

## CHAPTER 1

### Myth of the Indian Nation

Sri Aurobindo is one of the prominent Indian philosophers and idealists. Spiritual evolution is the key concept of Sri Aurobindo's thought and also his political theory of 'Spiritual Nationalism'. 'Bande Matram' (Hail to the Motherland), the mantra given by Bankim Chandra Chatterjee, is the key to understanding Sri Aurobindo's concept of the nation. For him, India was not just a geographical entity or a stretch of land, but a Goddess incarnate – *Shakti*, who has nourished her children for centuries and was groaning under the yoke of British rule at that time.

Sri Aurobindo's love for India was far deeper than mere patriotism; 'it was a deep and fervent religious *Sadhana*' (Singh 78). For him India was a living and pulsating spiritual entity, as Sri Aurobindo argued in one of his speeches, collected in the volume *Bande Matram*, delivered at Bombay in 1908, "What is Nationalism? Nationalism is not a mere political programme; Nationalism is a religion that has come from God; Nationalism is a creed which you shall have to live . . . If you are going to assent to this religion of Nationalism, you must do it in the religious spirit" (652). Thus, we find that Sri Aurobindo has a spiritual approach to politics which may be termed as 'Spiritual Nationalism'. He had a firm belief that India has a mighty role to play in the spiritual regeneration of the human race, for which absolute freedom should be the goal of Indian nationalism. Sri Aurobindo's nationalism therefore develops logically into an internationalism that had as its goal 'the elevated ideal of human unity' (Singh 81). There is a misconception about Sri Aurobindo's Spiritual nationalism being a Hindu precept and thus communal. Infact, it is important to note that Sri Aurobindo was quite clear about invoking the support of all groups of people irrespective of their religion, class or caste. He therefore reiterates:

Nationalism depends for its success on the awakening and organizing of the whole strength of the nation; it is therefore vitally important for Nationalism that the politically backward classes should be awakened and

brought into the current of political life . . . Nationalism can afford to neglect and omit none. It rejoices to any sign of life where there was no life *before*, even if the first manifestations should seem to be ill-regulated or misguided (1997: 644).

Sri Aurobindo made a detailed review of methods to be employed to attain liberty for the Motherland which included “the revival of the national spirit and pride in India’s great cultural heritage; Direct revolutionary action: Terrorism and armed revolt; Passive resistance and boycott” (Singh 98-99). According to Sri Aurobindo, one needs to be free in the heart before the country’s freedom and for this it is important to re-instil in the minds of Indians a pride for the glorious cultural heritage left behind by fore-fathers, an awareness of the heights India had risen in the past, its achievements in the field of politics, social organization, art and architecture, literature and its unique contribution to the realm of religion and philosophy. Sri Aurobindo made a powerful contribution to the national awakening through his writings in various editorials. He began by contributing a series of political articles under the title “New Lamps for Old” in *Induprakash*, a weekly paper edited by his friend K. G. Deshpande. The first two articles proved to be a sensation and the proprietor faced a threat of prosecution for sedition, as a result of which the original plan of the series of articles was dropped. Deshpande requested Sri Aurobindo to continue in a modified tone, to which Sri Aurobindo consented reluctantly. However the weekly paper was eventually discontinued.

In 1906, a Bengali paper called *Yugantar* was started by Barindra, Sri Aurobindo’s brother, with his approval to popularize the idea of violent revolt against foreign domination. Sri Aurobindo wrote some of the opening articles in the paper. Its aim was as Sri Aurobindo pointed out, “to preach open revolt and the absolute denial of the British rule and include such items as a series of articles containing instructions for guerrilla warfare” (Rishabhchand 153). Another English paper *Bande Matram* continued to awaken the patriotic passion in the countrymen to shake off the chains of slavery and fight for freedom. The *Bande Matram* and a third paper *Karmayogin* carried his masterly editorials, which dealt with an array of subjects which were

illuminated with the deep knowledge of Indian culture. According to Karan Singh, “He felt that a revival and regeneration of true Indian culture was a pre-requisite for her political freedom, and all his political writing was directed towards encouraging and hastening such a revival. As spiritualism was the keynote of Sri Aurobindo’s approach to political thought and action, the regeneration that he aspired towards was no mere growth of national chauvinism but a deep spiritual rebirth” (103).

In August 1914 Sri Aurobindo began the publication of the Journal called *Arya* to which he regularly contributed on topics and articles related to the revival of India’s great cultural heritage and its cultural values. He published a series of articles from December 15, 1918 to January 15, 1921, collectively printed under the title *Foundations of Indian Culture*, in which he gives a remarkable analysis of the base upon which the Indian civilization has been built. His main object was “to combat the self depreciation awakened in the Indian mind by this hostile impact and to explain to it the true meaning of its own civilization and its great achievements. Thus, he deprecates the ‘low, imitative, un-Indian and bourgeois ideals of our national activity in the nineteenth century’ and stresses ‘the cardinal fact that, if India is to arise and be great as a nation, it is not by imitating the methods and institutions of English politics and commerce, but by carrying her own civilization purified of the weaknesses that have over-taken it, to a much higher and mightier fulfilment than any it has reached in the past’” (105). Frantz Fanon voices similar concern in his book *Wretched of the Earth*, where he points out emphasizing the importance of reviving the national culture and traditions that, “When we consider the efforts made to carry out the cultural estrangement so characteristic of the colonial epoch, we realize that nothing has been left to chance and that the total result looked for by colonial domination was indeed to convince the natives that colonialism came to lighten their darkness. The effect consciously sought by colonialism was to drive into the native’s heads the idea that if the settler’s were to leave they would at once fall back into barbarism, degradation and bestiality” (169).

Sri Aurobindo terms the period of the Indian nationalist struggle as the ‘Renaissance of India’, which is important for both India and the world. The

renaissance is important for India as it is a time for recovery or change of her 'time-old spirit' and national ideals. For the world, it is important as it gives the possibilities of 're-arising of a force' which is quite different from not only others but also its genius is very different from the 'mentality and spirit that have hitherto governed the modern idea of mankind'. He describes the present situation of India as a giant power – *Shakti*, who on awakening finds herself ensnarled in bonds, some self-woven by its past and some recently imposed by outside forces. She is struggling to free herself from those bonds and to 'arise and proclaim' herself. The bonds are slowly snapping, but freedom has not been completely attained. Sri Aurobindo points out that Indian spirituality has always maintained itself inspite of decline in national vitality and this was certainly what saved India always in every critical moment of her destiny. Any other nation would have certainly perished under such a pressure. With the reawakening, Sri Aurobindo hopes that India would keep her characteristic soul but would shape for itself a new philosophical, artistic, political, cultural, literary and social form, which he hopes would be by 'the same soul rejuvenescent will', and would be termed as Indian renaissance, as he points out in his book *The Renaissance of India*:

