Malgudi in collaboration with his American associates is symbolic both of his narrow and rigid view of Gandhism as also of a very narrow and limited meaning that he gives to it.

The relationship between Mali and Jagan is comparable to that of Vasu and Natraj in The Man Eater of Malgudi. They are cordial till the time Mali is in America. Like Natraj Jagan too discovers the oppression : "Jagan felt that he was following a stranger. When Mali approached him, extending his hand, the he tried to shrink away and shield himself behind the cousin (p.55).

The estrangement between the father and the son is mainly because of the two different worlds they live in. The relationship at one stage at least tends to be that of the colonizer and the colonized. But Jagan soon regains his self confidence by holding the strings of his purse tightly. His flight is not an act of despair or a failure of Hinduism, it is sheer escapism

with a label of 'Sanyasa'. Ironically Jagan fails to practise the teachings of the Bhaqwad Gita that he so much boasts about. He like a coward, withdraws from the battle that Arjuna is asked to fight out in the Gita though he makes himself believe that he is undergoing a change in his identity by opting for going to a retreat in the Memphi Hills, the reader knows it only too well that Jagan would control his business from the retreat as he has not transferred his legal rights to any one and has not renounced the world like a true 'Sanyasi' though Raju the hero of the Guide is forced into 'Sanyasa' he lives it up. Jagan does not seem to be doing so.

Jagan has the consciousness of a nationalist colonial who barks at any thing that smacks of the colonial past. He cannot see even the most obvious: "Why do you blame the country for everything? It has been good for four hundred millions", Jagan said remembering the heritage of Ramayana and Bhaqvad Gita and all the trials and sufferings he had undergone to win independence" (p.84). His effort to rediscover a livable past is a kind of defence mechanism against the colonial forces. He puts Hindu philosophy into cultural capsules by teaching Gita to Sivaraman, the cook and others. But alas! there are no takers. His aggressive exhibitionism of Hinduism fails to culture any one. Traditional India for Jagan is a monolithic and immovable accumulation of some customs, rites and beliefs which accept no change. His colonially conditioned mind fails to see the tenacity and flexibility of Indian traditionalism which has "a built-in-

adaptive mechanism for making changes."³³ He praises India for the wrong reasons.

His is a monolithic character who refuses to learn. It is his impacable resistance to change (almost like Mr. Micauber) that makes him a comic character. His withdrawal to the Memphi Hills is reminiscent of Mr. Micauber's going away to Australia. While Micauber's act is an act of desparation, Jagan's is an act of escape into a decadent system of values and social structure which attaches importance to "Sanyasa". Jagan thus escapes into "Sanyasa" in order to preserve his sense of identity, which he believes, his religion has given him.

"Identity", maintains Klapp, "is like wealth; when you have it you do not need it, but when it is gone you know you do not have it"³⁴ (emphasis added.). The colonized among all the people, is the one who "knows" that he has lost his identity or is on the verge of losing it because of an onslaught of colonialism. He therefore tries to hold on to all those symbols or reference points which provide him even a little security. Jagan's obscurantism is therefore nothing but an effort in this direction. It is symbolic of the efforts made by a colonized in a "transitional" society to preserve his sense of identity.

33. Stephen Miller, "Passages to India : Hindu Culture and Western Minds", The American Spectator, 11, 9, (Aug/Sept. 1978), p.4-14.

34. Orrin E. Klapp, p.X.

The failure of the black American colonized community of the technologically advanced society of the U.S. to supply adequate identity symbols and reference points to its individual members is reflected in the identity crisis that the protagonists face in black American fiction. When these crises are not resolved properly, they get alienated from the Community. Sometimes, this 'alienation' becomes existential in nature.

But the black protagonists in African fiction still living in the tribal world are restored through the Communal efforts of its society, when their 'identity' gets mutilated by the naked intrusion of colonialism. The society, however, produces 'outsiders', who are studied in depth in the following chapter.

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