

A Nation in Conflict: Identity Politics in *The Bitter Wormwood*, *The House with A Thousand Stories* and *Curfewed Night*.

Objectives of the Project: The project entitled A Nation in Conflict: Identity Politics in *The Bitter Wormwood*, *The House with A Thousand Stories* and *Curfewed Night* analyses the various socio political factors that paved way for insurgency movements in the states of Kashmir, Nagaland and Assam. It also delves into the issue of identity crisis faced by the ethnic minorities residing in these States. The following objectives have been dealt with in detail for the study:

- To incorporate the current theoretical approaches to the issue of secession in Social Science and International Relations.
- To explore the relevant historical factors which have contributed to the evolution of the present demographic scenario of the States.
- To analyze the social, political and cultural factors that led to the production of these texts.
- To examine how nationalist and regional historiography have marginalized the people of Border States.
- To examine the bureaucratic measures adopted by a democratic government in dealing with secessionist issues.
- To psychologically explore the identity crisis and rootlessness faced by the people who share a common boundary.

11. Achievement of the objectives and the Project: A Briefing

Studies in Social Science related to the issue of secession and insurgency have been incorporated to analyze the texts taken for the study. A comparative study of these works with the studies conducted in the field of Social Science legitimizes these narratives though it

is indisputable that there are different versions of 'truth'. An in depth study of the historical factors leading to politics of identity and demand for secession proves the fact that most of the separatist groups operated for their own political motives and paid little or no attention to the demands of the common people. In this regard, only civil societies can offer a solution to these problems.

Representation and Resistance are the two ideas that dominate postcolonial literature. The writers, who share a firsthand experience can relate themselves to the turmoil in these states. In spite of that, they themselves face this identity crisis of not belonging to the wider Indian culture. While misrepresentation seems to be detrimental than non-representation, the writing of these narratives is inevitable to initiate a counter discourse. It facilitates the outsiders to estimate the set of events from a different perspective. These works question many national and regional historiographies and could be considered as mini narratives that question the dominant discourses of the time that represent these areas as conflicting zones and a threat to national integrity.

The works selected for the study examine what bureaucratic measures have been adopted by the state to forge nation integrity. Unfortunately, none of the works support the government's act of counteracting political unrest with violence, a derivative of colonialism. Jayprakash Narayan writes of the congress rule in India, 'one of the more malignant features of that machine is its continued adherence to the British imperialist theory that it is the duty of the people to obey first and then to protest'. The burgeoning of several insurgent groups forced the government to adopt brutal measures, sometimes to the extent of being inhumane.

The works problematize the concept of nation as a western phenomenon. These works foreground the various arguments related to nationalism and envision a concept of post nationalism where geographical boundaries become irrelevant. The people of these states do not share "a deep horizontal comradeship", a consciousness which is a requisite for nationness according to Anderson.

12. Summary of the Findings:

Insurgency and extremism have become the dominant discourse of the politics of North- East India. The North- Eastern States were several princely states who enjoyed an autonomous existence by maintaining their own socio-politico and ethnic identities secluded from the neighbouring states, and skeptical in their attitude. After the colonial rule, when they were

forced to join either of the two nations i.e. India or Pakistan, they were fearful of losing their culture and identity. Moreover, the concept of a nation state demands homogenization of culture “nation-ness is the most universally legitimate value in the political life of our times” (Anderson) but quite ironically it is achieved through political illegitimacy. “For Tagore, nationalism was a system of illusions, designed progressively to homogenise and normalize small individual sentiments of insurgency” (Leela Gandhi). When Anderson defines a nation as ‘Imagined Communities’, Partha Chaterjee questions the rationale behind it through his counter argument ‘Whose Imagined Community?’ He refutes the theory which is materialistic and modelled upon Europe and America and replaces it instead with one that emphasizes both spiritualism and materialism. In other words, nation includes both the community/people and the State.

In a country which is diverse as India, the concept of a nation as defined by Anderson seems non-negotiable. For the people inhabiting the borders, the concept of nation is quite different from the people who belong to the mainstream society. Though both Britain and India chose to maintain these states on account of their geographic positioning of facing international boundary lines, the former, tactfully, did not intervene in their internal affairs and excluded them from mainstream administration. This stand point of the British imbued them with the feeling of separatism. Post-independence, the Indian government paid little or no attention to the sentiments of these ethnic minorities who were already anxious about their future.

The sense of belongingness is what contributes to the concept of a nation. When the people of Kashmir and the North Eastern states do not identify themselves as part of Indian society, the concept of a nation state is again problematized. Despite this feeling of in-between-ness, both Easterine Kire and Basharat Peer mention about the changing relationship between the mainstream society and the people of these states. Years of struggle had drained the spirit of the people and they look forward to a peaceful life through negotiations. Christian and civil societies have played a key role in reducing the violence in these states.

When the notion of ‘truth’ is much debated in the postmodern context, all narratives share the elements of subjectivity. Still these texts could be analyzed as counter discourses when read against the grand narratives. The texts portray the lives of common people caught amidst the political rhetoric of the State and the various insurgency groups. Apart from this, the authors also delineate the factional killings that happen between the insurgent groups that had led to internal rift in their societies. In Kashmir, the struggle for autonomy has been

transformed to Islamist 'jihad'. All the three authors discuss how the life of the people had been transformed due to this struggle; how their people had been victimized. From such a vantage point, it is worth debating whether the rationale behind territorial integrity can be justified at all. Jayprakash Narayan makes a distinction between the "outward" framework of nationalism and the "mental world of those who comprise it". Territorial integrity is a geographical phenomenon where true human experience is negated or rather, nullified though secession cannot be an alternative. Inter- ethnic killings prove how destructive can the mixing of ethnicity and territoriality could be. Effective strategies should be employed to overcome the limitations of exclusivist ethno nationalist struggles.

13. Contribution to the Society:

Liotard describes postmodernism as incredulity towards metanarratives. The study acknowledges the plurality of mini narratives while rejecting the 'totalitarianism' of the grand narratives. It is an attempt to hear the voice of the marginalized whereby the subaltern is given a space to speak for themselves. It also aims at locating the fissures between theory and life experience. By focusing on the real life experience of the people in Kashmir, Nagaland and Assam, the project analyses how they have been victimized and exploited both by the State and the various insurgency groups. The study also focusses on the plausible measures that can be adopted by the State and civil society organizations in forging greater solidarity among the members of a nation.