Spirituality is indeed the master-key of the Indian mind; the sense of the infinite is native to it. India saw from the beginning, - and, even in her ages of reason and her age of increasing ignorance she never lost hold of the insight, - that life cannot be rightly seen in the sole light, cannot be perfectly lived in the sole power of its externalities. She was alive to the greatness of material laws and forces, she had a keen eye for the importance of the physical sciences; she knew how to organize the arts of ordinary life. But she saw that the physical does not get its full sense until it stands in right relation to the supra-physical. (6)

The European influence gave rise to a new wave of activity; imitative initially of the foreign culture. Sri Aurobindo points out to the history of nations that were destroyed by the 'deadening of its old innate motives and a servile imitation of alien ideas and habits'. However, India survived this disastrous situation as it had the 'energy of life' which had fallen asleep but not dead. Despite the temporary decadence

caused due to the crude influence of European life and culture, according to Sri Aurobindo, it gave rise to three important impulses, “It revived the dormant intellectual and critical impulse; it rehabilitated life and awakened the desire of new creation; it put the reviving Indian spirit face to face with novel conditions and ideals and the urgent necessity of understanding, assimilation and conquering them. The national mind turned a new eye on its past culture, reawoke to its sense and import, but also at the same time saw it in relation to modern knowledge and ideas. Out of this awakening vision and impulse the Indian renaissance is arising . . .” (Sri Aurobindo:2004, 15).

The work of Indian renaissance is to make these impulses work. However, according to Sri Aurobindo, it is presently only vaguely awake and proceeding under the influence of European motive and method. The process that leads to Indian renaissance can be analyzed into three steps of transition – ‘a complex breaking, a reshaping and a new building’ however, the final result is yet a far cry. The first base, of a new age in which the old culture is transformed, a renascence, a true rebirth, has been laid. According to Sri Aurobindo, the first step, ‘a complex breaking’, was the reception of the European culture, acceptance of some of its radical principles at the same time a ‘revolutionary’ denial of ‘the very principles’ of the old culture. The second step, ‘a reshaping’, saw the diverse reactions of the Indian spirit upon the European influence. Sometimes it was total denial of what it had to offer in support of the ‘national past’, yet at the same time it masked a ‘movement of assimilation’. The third step was a process of new creation, ‘a new building’, accepting whatever was rational and useful or ‘inevitable of the modern idea and form’ but at the same time transmuting and Indianizing it. As a result of which, transforming it completely into itself, where its foreignness disappears giving rise to a harmonious element in the characteristic working of the ancient goddess. The *Shakti* of India thus masters and takes possession of the modern influence, and is no longer possessed or overcome by it (Sri Aurobindo:2004, 17). In this whole process the spiritual power of the Indian mind remains supreme.

Sri Aurobindo talks about the earliest generation of Indian intellectuals, who arose as a result of western education in India, in the same vein as Fanon talks about native intellectuals and writers in his essay “On National Culture” in his book *The Wretched of the Earth*. These Indian intellectuals welcomed the prospect of a new India modernized completely and radically in mind, spirit and life. Though patriotic, these intellectuals were denationalized in their mental attitude and admitted practically the western view of their past culture, as only a ‘half-civilization’. They were willing to take from ancient India whatever material they could modify according to their new stand point and strove to get rid of whatever did not suit it. “They sought for a bare, simplified and rationalized religion, created a literature which imported very eagerly the forms, ideas and whole spirit of their English models, - the value of the other arts was almost entirely ignored, - put their political faith and hope in a wholesale assimilation or rather an exact imitation of the middle-class pseudo-democracy of nineteenth-century England, would have revolutionized Indian society by introducing into it all the social ideas and main features of the European form” (Sri Aurobindo:2004, 19). However, this method proved to be wrong as it was impossible to imagine an anglicized India which would have only made the Indians ‘painful copyists, clumsy followers always stumbling in the wake of European evolution and always fifty years behind it’. This movement could not endure long, but it made them look upon what their past contained with new eyes and ‘recover something of their ancient sense and spirit, long embedded and lost in the unintelligent practice of received forms’, which was quite similar to what Fanon terms as the second stage ‘*Reclaiming the Past*’ in national evolution.

The native Indian intellectuals and writers were dissatisfied copying the colonizer, they preferred to ‘turn backward’ and immerse in the cultural history of the people. They felt the need to assert a national culture and fulfil the need to exist side by side with the European culture which, threatened to transform itself into a ‘Universal cultural society’. However, as Fanon asserted, “You will never make colonialism blush for shame by spreading out little-known cultural treasures under its eyes” (179-180); glorifying cultural treasures of the past is not enough. One had to find a new way of mobilizing inherited culture, a way to put it actively to work. In attempting to do this, the native intellectual is drawn into a closer proximity with the country men.

This led to the third phase that Fanon called the '*fighting phase*', where the native intellectual became directly involved in the people's struggle for freedom from colonialism. Sri Aurobindo here cites the examples of Bankim Chandra Chatterjee and Rabindranath Tagore, whom he called 'two minds of the most distinctive and original genius in our recent literature', who best illustrated the above stages of this transition. These writers took up the work of awakening the countrymen through their works. Bankim Chandra's *Anandamath* and Tagore's *Gora* exemplify this third stage. Their works "sought to arrive at the spirit of the ancient culture and, while respecting its forms and often preserving them to revivify, has yet not hesitated also to remould, to reject the outworn and to admit whatever new motive seemed assimilable to the old spirituality or apt to widen the channel of its larger evolution" (Sri Aurobindo: 2004, 21). Their works including Raja Rao's *Kanthapura*, are a part of this 'fighting phase' and these works can be truly called national literature as they played an important role in awakening and mobilizing the Indian freedom struggle. Sri Aurobindo, in special reference to Bankim Chandra and Tagore says, "Both show an increasing return to the Indian spirit in fresh forms; both are voices of the dawn, seek more than they find, suggest and are calling for more than they actually evoke" (2004:29).

There were some gradual changes taking place in the social fabric of India, however, the outward life of the nation was still in a state of uncertainty and confusion due to the political conditions of India. According to Sri Aurobindo, "All that is as yet clear is that the first period of a superficial assimilation and aping of European political ideas and methods is over. Another political spirit has awakened in the people under the shock of the movement of the last decade which, vehemently national in its motive, proclaimed a religion of Indian patriotism, applied the notions of the ancient religion and philosophy to politics, expressed the cult of the country as mother and Shakti and attempted to base the idea of democracy firmly on the spiritual thought and impulses native to the Indian mind" (2004:30). He advocates a type of spirituality that is 'all-inclusive' and not exclusive. It is the 'collective advance towards the light, power, peace, unity, harmony of the diviner nature of humanity which the race is trying to evolve'. We need to be free and faithful to the truth of life and our dealings with the Indian spirit and modern influences. Sri Aurobindo advises fellow countrymen to apply this spirituality to 'broader and freer lines'; he advises

them to accept Western science, reason, progressiveness, and the essential modern ideas but on the basis of the Indian way of life and should be assimilated to Indian spiritual aim and ideal as he points out:

But at no time did Indian culture exclude altogether external influences; on the contrary a very great power of selective assimilation, subordination and transformation of external elements was a characteristic of its processes; it protected itself from any considerable or overwhelming invasion, but laid hands on and included whatever struck or impressed it and in the act of inclusion subjected it to a characteristic change which harmonized the new element with the spirit of its own culture (2004:50).

