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## **Nation and the Narratives of Violence: Violent Embeddings of Nationalism**

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### **Abstract**

Post colonialism is not restricted to the aftermath of colonialism. Before entering into post colonialism and neo- colonialism there is an imagined space that negotiates identities, worlds and languages. Covid 19 may have given us an opportunity to connect to the world from every nook and corner but connecting is far from gaining an identity and space. The issues of space and identity are secondary. It is rather more important to be able to connect with one's own culture and diversity. This does not resolve the negotiations that the regional writers and languages have to go through. There are translated memories and experiences and generations that bear the brunt of the violence that took place years ago. The answer to that violence is not non-violence. The existence of the third space or world is not enough anymore. To begin with, the writers in the North- East region (North East India) have to justify the use of English in writing. The dilemma faced by these writers over the use of the language is equally and sometimes more important than the content. For them the content is as important as the language. They are not only using language as a tool to resist but also as a tool to gain access to the world outside their immediate worlds. However, a lot is lost during this translation of experiences and words. It is this battle of crossing over that needs to be recognised first. Violence at the level of expression needs to be addressed before physical and psychological.

**Keywords:** Nation, Violence, Choice, Identity, Dialogue.

### **Introduction**

Violence is reflected in the literature and this in turn shapes the violence further. Thus the form of violence and its expression keeps on changing and so does the relationship of the people with its nation. This change is reflected through the narratives on violence and becomes a part of the narratives on nation and of the nation. Culture creates literature and literature adds to culture and the lives of the people. The folklores, lullabies, stories of good and evil, victory and triumph all are rooted and part of various cultures. Literature has become a mirror of this change, sometimes it subverts the reality other times it becomes a negotiating space for peoples, cultures and languages. It is an ongoing narrative that changes as changes happen and also triggers changes.

The idea of India lies in the diversity of India. The stories that these narratives create romanticise the version of India rooted in this diversity. India as a nation is not based on the concept of shared language, religion, culture and ethnicities. As K.S. Komireddi points out in the text "Malevolent Republic", "India survives as a union because most people see themselves as Indian first. And those who do not can be persuaded to see themselves as

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Indian because Indian nationalism is not premised on religion, or language, or ethnicity” (Komireddi 2019, p. 180). It is true that the nation was not built on commonality among the inhabitants but the will that they (people) all wanted to stay together. However, this will of the people has gone through a major turmoil and tests over the past few decades. People arguing over religion, language and ethnicity to an extent that the nation was beginning to unfold like a narrative of violence in the years following Independence. The 1984 riots were the first riots that began to show the dent in the unification of India rooted in secularism. The idea of unity in diversity propagated by some was falling through the cracks of organised mob mentality that displaced thousands of Sikhs in the 1984 riots. It was the first incident of religious based violence since Independence. The mobs were to set precedent for future episodes of violence in the following years.

Kashmir, the valley with picturesque landscape and infinite breathtaking views witnessed its own holocaust where the valley was cleansed of the non Muslim population during the 1990s. The displacement number was in lakhs. What made the condition worse was the term associated with the population that was displaced from their homes, they had been termed as “displaced migrants”. The people who had been living in unity with their neighbours for so long were brutally killed, threatened and massacred. Kashmir had come to be a mini India. It was an example of a secular India where the majority of the Muslims had been living with non Muslims, that comprised of Pandits, Sikhs, Jains and even Buddhists. Kashmir was not just about the geographical beauty but a cultural hub of India. The mass cleansing that took place in Kashmir was not only brutal, but it was soon forgotten. The 1984 riots have not found space in the public forum either, not much is talked about the sufferings of the people who were victims of the 1984 violence. The non Muslims in the Kashmir region share the same fate. The violence is visible through the terms that have been associated with the victims of the violence. The non Muslims have been termed as ‘displaced migrants’, women who have lost their children and husbands due to the riots in the valley but whose bodies have not been recovered have been the worst victims of the violence, for they don’t even know whether they should wait for their family members or should move on with their lives. Their plight speaks through the terms like ‘half widow’, and ‘half mother’.

