

//WOMEN IN MASCULINIZED MEMORIES: NARRATING THE  
NATION THROUGH VOCABULARIES OF DISOURSE//

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ABSTRACT: Can women narrate the Nation? Does woman have equal claim over 'historicity', and over 'being historical'? Moreover is she allowed the vocabulary to express her desires for contesting for historicity? Or they are interpreted as not wanting to be historical in the backdrops of historical events? Or are these denials camouflaged under garbs of tradition, which is perpetually attributed to women? Or is it the narrative's vocabulary, choice of expression and imagery that exalts and portrays man as historical and public and the woman as personal and private and willingly hiding behind constructed social and gendered roles? Or perhaps it is the norms which declare a man as historical and are mostly attributed to his nationalistic or patriotic inclinations, including his bravado in wars, revolutionary ideology etc. Could it not be that the narrative of the history of creation of the Nation eclipses that of the Woman?

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*“...My reference is to a place where the concept of woman was not really part of an available vocabulary: we were too busy for that, just living, and conducting precise negotiations with what it meant to be a sister or a child or a wife or a mother or a servant. By this point I am damned by my own discourse...and once in a while, we naturally thought of ourselves as women, but only in some perfunctory biological way that we happened on perchance. Or else it was a hugely practical joke, we thought, hidden somewhere among our clothes...”* (Suleri, 1989, pg 1-2)

## 1. [His]tory and Her story

Man can be historical and can lay claim to history or to being historical while women are excluded by and from the historical narratives. Is History then born masculine? How does the gendering of History take place? Sara Suleri, a woman writer from the Pakistani Diaspora makes an important declaration in the above quotation, which while pointing out an existing lacunae in female communication and self-expression has thus also become an initiating point of discussion for women writers and their women characters, as well as for the unisexual readers; which is the search for ‘a vocabulary for women’(Cameron, 1990) to narrate themselves as women, and as opposed for instance to narrating the history of creation of the Nation, because the narrative of the history of creation of the Nation eclipses that of the Woman.

The heading of this section while playing on the notion of History, also attempts to link gender discourse with the act and style of writing itself. [His]story thus starts as a comment on the biological gender of a man and since History has itself been traditionally made and written by man, hence it is ‘His’ story, the man’s story; which is to also say that ‘History’ becomes masculine by default. But this article also attempts to take flight from where women have been thus ‘damned by my [their] own discourse’; that is ‘Her’ story is the woman’s personal story, her own lived experiences which are as much historical during her own lifetime as much as History is historical in its own lifetime. ‘Herstory’ thus attempts not to supplant one gender away for another from the corpus of History writing, but rather envisions to give a parallel narration to the idea of history as seen, experienced and perceived by women by searching for another available vocabulary. ‘Herstory’, thus attempts to make ‘History’, gender sensitized; especially in the way it is being written about and designed to persevere in civil and communal memory. While the norms which declare a man as historical are mostly attributed to his nationalistic or patriotic inclinations, including his bravado in wars, revolutionary ideology etc, those that make woman a historical figure would be solely again her nationalistic affiliations, if any exists and is noticed till appreciation. A woman may largely be invisible in history but if not historically famous as a patriot, nationalist, social activist or a regal figure, she will be made famous as an artist’s muse, a king’s forbidden beloved or made notoriously infamous because of her strong sexuality as well as because of her awareness and uninhibited expression of that sexuality. Contemporary writings by women writers from the Home and the various Diasporic communities could steer our attention to these aspects from a different angle and that would be when an attempt is made to engage in the historiography of women and their literary traditions in this context.

What has emerged is a leviathenic body of literature where the plot and characters seem to be ripped apart by psychomachia<sup>1</sup> due to the contesting affiliations of Nation and Home, Nation and Self, Nation and Gender. Similarly there is also a dual and conflicting presence of History, namely narration by the gender, History literally and yet again literally as a ‘male story’ encountering ‘Herstory’ or the ‘woman’s story’. Thus the public history of the Nation, its myriad politics, wars, frontier issues, chronology of rulers and dictators, manoeuvres are all executed by men, and it is this Siamese pair which ‘is’ the National History and it is what feeds the National or Communal Memory and has the pre-ordained potential to comprise the National Literature as well. But, if this is what ‘National Legends’ are made of, then where is the space for accommodating this canon of narratives of being a woman, of being ‘Her’? Where are the women in these national legends? And the epic of a culture, a country also has the eligibility of constituting the national literature of that particular country/culture, then how many epics do we have globally, where the woman is the central protagonist and not just the epic hero’s mother, patron goddess, jilted lover, waiting wife, abducted beloved etc? And where are the narratives where the woman could become a ‘national symbol’?