It can be contended that the Indian nationalism is both, a '*pedagogical discourse*' as well as a '*performative discourse*', as the eminent postcolonial theorist Homi K. Bhabha terms them in his essay "DissemiNation: Time, Narrative and the Margins of the Modern State". Bhabha argues that on one hand pedagogy represents the nation and the people as what they are, while performativity keeps reminding that the nation and its people also continuously generate 'non-identical excess' over and above what they were thought to be. He further points out that, "in place of the polarity of a pre-figurative self –generating nation "in-itself" and extrinsic to other nations, the performative introduces a temporality of the 'in-between'. He also adds that the polarity of pedagogical and performative is constantly blurring, so that the pedagogical is never as stable as it wants to be, and the performative itself becomes pedagogically important" ([http://shodhganga.inflibnet.ac.in/bitstream/10603/4107808\\_chapter%203.pdf](http://shodhganga.inflibnet.ac.in/bitstream/10603/4107808/chapter%203.pdf)).

According to Bhabha, nationalist discourses are split by a disruptive "double narrative movement", both the '*pedagogic*' and '*performative*' aspect define and theorize the Indian nationalist discourse too. The '*pedagogic*' narrative suggests a fixed origin for the nation and also asserts there being a continuous history responsible for the link between the present people to the previous generations of the nation's subjects. On the other hand, Bhabha insists that the nationalist discourses are



simultaneously '*performative*'. The performative aspect "refers to the ways in which nationalist icons and popular signs (all those representations which help fix its 'norms and limits') must be continually rehearsed by the people in order to keep secure the sense of 'deep, horizontal comradeship'" (McLeod 118), as Bhabha points out to in his essay, - "The scraps, patches and rags of daily life must be repeatedly turned into the signs of a coherent national culture" (1994:145).

The continuous history of the Indian nation is suggested by the existence of various icons, signs, symbols, traditions and culture which form a part of Bhabha's '*performative*' narrative of the nation, which is 'repetitious' and 'recursive'. And it is this very aspect that defines the Indian nation as an assimilationist culture, an integrative culture which performs 'selective assimilation' as Sri Aurobindo terms it in his essay '*Indian Culture and External Influence*'. In conformity to what Sri Aurobindo stated, Paranjpe defines India as, "cultural plurality, inclusiveness, variety and compatibility – this is India" (1993: 72). For the nation to be culturally plural and inclusive, it is essential that it has a history and rich cultural heritage that defines its people wherever they live, as citizens or diaspora. And this idea of the nation by Aurobindo is substantiated by the proposition that it is possible to define the Indian nation with its '*pedagogic*' and '*performative*' aspects combined together. The proof of a continuous history is the great Indian freedom struggle against British imperialism as portrayed in Bankim Chandra Chatterjee's *Anandmath*, Rabindranath Tagore's *Gora* and Raja Rao's *Kanthapura* and Sri Aurobindo's political discourse on Indian culture and spirituality.

Nations are not a naturally occurring phenomenon. Nation, today, has become one of the most important social, economic and political modes of organization in the modern world and is assumed to be 'just there'. The concept of nation is of a western origin, an offshoot of western capitalism and industrialization and a fundamental component of the imperialist expansion. Nations, as they are known today, have been constructed by groups of people by will or violent coercion. Nations are demarcated by boundaries which are defended violently if the need arose. Thus, one can say that nations are '*fabricated*' (McLeod 68). As Gellner points out in his book *Nations and*

*Nationalism*, “nations are not inscribed into the nature of things” (49). They are constructed and protean in nature. It is an idea which is highly contested. Benedict Anderson defines the nation as “an imagined political community”, because “the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion” (6). Thus, people ‘think’ that they are a part of a greater collective and that they share what Anderson calls a ‘deep, horizontal comradeship’ with others. Similarly, Timothy Brennan, another theorist, in his essay ‘The National Longing for a form’, says that nation “as a term refers both to the modern nation-state and to something more ancient and nebulous – the ‘*natio*’ – a local community, domicile, family, condition of belonging” (Bhabha: 1990, 45). Thus, at the core of the idea of the nation are “notions of collectivity and belonging, a *mutual* sense of community that a group of individuals imagines it shares. These feelings of community are the emotive foundation for the organization, administration and membership of the ‘state’ the political agency which enforces the social order of the nation” (McLeod 69).

The mutual sense of belonging, being a collection is also reinforced “by the performance of various *narratives*, *rituals* and *symbols*,” which act as stimulants to intensify an individual’s sense of belonging to a group. Eric Hobsbawm has pointed out in ‘Introduction: Inventing Traditions’ in *The Invention of Tradition* (7) that the nation relies on such inventions of national traditions which are manifested through the repetition of rituals, symbols or narratives. This performance of national traditions helps keep a sense of *continuity* between the present and the past of the nation. It arouses a sense of *shared history* and of *common origins* of its people. Hence we find the emergence of the national flag, anthem, song and symbols, in all the nations of the world, which are a part of the ‘invention of tradition’. There is a repeated ‘performance of rituals’; which are emotive and sacred in nature for people of all nations. The *performative* discourse is brought to the fore by the song ‘*Bande Matram*’ written by Bankim Chandra Chatterjee in his novel *Anandmath*, which went on to become the national song. Similar icons, symbols and signs are visible in terms of cultural values and beliefs, traditions, rituals and language in the novels of Tagore, Raja Rao, Jhumpa Lahiri, Kavita Daswani, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni and Bharati Mukherjee. Apart from the invention of tradition and performance of rituals, and other

dominant factors, central to the concept of nation is the '*narration of history*'. "Nations are often underwritten by the position of a common historical archive that enshrines the common past of a collective 'people'. The nation has its own historical narrative which posits and explains its origins, its individual character and the victories won in its name" (McLeod 70). Even certain individuals are identified as the chief actors/heroes in the formation of the nation. The invention of tradition and shared history gives a sense of continuity and connectedness, which proves very beneficial in many anti-colonial movements all over the world. It was also the feature of the Indian freedom struggle against the British imperial rule. It gave rise to several narratives of the historical freedom struggle. Bankim Chandra Chatterjee's *Anandamath*, Rabindranath Tagore's *Gora* and *The Home and the World*, and Raja Rao's *Kanthapura* are a few examples of such historical narratives.

*Anandamath* evinced the early days of the freedom struggle in India. It narrates the story of the *Sannyasin Revolt* against the British rule, which took place in Bengal in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century. The first English publication was titled *The Abbey of Bliss*. It became synonymous with the struggle for Indian independence from the British rule. '*Bande Matram*' became the slogan of the millions of revolutionaries in India. It invigorated them to fight for the defence of their Motherland, as Dr. William J. Jackson points out in the *Preface to Anandamath*, "his song *Bande Matram*, "Hail to the Mother", which became India's national song expressed his vision of Mother India as a Goddess, and of woman as holy and venerable. His vision sparked the imagination of his compatriots in Bengal and other parts of India" (Chatterjee 8).