Violence not only scars the physical bodies of the people but it leaves a lasting impression on the history of mankind. Unfortunately, people do not engage with the history and the past and this creates ruptures in the fabric of the nation. It is important for the people to assert their identities and the identity of the nation as a collective whole. It becomes imperative that the people engage in dialogue with their past. Thus the literature becomes an important space to initiate negotiations with the history and the past. The acts of violence are not random, but they have manifested in the psyche of the people for a long time, it is only when people fail to negotiate their realities and their identities that they become part of a mob. A mob has no mentality of its own, it feeds on the suppressed rage and discrimination that people had been victims of for a long time. It allows the insecurities of the people to take over and converts them into violence. Riots were an opportunity for people. It was not just about faith but about a false sense of superiority and self image. It was about profiting from the situation. Riots defy the nature of the people making their behaviour unpredictable. As has been portrayed by Revati Laul in the book “The Anatomy of Hate”, “... Farzana was trying hard to contain her fear while also dealing with the excitement of Suresh’s family who saw the day as an opportunity. Radhaben had just returned home fresh from the day’s loot” (Laul 2018, p. 09). Suresh even though was married to Farzana, a Muslim could not let go of his false pride. He had a bad leg and he had been a victim of abuse throughout his life, the riots were a way for him to establish and take back the control in his life. It was about power and fear that he wanted people to see in him. On one hand he looks after Farzana and asks her

to put red 'tikka' (vermilion) on her forehead so that the Hindu mob does not attack her and on the other hand he subjects her to domestic abuse to an extent that on several occasions it was impossible for her to even carry herself on her own without any help from others. Farzana could not decide whether it was the riots that had changed his behaviour or the constant abuse that he had endured since his childhood from his father and others in the society. The confusion and chaos that was prevalent on the outside could be seen in the relationships of the people. Suresh's and Farzana's relationship was chaotic, the more she tried to understand his behaviour, the more violent would be the outcome. Suresh's behaviour and life resembled the characteristics of the riots. He was confused, with misdirected anger and was oppressed as a child, because of his physical disability as well as by his abusive father. Farzana was as confused about her identity as she was about her relationship with Suresh. She did not know whether she was a Muslim first or a wife, she could not even convince Suresh to look at the pile of bodies that had been massacred as people, for him they were Muslims. Suresh's decision to marry Farzana was out of his rage towards religion. He started seeing Muslims as his enemy when his sister ran away with a Muslim, and he became a topic of discussion among his people. It was then he decided that he would marry a Muslim as revenge. During riots he seemed to protect Farzana because she was his wife first and a Muslim second.

Religion and the wounded pride were not the only reason for the people to become part of the mob mentality. For people like Dugar it was about the economic stability and caste hierarchy. Because of his low caste, his side of the village was seen as lower than the Muslims. Moreover, he was poor, in spite of working hard he could not build a house as nice as his Muslim neighbour. Education was his only way out of the caste system and the exploitation that he faced on a daily basis. Even in Germany the Nazis harboured the same sentiments towards the Jews. Hitler used the flourishing Jew community and instilled hatred among the Nazis that they had been using all the resources of the country, and it was Jews because of whom Germany had to face defeat during the first World War. Dugar became part of the same sentiment. It was easier for him to transfer his hatred on to the imaginary enemy than to focus on working hard and moving out of his existing conditions. His economic insecurities made it easy for him to be a part of the mob than to deal with the reality of the circumstances, so when some people forced him to take revenge on the others whom he had already internalised as the enemy it was easier for him to burn the houses of his Muslim neighbours, besides he was reminded of his own failures when he saw those 'colorful concrete houses'. It was the same mentality that was used by the men during the Partition, when they associated honour with women and asked women to sacrifice themselves in order to prevent forced conversions.

Patriarchy had subverted the meaning of 'weak' and 'honour' during partition. Women were considered weak and therefore were killed, either they were burned alive or jumped into the wells to protect family's honour. The men termed it 'sacrifice' rather than killing or murder. Because in doing so they were protecting the honour of the family. Men who always saw themselves as strong and protectors for some reason found it more appealing to their honour to allow women to perform 'jauhar' or self immolation than to fight for the safety of the women. Dugar justified his act on the same lines.

At the time of Partition the imagined enemy was the colonist against whom the people had united. The same ideology was employed to tap into the suppressed rage of the people by people with vested interests. Violence feeds on the insecurities of the people and their lack of ability to have a dialogue with their past and reality in the present. The politics of the state manipulate this disability in people and their blind rage since it is convenient rather than allowing them to harbour positive sentiments. It is only in the post violence period that the

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people are able to confront their rage vis a vis the reality of their actions, that leads to the churning of a better identity.