## 2. Heroic Men and Distressed Women in Epic and Comic Book

A look at the comic book genre, like Batman, Spiderman, Superman and Phantom for instance which play with similar epic characteristics would again show the women similarly typecast as beautiful yet dependent women caricatures of damsels in distress, whimpering ladies who keep crumpling on the arms of these superheroes throbbing with masculinity. While for example, Catwoman<sup>2</sup>, one of the few female Super heroines in the comic book genre who is excessively sexualized, sensually stylized and exhibits aggressive femininity, almost thus making her an Other figure, because she doesn’t need to be saved. If one has to read into the symbolism of these superheroes, then one can perhaps wonder why feline for the woman? Perhaps, because the feline cat, although being the most popular pet and loved by all, yet it resists absolute domestication. Cats, retain a streak of wildness in them always, unlike canines who surrender completely. So, Catwoman, is actually having many vamp<sup>3</sup>-like traits unlike that of an all surrendering heroine. Certainly, she is not a Victorian Angel-in-the-House<sup>4</sup> and thus when it comes to her popularity among readers, there are boys and men who fantasize about being seduced, not saved by her and no boy aspires to be like Catwoman; while both boys and girls may aspire to be like the superheroes like Batman, Superman etc. So, Catwoman is

1 Psychomachia (Latin for The Battle for the Soul of Man) by Aurelius Prudentius Clemens, a Latin poet of Late Antique period, 348CE, wrote this medieval allegorical work on man’s battle with vice and virtue. The Psychomachia of Prudentius by H. J. Thomson. The Classical Review. Vol. 44, No. 3 (Jul., 1930), pp. 109-112. Published by: [Cambridge University Press](http://www.jstor.org/stable/698302). Article Stable. URL:<http://www.jstor.org/stable/698302>

<sup>2</sup> Catwoman, is a female superhero who has the agility, cunning, grace, wildness of cats. But she is an [anti hero](#), in the DC comics Batman Franchise and her character was created by [Bob Kane](#) and [Bill Finger](#).

<sup>3</sup> Vamp in urban parlance refers to a femme fatale in movies and books who is not conventionally beautiful but has a charming and seductive allure which allows her to seduce men.

<sup>4</sup> Angel-in-the-House, is the Victorian concept of the perfect and ideal wife and this term was coined after Coventry Patmore’s poem *The Angel in the House*, which he started writing, inspired by his wife in 1854. E-text is available at <http://www.gutenberg.org/dirs/etext03/anghs10.txt>

actually made an Other figure, that of the anti-hero. And one hasn't even delved into the portraiture of women in Ian Fleming's James Bond<sup>5</sup> series here in the same breath who just keep confirming our notions!

The concept of epic hero and national hero seem to have become clones. They develop and are appropriated as moral codes and as political propaganda, and also seem to elevate historical or quasi-historical or even mythical happenings to the levels of cosmologically ordained truths by introducing genesis, genealogy and Bildungsroman<sup>6</sup> of the hero, of man from the divine and thus in this way instills in us a degree of Fatalism which inadvertently affects our reception and perception of these narratives. The moment one's perception of history gets contaminated with a fatalist attitude, it leaves no space for striving, change, and complaints. Then there can be no re-interpretations of History, no re-writing or appropriation of History, and certainly there won't be any space for the Subaltern to breathe. Even Biological Determinism<sup>7</sup> seems to be victimised within this discourse. So, is this national literature misogynist or have we been intentionally resisting from increasing the range of our vision while scouting for what may constitute as national literature, as history etc? So, if epics can be mythologized histories, then much of the recorded and constructed presences of women in all these could have their genesis in masculinised memories. Is notion of 'Heroic', of 'epic' only limited to martial courage and moral excellence, even if it is intended for carrying the weight of the National discourse? If we have Carlyle's<sup>8</sup> Great Man Theory<sup>9</sup> which in a way would in our context suggest that greatness preceeds Nationalism, then could we also engage in a discussion of having a Great Woman Theory or is it a dispensable and vestigial need? Because according to Herbert Spencer's (Spencer, 1896) counter-argument, those very great men and heroes are inevitably the product of their societies and cannot pre-exist the temporal frontiers of their societies. In a way this also seemingly reinstates the Hegelian concept of Zeitgeist<sup>10</sup> in *The Philosophy of History* (Hegel, 1837); together to which one could add and ask, that is it not possible that just like men, women too are affected by the spirit of their times, especially with all that that has been happening in their society before their lifetime as well as during their lifetime? So, perhaps they would also thus feel provoked to aspire to certain levels of 'greatness' and attempt making of history by articulating their experiences through any language and form. There is an inevitable possibility of a quest-motif after all. Thus, though the concept of, for example, a female epic which could address all these anxieties of the

<sup>5</sup> Ian Fleming (1908–1964) was an English [naval intelligence officer](#) and also an author, journalist and wrote the [spy novels](#) series of James Bond, a British intelligence agent with panache.