"It is not till the motherland reveals herself to the eye of the mind as something more than a stretch of earth or a mass of individuals, it is not till she takes shape as a great Divine and Maternal Power in a form of Beauty that ... the patriotism that works miracles and saves a doomed nation is born. To some men is given to have that vision and reveal it to others" (2006:14). These words were told by Sri Aurobindo for Bankim Chandra Chatterjee in the light of the novel *Anandmath*. In 1882, Bankim Chandra Chatterjee introduced for the first time the powerful imagery of the Mother Goddess into the discourse of nationalism. He painted three visual images of the Mother as she was in the past, the Mother as she is, subjected under the foreign rule

and as she will be in the future. The following excerpt of the conversation between Mahatma Satya and Mahendra Singh from the novel *Anandmath* elucidates the three images of the Mother:

At first Mahendra could not see what there was in the room. Gradually a picture revealed itself to him. It was a gigantic, imposing, resplendent, yes, almost a living map of India.

“This is our Mother India as she was before the British conquest,” the Mahatma said.... “Now follow me, Mahendra,” the Mahatma ordered; and they entered a dark tunnel to emerge into another, even darker room. Only one ray of light entered it, so it was sad and gloomy. There Mahendra saw a map of India in rags and tears. The gloom over this map was beyond description.

“This is what our Mother India is today,” the Mahatma said. “She is in the gloom of famine, disease, death, humiliation and destruction.”

“Why does a sword hang over Mother India of today?” Mahendra asked.

“Because the British keep India in subjection by the sword. And she can be freed only by the sword. Those who talk of winning India’s independence by peaceful means do not know the British, I am sure. Please say *Bande Matram*.”

Mahendra shouted *Bande Matram*, and bowed low in reverence with tears in his eyes.

“Follow me along this way,” the Mahatma said. They went through another dark tunnel and suddenly faced a heavenly light inside another room. The effulgence of the light was radiating from the map of a golden India – bright, beautiful, full of glory and dignity!

“This is our Mother as she is destined to be,” the Mahatma said; and he in turn began to chant *Bande Matram*.

Mahendra was moved. Tears flooded his eyes as he asked: “When, O Master when shall we see our Mother India in this garb again – so radiant and so cheerful?”

“Only when all the children of the Motherland shall call her Mother in all sincerity.” (43)

Inspired by the ‘children’ in *Anandmath*, around 1900 onwards, Sri Aurobindo began contacting revolutionary groups in Maharashtra and Bengal. At his initiative, his brother Barindra Kumar Ghose and Jatindranath Banerjee, tried to co-ordinate their actions, especially spreading the nationalist ideal. The towns and villages were seen as the ideal locations to establish centers where young men were given intellectual, moral and physical training and inspiration to work for the liberation of the motherland. It was around this time that Sri Aurobindo wrote *Bhawani Mandir*, which he called a pamphlet ‘for the revolutionary preparation of the country’ (13), in which he laid down the rules and regulations for a new order of Sannyasis and the work to be done by them. Sri Aurobindo does not see any difference between the Motherland and the Goddess Shakti and hence says:

For what is a nation? What is our mother – country? It is not a piece of earth, nor a figure of speech, nor a fiction of the mind. It is a mighty Shakti, composed of the Shaktis of all the millions of units that make up the nation, just as Bhawani Mahisha Mardini sprang into being from the Shakti of all the millions of gods assembled in one mass of force and welded into unity. The Shakti we call India, Bhawani Bharati, is the living unity of the Shaktis of three hundred million people; but she is inactive, imprisoned in the magic circle of Tamas, the self-indulgent inertia and ignorance of her sons. (65)

In his only Sanskrit poem *Bhavani Bharati*, written somewhere between 1904-1908, which has 99 verses in all, Sri Aurobindo reinforces that the Motherland and the Divine Goddess are the same which he states towards the end of his introduction to the poem – “*Bhavani Bharati* is a prayer, which reverberates beneath this soil, forever invoking the Shakti, the Mother of the nation, the nation itself” (v).

Apart from Sri Aurobindo, Rabindranath Tagore was also considered to be one of the Intellectual revolutionaries whose views on Indian nationalism were noteworthy.

Rabindranath Tagore vehemently opposed the western ideology of nationalism, which was militant and based on the homogeneity of language, religion and culture of the people. He belonged to the small minority of Indians, who regarded nationalism as a by-product of the western nation-state system and of the forces of homogenization let loose by the western worldview. To them, a homogenized universalism, itself a product of the uprootedness and deculturation brought about by British colonialism in India, could not provide an alternative to nationalism. Their alternative was a distinctive civilizational concept of universalism embedded in the tolerance encoded in various traditional ways of life in a highly diverse, plural society” (Nandy x-xi). An attempt has been made here to look at the theories of nationalism and the idea of the Indian nation as suggested by some such dissenters, namely Sri Aurobindo and Rabindranath Tagore. Ashis Nandy calls Tagore one such dissenter among dissenters, “whose reservations about nationalism led him to take up a public position against it, and who built his resistance on India’s cultural heritage and plural ways of life” (xi).

Contrasting Indian nationalism with nationalism in the West Tagore states that, “our history has been the history of continual social adjustment and not that of organized power for defence and aggression”. Though the Indian history may record the rise and fall of kingdoms, of fights for political supremacy, but are despised and not remembered by the people. The Indian history is rather remembered as that of “our social life and attainment of spiritual idealism” (5), as compared to the western civilization, which has a rigid national machinery of commerce and politics which manufactures a humanity that is mechanical and of a high market value. Tagore comments that, “Obviously God made man to be human; but this modern product has such marvellous square-cut finish, savouring of gigantic manufacture that the Creator will find it difficult to recognize it as a thing of spirit and a creature made in His own divine image” (6).

Looking back on the history of India, Tagore laments that the former governments which existed in India were ‘woefully lacking’ the advantages which the modern governments have. “But because those were not the governments by the Nation, their texture was loosely woven, leaving big gaps through which our own life sent its

threads and imposed its designs” (24). The foreigners, who came to India, though came for selfish motives did not constitute a nation as it is known in the present day context. These foreigners adapted themselves into the Indian milieu and were likewise absorbed into the Indian social fabric. They brought with them their own cultures, traditions, religions and languages, which they tried to impose forcibly onto the Indians. However, “for India has all along been trying experiments in evolving a social unity within which all the different peoples could be held together, while fully enjoying the freedom of maintaining their own differences. The tie has been as loose as possible, yet as close as the circumstances permitted” (115). This has been possible as a result of the deep wish to ‘live peacefully’ and ‘think deeply’ as Tagore delineates the qualities seen in the traditions of India, “whose one ambition has been to know this world as of soul, to live here every moment of her life in the meek spirit of adoration, in the glad consciousness of an eternal and personal relationship with it” (7).