Pranav felt that it was alright for him to be a mute spectator to the violence. Because he did not cause the violence, therefore it was not his responsibility to stop the same, neither the people were his responsibility. He was a college student. He had seen the community life from a distance. Since he belonged to an upper caste family who enjoyed special attention of the people in the village, he was never faced with the crisis that violence and identity brings upon people. He could not understand why people had been fighting, moreover even if they were it was not his place to interfere and stop his friends to loot the shops that lay unattended due to the riots. The only rebellion he knew was to defy his fathers rules. This defiance was limited to consuming non vegetarian food and taking up arts in college. These choices allowed him to see himself as modern and open minded. This was enough for him to describe himself as a rebel who would not conform to the rules laid down by his father, and would lead a free life.

All the three characters had different versions of themselves during pre violence times. During the riots their actions were in sync with their beliefs and limited visions that they had of themselves and the others. It was only when the riots were over that they realised the impact of their actions. While the change in Dungan's behaviour was more of an arrangement with his victims, it was the fear of imprisonment for his actions that made him change his outlook and resolve to action in order to undo the damage that he had done. He was asked to rebuild the houses that he had burned, or he would be prosecuted. It was his fear of punishment that forced him to face the reality of his actions. He had started believing in religion because that was the only way he could validate himself and see himself on a higher ground than the others. The caste difference and exploitation had changed him, he needed someone else to validate his identity and recognise him beyond his caste identity. But it was the reality of the post violence mayhem that made him realise his mistake. It was only when he saw the families of the people whose houses he had burned down, living in tents without any civic amenities that he realised the graveness of his actions. An action that he took due to blind rage and to earn credit from others. The path he had chosen out of fear to rebuild the colony of the victims during the course allowed him to regain his lost sense of identity. He gained importance in the eyes of the people and that was all that mattered for him. It was the very reason why he had taken up violence in the first place, out of envy and insecurity. His actions after the violence allowed him a new identity and popularity. Dungan did not stop there, he capitalised on the situation and got involved in politics. His hunger for power did not end even after violence but it did bring a change in him, he knew how he could manipulate circumstances and people better but at the same time it changed him to not indulge in violence. The sense of belongingness to his religion and claiming the nation as his own on the basis of religion subsided, he realised where he had been wrong. He knew it did not matter any longer, if only he knew how to negotiate between parties and people.

The text *Anandmath* begins with the descriptions of poverty. People selling and buying everything and anything for food and necessities. People turned into animals because they had been hungry for so long that there was hardly any difference left. They would eat anything they could get their hands on, food, other humans, the old and the sick and even the new borns. Amidst all this there is still Dharma. It was almost like an organisation of men 'santaans' who had pledged to be a part of this movement to free the Motherland and till that happens would not return to their families. Kalyani and Mahendra's relationship is tested. Kalyani thinks of herself as a burden that would hinder this cause of her husband and thus decides to kill herself. On the other hand Shanti wants to be a part of this movement and thus

disguises herself as Naveenanand, a male. She doesn't believe that she is less than any other *santaan*. The name that she chooses for her new identity is almost metaphorical. The difference between the two texts and the journey the characters embark upon in the texts are a stark reminder of the change in circumstances and the change in the forms of violence over the years. It is through the choices that the characters have made that sets the tone of the texts. On one hand *Anandmath* tries to bring people closer from all walks of life against the common enemy while in the text "The Anatomy of Hate" the characters are divided because of the financial reasons, it is not just limited to caste differences but the progress that the 'other' caste and community has made. Even though the texts have different backgrounds and are set in different times yet the insecurities in people and the violence that takes place are similar at various levels. At the end when Naveenanand and her husband decide to leave in search of knowledge, it is because they realise that the people were not content with the victory and the war that they had been fighting was now losing its essence and values. The aim was to fight against the unjust rulers and establish just rule but the 'santaans' too had started looting and killing people. They too had become greedy and the essence of right and wrong was diminishing. Similarly, Dungan who had changed post violence, was now using his new found image to become a politician. He knew people would forget his wrongs and he could manipulate his positive image to gain control. The violence completely changed Suresh. Like Naveenanand he realised that nothing is permanent. It is important to gain knowledge and freedom in order to take advantage of the freedom that both had gained in their respective lives post violence.

Violence affects different people differently. While Mahendra and Kalyani decide to lead a peaceful life, Suresh continues to come to terms with the reality and duality of the past and present identities. The texts try to capture the glimpse of the violent embeddings left behind in the post violence time through the characters. Even though the violence had seized yet the people were struggling to come to terms with their pasts. The only way to move forward is to engage with one's actions and choices in the past as well as to continue the dialogue in the present.

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