Tagore defines nation in terms of a political and economic union of people as ‘that aspect which a whole population assumes when organized for a mechanical purpose’ and this mechanical purpose being amassing wealth, at the cost of general humanity. Tagore warns against such a nation; “When this organization of politics and commerce, whose other name is the Nation, becomes all-powerful at the cost of the harmony of the higher social life, then it is an evil day for humanity” (12). Tracing the problems with the evolution of the concept of nation, Tagore contends that its ‘moral culture of brotherhood’ was demarcated by its geographical boundaries. People believed in such traditional boundaries which eventually became imaginary lines posing as a threat to the sovereignty and peace of general humanity. Hence, Tagore points out with exasperation, “Nationalism is a great menace” (111). The reason, Tagore insists that “India has never had a real sense of nationalism. Even though from childhood I had been taught that idolatry of the Nation is almost better than reverence for God and humanity, I believe I have outgrown that teaching, and it is my conviction that my countrymen will truly gain their India by fighting against the education which teaches them that a country is greater than the ideal of humanity” (106). Tagore favours humanity over nationalism, which advocates parochialism and threatens the freedom of people. Tagore also points out that those people who have

got their political freedom are not necessarily free, they are merely powerful. They are imbued with unbridled passions which are creating 'huge organizations of slavery in the disguise of freedom' (121). Tagore evokes the greatness of Indian traditions and history, which tolerated differences of races from the beginning, and that 'spirit of toleration has acted all through her history' (115). He suggests the continuation of this 'spirit of tolerance' and humanity as the gospel of Indian nationalism and hopes:

In finding the solution of our problem we shall have helped to solve the world problem as well. What India has been, the whole world is now. The whole world is becoming one country through scientific facility. And the moment is arriving when you must find a basis of unity which is not political. If India can offer to the world her solution, it will be a contribution to humanity (99).

Tagore believed in this gospel of Indian nationalism and the same spirit can be seen invested in the protagonists of his novels. Tagore opposed nationalism in its western sense of the word. He promoted spiritual values and the creation of a new world culture founded in multiculturalism, diversity and tolerance.

Raja Rao was one of the trilogy of the early novelists in India. Though not a revolutionary, his novel *Kanthapura* is a faithful depiction the early days of the Indian freedom struggle. Raja Rao exemplifies Spiritual nationalism, upheld by Sri Aurobindo, in his novel *Kanthapura*. The story revolves around the Indian freedom struggle and the influence Gandhiji had on the people. Rao begins the narration with the description of the village Kanthapura slumbering for centuries. It is suddenly awakened by the non-violent, non-cooperation movement led by Gandhiji during the twenties. Rao develops the theme of the freedom movement as the novel progresses. He begins the novel by giving an insight to the reader not only into the appalling social conditions of the Indian villages but also the values that have preserved the people against the 'flood, famine and exploitation from within and from without'. The novel also portrays how Gandhiji was able to tap the deep-seated religious and spiritual resources of the people living in the remote parts of India and building up a national movement in one life-time. According to Narsimhaiah it is "truthfully and touchingly the story of the resurgence of India under Gandhi's leadership: its religious



character, its economic and social concerns, its political ideals precisely in the way Gandhi tried to spiritualize politics, the capacity for sacrifice of our people in response to the call of one like Gandhi – not the spectacular sacrifice of the few chosen ones who later became India’s rulers, but the officially unchronicled, little, nameless, now altogether forgotten, acts of courage and sacrifice of peasants and farm hands, students and lawyers, women and old men, thanks to whom Gandhi’s unique experiment gathered momentum and grew into a national movement” (42-43).

Raja Rao is also worth mentioning in this study as he was also one of the earliest male writers of Indian diaspora. Raja Rao wrote *Kanthapura* while staying in some interior part of France, which gave him the ‘necessary perspective and detachment’ and enabled him to view the violence and waste and futility and that terrible beauty born of it ‘all manifest in India’s abiding faith in religion and idealism’. During those times religion became ‘the nucleus of regeneration’, which is depicted in the novel in the true Indian tradition, where ‘social reformers have invariably been profoundly religious men’, like Sri Aurobindo for instance (Narsimhaiah 49). The protagonist Moorthy is a Gandhian and preaches the Gandhian principles to arouse and unite the people of *Kanthapura* to fight against the British Empire. C. D. Narsimhaiah calls *Kanthapura* the microcosm of India, where we come across people belonging to various classes and castes. Raja Rao draws his inspiration from the Puranas and the mythological legends of India. These myths and legends are used as metaphorical representations to depict contemporary India. These metaphorical stories are used as a vehicle to spread nationalist feelings among the common masses. The Harikatha man, the traditional Indian story-teller, moved from place to place spreading these stories orally. Traditionally, *Hari-katha* is, as Rao explains, “literally story of God. Generally a story from one of the Indian legends is taken, and with music and dance, the Harikatha-performer relates it in extemporized verse. Sometimes the music and dance stop, and he explains the whole thing in familiar prose” (1970:14).

Jayramachar, the famous Harikatha man narrates scintillating stories in which the nationalist agenda is interspersed with the mythology in such a way that the audience listens to him in rapt attention, mesmerized. One of the stories that the narrator claims

she would never forget was about the birth of Gandhiji. Once the sage Valmiki approached Brahma to give him the news of his daughter Bharatha the goddess of wisdom and well-being. He informs Brahma about the sorrow and suffering that has befallen on her due to men who had come from across the oceans to trample on the age-old wisdom and virtue of Goddess Bharatha. Valmiki requests Brahma to send one of his Gods to incarnate on the earth and liberate his enslaved daughter. Brahma obliges to Valmiki's request and informs him that the mighty Lord Shiva would incarnate on the earth. Even before the sage Valmiki returned to earth there was born into a family in Gujarat, Lord Shiva's incarnation, Mohandas, who would fight against the enemies of the country. Jayramachar, the Harikatha man then informs his audience that the Mahatma had started his work of slaying the serpent of foreign rule. He would help unite the people to fight against enforced slavery. Even before the Harikatha man Jayaramachar could finish the Harikatha and *Aarti* to the Gods, the police comes to arrest him. Raja Rao refers to the Harikathas as a very effective vehicle to arouse nationalist feeling among the simple village people. It is worth mentioning that in every Harikatha and every reference to the country, the country is feminized as the iconic mother or divine feminine force, who was enslaved and had to be liberated by collective efforts. This aspect is very clear from Moorthy, the protagonist's provocations, "Our country is being bled to death by foreigners. We have to protect our Mother" (23).

This dissertation is titled '*Feminization of the Nation in the works of Diasporic Women writers*'. "The metaphorical association between woman, mother and nation is familiar to many nationalist discourses. . . In both literary and popular representations, the nation has frequently been depicted iconically as a female" (McLeod 114), so is the Indian nation represented as Mother India. Sri Aurobindo equates the Indian nation to the Goddess *Shakti*; Bankim Chandra Chatterjee too composed the song '*Bande Matram*' keeping in mind the various iconic representations of the Goddess *Shakti*, who for him symbolized the Motherland (*Matram*). Tagore too invokes the nation as a mother as symbolized in his portrayal of Anandamoyi, the female protagonist of his novel *Gora*. She is the most inspirational and apt representation of what the motherland stands for. The qualities that one draws for the Motherland have been characterized in Tagore's portrayal of Anandamoyi. "Mother, you are my

mother!” exclaimed Gora. “The mother whom I have been wandering about in search of was all the time sitting in my room at home. You have no caste, you make no distinctions and have no hatred – you are only the image of our welfare! It is you who are India!” (407) Nationalism has often been a ‘gendered discourse’. Men are represented as the dynamic force behind the freedom struggle, while women are represented as mere icons of the nation, thus reinforcing the patriarchal inequalities. While men were represented as chauvinistic, women were represented as passive, who needed to be protected and defended. Thus, in the process also assert that the chief agents of decolonization are men and that the national liberation was exclusively male endeavour. The contribution of women in the independence struggle is completely ignored and deployed only at a symbolic level as Mother India. According to the views of feminists, in particular, the construction of the nation leads to privilege men as the “chief beneficiaries of political and economic power gained through nationalist struggle” (McLeod 115).

Nira Yuval-Davis and Floya Anthias offer a feminist critique of nationalism in the introduction to their book *Woman-Nation-State*. They explore the relationship between women, the nation and the policies of the state, in their collection of essays. They point out to the five major ways in which women have been positioned historically within nationalist discourses. They explore the relationship between women, the nation and the policies of the state, in their collection of essays. They point out to the five major ways in which women have been positioned historically within nationalist discourses (7):

- a) as biological reproducers of members of ethnic collectivities;
- b) as reproducers of the boundaries of ethnic/national groups;
- c) as participants centrally in the ideological reproduction of the collectivity and as transmitters of its culture;
- d) as signifiers of ethnic/national differences – as a focus and symbol in ideological discourses used in the construction, reproduction and transformation of ethnic/national categories;

- e) as participants in national, economic, political and military struggles.

According to Yuval-Davis and Anthias, these roles are constructed according to different historical contexts, and the roles too differ. They also proceed to give a brief explanation of each of the categories as follows:

- 1) *As biological reproducers of members of ethnic collectivities* the women are made to believe by the state that it is their duty to reproduce and replenish the numbers who rightfully belong to the nation/ethnic community. And those who are not deemed to be belonging to the 'proper' ethnic group are subjected to forced sterilization.
- 2) *As reproducers of the boundaries of ethnic/national groups*, "women are charged with ensuring that the act of reproduction does not threaten group identity at a symbolic level" (McLeod 116). Like for instance, women were forbidden from having sexual relations with men of other ethnic groups or social class.
- 3) *As participants centrally in the ideological reproduction of the collectivity and as the transmitters of its culture* women are considered to be the primary educators of the children and thus responsible for introducing them to the heritage and traditions of the national culture. Women as ideological reproducers, is often related to their role as 'cultural carriers' of the ethnic group (9). "Women's role as reproducers is at once biological and cultural" (McLeod 117).
- 4) *As signifiers of ethnic and national differences*, the role of women is not only to teach and transfer cultural and ideological traditions of the ethnic and national groups but they also constitute the 'actual symbolic figuration'. The symbolic figure of the nation as "a loved woman in danger or as a mother who lost her sons in battle is a frequent part of the particular nationalist discourse in national liberation struggles or other forms of national conflicts when men are called to fight 'for the sake of our women and children' or 'defend their honour'" (9-10).

- 5) *As participants in national, economic, political and military struggles* in contradiction to the many nationalist representations which depict women “in a supportive and nurturing relation to men even where they have taken most risks” (10).

Nira Yuval-Davis further develops her ideas of the categories of women formed under various nationalist discourses in her book *Gender and Nation*. She opens the argument by stating that, “Most of the hegemonic theorizations about nations and nationalism (for examples, Gellner, 1983; Hobsbawm, 1990; Kedourie, 1993; Smith, 1906; 1995), even including sometimes, those written by women (for example, Greenfeld, 1992), have considered gender relations as irrelevant” (1). Yuval-Davis points out that when discussions of issues of national ‘production’ or ‘reproduction’ in literature on nationalism takes place, it relates to the state bureaucrats or intellectuals excluding women. And she insists that it is women along with the bureaucrats and intellectuals who ‘reproduce nations, biologically, culturally and symbolically’ (2). However, Yuval-Davis concentrates more on the negative connotations attributed to women in relation to their contribution to the national collectivity. For instance, she points out, “the figure of a woman often a mother, symbolizes in many cultures the spirit of the collectivity, whether it is Mother Russia, Mother Ireland or Mother India” (45). The situation complicates when the ‘burden of representation’ on women brings about the construction of women as ‘the bearers of the collectivity’s honour’, its identity and future representation. However, the dissertation prefers to look at this very iconic representation as a strength that not only mobilized the freedom struggle in India but also continues to be a source of inspiration to the present Indian diaspora.

In *Kanthapura*, Jayramachar, the *Harikatha*-man inspires the villagers through his recital of the myths and legends of India where every powerful and iconic female is symbolized as the manifestation of the motherland – ‘Today,’ he says, ‘it will be the story of Siva and Parvati.’ And Parvati in penance becomes the country and Siva becomes heaven knows what! ‘Siva is the three-eyed,’ he says, ‘and Swaraj too is three-eyed: Self-purification, Hindu-Moslem unity, Khaddar.’ And then he talks of Damayanthi and Sakunthala and Yasodha and everywhere there is something about

our country and something about Swaraj. (Rao 16). While in *Gora*, the nation is manifested in Gora's mother Anandamoyi, which he realizes only at the end of the novel when his own identity is revealed to him. Gora then recognizes no caste or class differences and sees the true essence of India and its culture manifested in his mother – Anandamoyi. The attempt is to develop a positive view of the roles assigned to women, - as iconic representation of Goddess or Motherland, or as the 'transmitters of culture' in special reference to the contemporary diasporic women writers, settled in the United States of America, - Bharati Mukherjee, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, Jhumpa Lahiri and Kavita Daswani.

Robin Cohen defines diasporas as "communities of people living together in one country who 'acknowledge that "the old country" – a notion often buried deep in language, religion, custom or folklore – always has some claim on their loyalty and emotions" in his book *Global Diasporas*, as cited by McLeod. Here the emphasis is on collectivity and community, the sense of living in a foreign land but looking across to another, the homeland, across time and space.

...on the other hand, is an image of 'home' as the site of everyday lived experience. It is a discourse of locality, the place where feelings of rootedness ensue from the mundane and the unexpected of daily practice. Home here connotes our networks of family, kin, friends, colleagues and various other 'significant others'. It signifies the social and psychic geography of space that is experienced in terms of a neighbourhood or a home town. That is, a community 'imagined' in most parts through daily encounter. This 'home' is a place with which we remain intimate even in moments of intense alienation from it. It is a sense of 'feeling at home'.

(Brah 4)

Cohen also adds that the individual's adherence to the diasporic community is "demonstrated by an acceptance of an inescapable link with their past migration history and a sense of co-ethnicity with others of a similar background" (207). The aspect of 'generational differences' is vital in the diaspora community. The children born to migrants automatically qualify for citizenship of the adopted country. But, their sense of identity is influenced by the 'past migration history' of their parents or

grandparents. Avtar Brah states that different diaspora communities are formed by the ‘confluence of narratives’ of journeys on different occasions and purposes from the ‘old country’ to a new one which create a sense of shared history. She also adds that “all diasporas are differentiated, heterogeneous, contested spaces, even as they are implicated in the construction of a common “we”” (183-184). This makes Diasporas *composite* communities.

Recent postcolonial literature has been animated by the experiences of the migrant people living in diaspora. “Differences of gender, ‘race’, class, religion and language (as well as generational differences) make diaspora spaces dynamic and shifting, open to repeated construction and reconstruction” (McLeod 2007). The literature by various diaspora writers and academic writing about it by Paul Gilroy, Homi K. Bhabha, Avtar Brah and Rey Chow, for example, explores new possibilities and problems in the lives and experiences of immigrants like racism, alienation, exclusion from the ‘new country’ and cultural practices, etc. This dissertation looks at women’s experiences of migration and how they view the host country and the home country. The concept of ‘home’ has a huge significance for migrants. It is a means that gives orientation by creating the sense of one’s place in the world. It tells where the individual belongs to and where s/he has originated from. But how do the diaspora view the idea of home? For Salman Rushdie the process of writing *Midnight’s Children* (1981) was to ‘restore home’; a “world of his childhood home distant in both time and space, to the present”, which proved to be an impossible task. As Rushdie points out, “the writer who is out of country and even out-of-language may experience this loss in an intensified form. It is made more concrete for him by the physical fact of discontinuity, of his present being in a different place from his past, of his being ‘elsewhere’” (12).

Although migrants may pass through the *political* borders of nations, crossing their frontiers and gaining entrance to new places, such ‘norms and limits’ can be used to exclude migrants from being accommodated inside the *imaginative* borders of the nation. The dominant discourses of ‘race’, ethnicity and gender may function to exclude them from being recognized as part of the nation’s people. Migrants may well live in new places, but they can be deemed not to belong there and disqualified from

thinking of the new land as their home. Instead, their home is seen to exist elsewhere, back across the border. (McLeod 212)

If 'home' is a 'dream' or 'imagination', are new homes secured in the host countries then? Migrant's movement from country to country involves them in setting up various homes, which problematizes the very concept of home. "Migrants tend to arrive in new places with baggage; both in the physical sense of possessions or belongings, but also in less tangible matter of beliefs, traditions, customs, behaviours and values", according to McLeod (211). These also affect the ways in which other let or do not let the migrants feel 'at home' in the new land. "Nationalism is a discourse that depends on notions of space, of territory. Outsiders do not belong, are not rooted in the soil, and indeed have immigrated from outside . . . I would suggest that this opposition of nation and migrant has an ideological function. Nationalism needs this story of migration, the diaspora of others, to establish the rootedness of the nation" (van der Veer 6)

Kapil Kapoor points out that there are two directions of Indian diaspora, - '*into the country*' and diaspora '*out of the country*'. Diaspora is the experience of dislocation and relocation. Diaspora literature is the literature of 'recall' as Kapoor calls it. The other themes noticeable are – that of return, mental or physical, feeling of uncanny and alienation in a new culture, attempt at integrating, and embarking on a search for permanence in host land (39). Diaspora 'into India' is a smooth process as, "India has been [thus a unique], receiving structure, receiving diaspora, and allowing the various people to come in, and then let them be. These are all harmonious diasporas" (30). People who came to India retained their identities, also becoming part of the larger Indian culture. According to Kapoor, the effect of movement into India is more interesting as it enables and reinforces the intrinsic plurality. It achieved its plural status not just because of people coming and settling here, but it was the 'intrinsic plurality' and the 'built-in-tolerance' of the Indian society which provided a matrix where 'embedding' is possible. Hence, the movement into India just reinforces Indian plurality. This makes the Indian culture fluid as it increases the willingness to interact and to exchange and hence lends a plurality to life. Since the culture itself becomes fluid, there is a scope for both, - transforming and getting transformed. Another



noteworthy aspect of these migrations ‘into the country’ has been that both the society and culture has been enriched. The migrants have made a disproportionately rich contribution to the country and its culture. To reinforce this point Kapil Kapoor gives the example of the contribution made by Parsis and Jews to the Indian society in terms of economy, culture and values. And also, the “into-India-diaspora has made India very resilient. . . So, this resilient receiving structure is a product of our diasporic history, of our experience that has evolved in our community a consciousness of the whole world as one family. And all these experiences have left their imprints” (33).

The diasporic writers are characterized by dominant elements of diasporic experience seen in their writings. As Kapoor suggests, - one is that of *the exile*, who is nostalgic for the home country and has a negative attitude towards the host country; then there are the *double diaspora* writers who have “a dispersed, constructed nostalgia and some approval of one, if not both the hosts”. Then there is the *one time diasporic*, who has a negative stand towards the homeland as well as nostalgia; and the third type, - *the perfect immigrant* like Bharati Mukherjee, who claims to be transforming herself. This type of immigrant has a positive stand towards the host country and is ‘ambivalent, if not denigrative towards his/her own home country’. Thus, to sum up, “Nostalgia, directedness towards the culture you are absorbing and thirdly re-stitching – these are the features. And fourthly, *the divided settler* evolving into a permanent alien and transforming into a perfect immigrant” (38-39).

According to Makarand Paranjpe, nations too have souls apart from the physical features. As Raja Rao reiterated, “India is not a country (*desa*), it is a perspective (*darsana*); it is not a climate but a mood (*rasa*) in the play of the Absolute – it is not the Indian who makes India but “India” makes the Indian, and this India is in all” (1996: 17-18). It is the India created by the mind, the spirit which makes it a unique nation. And therefore, the Indians share a mystic relationship with the country as Paranjpe points out, “To that extent, when we leave or are forced to leave India we continue to have a tie with the motherland” (2001: 67). Hence, when the same Indian moves away from India to an alien land and culture, carries the ‘Indianness’ within in the form of culture, traditions, beliefs and value system. All this includes the innate

integrative and assimilative characteristic of the Indian culture which enables the Indian diaspora to retain their essential Indian identity, inspite of whatever might be their approach to settle and adapt themselves in the new country.

This dissertation deals with a study of the two types of diaspora which Victor Ramraj refers to in his essay “Diasporas and Multiculturalism”, ‘traditionalists’, who retain their separate identity and ‘assimilationists’, who gradually merge into the mainstream of the new/host country. Both types of diaspora maintain ties with the motherland, while also trying to adapt and acculture in the host society, trying to create an identity of their own in the alien land. A noteworthy point to mention here would be that ‘a nation needs a diaspora to reaffirm its sense of rootedness’ because, as Paranjpe points out, “the migrant who did not feel like an Indian in India may suddenly discover his Indianness as a diasporean” (2001: 162). Thus, the diasporas and homelands are interconnected and interdependent on each other. Just as the homelands give rise to diasporas, similarly the diasporas too have the capacity ‘to shape, if not create homelands’. The diasporean community or some of its members migrating out of the subcontinent have contributed greatly to the formation of the modern Indian-state. Gandhiji was one such stalwart. As Paranjpe asserts, “Let us not forget that Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi became Mahatma not in India, but among the Indentured labourers whose rights and dignity he fought for in distant South Africa. It was his fight against racism, imperialism, and apartheid that made him take on the most powerful empire in history – and, so to say – win” (2001: 163).

To sum up, the dissertation studies the two key types of diaspora – ‘traditionalist’ and ‘assimilationist’ settled in the United States of America specifically. The noted historian Carlton J. H. Hayes traces the history of the nationalist consciousness in the West. According to Hayes, the west is now moving fast towards the fifth type, - Integral nationalism. Charles Maurras, who was a rigid doctrinaire of integral nationalism defines it as, “the exclusive pursuit of national policies, the absolute maintenance of national integrity, and the steady increase of national power for a nation declines when it loses military might”, as cited by Hayes in his book *The Historical Evolution of Modern Nationalism*. Hayes also further points out that

Integral nationalism has nothing to do with the “oppressed” or “subject” nationalities, but to countries which have achieved political independence and unity like ‘the contemporary nations of Europe and America more than to those of Asia and Africa’ (165). Integral nationalism is no stepping stone to a new-world order, but an end in itself because it is antagonistic to internationalism and humanity preached by the humanitarians and liberals.

In the present day context, diaspora has been defined as people who have migrated to foreign lands from their home country for social, economic or political reasons. The present generation migrates from the homeland to foreign shores for higher education or better economic conditions. Another category of immigrants of the present generation are those whose parents or earlier generations migrated long back from the homeland for better prospects, for instance, the former categories of immigrants are exemplified in the novels of Kavita Daswani, while the latter are seen in the novel and short stories of Jhumpa Lahiri. These women writers feature the aspirations and desires of their female protagonists on the one hand and on the other they deal with the sensitive issues that bother the diaspora, viz. nostalgia for the home country and past, the sense of alienation, assimilation, resistance and hybridity.

The protagonists in the novels of these diasporic writers are women. The thesis attempts to study the role of the diasporic women, as Nira Yuval-Davis and Floya Anthias call them, the “transmitters of culture” (7), in their book *Woman-Nation-State*. In their role as the nurturer and care-taker of the family, it has been assumed that it is the woman’s duty to transmit culture to the new generation by imparting them with the cultural values, traditions and language of the country where their roots lie. They inculcate a sense of nationalism and love for the motherland in the new generation by doing so. Even when alone or single they are expected to uphold the traditions and cultural values of the country of origin. This sense of nationalism is based on the emphasis of the cultural values and traditions of the homeland, or what can be termed as Cultural Nationalism, based on Anthony D. Smith’s definition of national identity in his book *Nationalism: Theory, Ideology, History* as “the continuous reproduction and reinterpretation of the pattern of values, symbols,

memories, myths and traditions that compose the distinctive heritage and its cultural elements” (18).

The importance of hybridity is that it bears the traces of those feelings and practices which inform it, just like a translation, so that hybridity puts together the traces of certain other meanings or discourses. It does not give them the authority of being prior in the sense of being original: they are prior only in the sense of being anterior. The process of cultural hybridity gives rise to something different, something new and unrecognizable, a new area of negotiation of meaning and representation. (Rutherford 211)

Women are burdened as the carriers of culture and traditions to future generations according to Postcolonial feminist writers like Yuval-Davis and Floya Anthias as is clearly depicted in the novels of the diasporic women writers. But these diasporic women writers do not just submit to the symbolic role assigned by the native culture, they go a step ahead to assimilate, negotiate a ‘new meaning and representation’, and integrate an alien culture, forming a new hybrid identity, which is more globalized yet also remain strongly anchored in their roots. According to Bhabha, cultural identities are always in flux, as he argues, - “all forms of culture are continually in a process of hybridity. But for me the importance of hybridity is not to be able to trace two original moments from which the third emerges, rather hybridity to me is the ‘third space’ which enables other positions to emerge” (Rutherford 211). This assimilation may be a new concept for the rest of the world, but for the Indians it is following the ancient cultural tradition of India viz. welcoming and assimilating peoples belonging to diverse cultures who came to her seeking humanitarianism and peace, as well as wealth and power. The Indian diasporic women portray the reverse of this activity in the globalized world today; they assimilate the host culture to an extent that enables to form not only identity of their own but also at the same time rooted in their own cultural traditions without losing their Indianness, as Raja Rao has very aptly stated in his book *Meaning of India* – “. . . it is not the Indian who makes India but “India” makes the Indian, and this India is in all . . .” (17-18).

Hybridity is not something that denies the traditions from which it originates or “the disappearance of independent cultural traditions but rather on their continual and

mutual development. The interweaving of practices will produce new forms even as older forms continue to exist” (Ashcroft et al 138). Forming such ‘in-between’ identities sets an example for the formation of a hybrid world where conflicts of purity, race, religion, region, class, language, which encourage the spread of Integral Nationalism can be curbed making way for humanitarianism and internationalism. Traditions which were considered inevitably and inextricably a part of the Indian culture are gradually making way for a more hybrid identities. Certain aspects of the culture which have been stifling like marriage in one’s own community and caste, for instance, is fast changing giving way to acceptance and intermingling of communities and cultures. There are attempts made by the female protagonists to abide by the culture and traditions of the home country, however metamorphosing themselves at the same time to fulfill the demands and challenges thrown at them by the host country and its culture. The process of change is not complete transformation. The attempt is not to become an American but blending the best of both cultures without sacrificing the essence of Indianness in them. The core Indian values, culture and traditions are retained without looking down upon the host culture with contempt, or transforming completely to fit into the adopted culture.

Each nation has its own history to narrate based on the struggles and lived experiences of its people. This dissertation tries to theorize the Indian nationalism from the standpoint of the Indian freedom struggle and the rich cultural heritage that has been well-preserved through generations till date, which essentially defines the Indianness of the Indians. It is also to emphasize on an integrative and assimilative nationalist ideology through which the Indian culture has kept itself alive even amongst its diaspora. The female diaspora are the focus of this dissertation. It seeks to look at the ways in which the protagonists of the novels and short stories of Bharati Mukherjee, Jhumpa Lahiri, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, Kavita Daswani assert their Indianness in spite of the hybrid identities they adopt and keep alive their rich cultural heritage. Thus making way for internationalism as Bhabha argues that all cultural systems and statements are constructed in what he calls the ‘Third Space of Enunciation’ (Ashcroft et al 183). In accepting this argument, we begin to understand why claims to the inherent purity and originality of cultures are ‘untenable’. Bhabha urges us into this space in an effort to open up the notion of an international culture

“not based on exoticism or multi-culturalism of the diversity of cultures, but on the inscription and articulation of culture's hybridity.” (Ashcroft et al 185).

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