<sup>6</sup> Bildungsroman can be first traced to the publication *Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship* by [Wolfgang Goethe](#) in 1795–96. It means the coming of age story in literary criticism and was coined by the philologist [Karl Morgenstern](#) in 1819. Just as a Bildungsroman of a hero is written about, similarly, the national epic, national literatures, and History compose the Bildungsroman of the Nation.

<sup>7</sup> Biological Determinism posits the Nature vs. Nurture duality, where the latter term is proposed by Social Determinism.

<sup>8</sup> Thomas Carlyle was a Scottish writer who wrote the 'Great Man Theory' in the 1840's in *On Heroes, Hero-Worship and the Heroic in History*, Fredrick A. Stokes & Brother, New York, 1888.

<sup>9</sup> Thomas Carlyle's 'Great Man Theory' posits that History is the resultant impact of great men and Heroes.

<sup>10</sup> German philosopher Georg Hegel used an expression containing the word Zeit, in his work *Lectures on the Philosophy of History*. He wrote, 'der Geist seiner Zeit', which connoted to 'the spirit of his time'.

female sex, still remains as a concept in literary criticism, although there have been new works like Lady Mary Wroth<sup>11</sup>'s *The Countesse of Mountgomerie's Urania* (Lady Mary Wroth, 1621), Mary Tighe's<sup>12</sup> *Psyche*<sup>13</sup>, Elizabeth Barrett Browning<sup>14</sup>'s *Aurora Leigh*, and Rebecca West's<sup>15</sup> *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon*<sup>16</sup>.

### 3. What constructs the Nation-Space and from Whose Narrations?

Literature, fiction and memoirs as genres have often acted as those surrogate support systems hosting writings which can potentially reflect women's socio-cultural, religious, ideological, ethnic-anthropological history. These are what are the 'personal histories' of the women<sup>17</sup> from which often social scientists have churned out public volumes like 'Fragment of an Analysis of a Case of Hysteria (1901-1905)<sup>18</sup> The contemporary works of fiction by many women writers are thus those private histories of the female selves; the woman's past, her family, her sexuality, her Body, her secrets and secretions, her periods and psyche, her milk and life! These are aspects which are periodically being dredged up by some female writers from shards of oblivion. But can women narrate the Nation? Does woman have equal claim over 'historicity', and over 'being historical'? Does she even wish it, or desire it? Moreover is she allowed the vocabulary to express her desires for contesting for historicity? Or they are interpreted as not wanting to be historical in the backdrops of historical events? Or are these denials camouflaged under garbs of tradition, which is perpetually attributed to women? Or the family and patriarchal institutions prohibit their entry into the historical space? Or is it the narrative's vocabulary, choice of expression and imagery that exalts and portrays man as historical and public and the woman as personal and private and willingly hiding behind constructed social and gendered roles?

What now, constitutes the History of Nation? Nations also emerge from the political thought and literary language (Bhabha, 1990: 1-7) and are as much a part of the

<sup>11</sup> Lady Mary Wroth (1587–1651/3) was a Renaissance poet, a radical, and as first female British writer had written the extant prose romance *The Countesse of Mountgomerie's Urania*.

<sup>12</sup> Mary Tighe (1772 –1810), was an Anglo-Irish [poetess](#) from Dublin who wrote about the Greco-Roman myth of Cupid and Psyche.

<sup>13</sup> *Psyche, or the Legend of Love* (Privately printed, in 1805; but was republished posthumously in 1811 with other, previously unpublished works by Longman, London) The [Etext](#) of Psyche from the 1811 ed. is available at <http://web.nmsu.edu/~hlinkin/>

<sup>14</sup> Elizabeth Barrett Browning (1806–1861) was a renowned Victorian poetess and was also the wife of the poet Robert Browning and she wrote *Aurora Leigh*, which traces the lives of women and their stories.

<sup>15</sup> Rebecca West, (1892–1983), was a British author, travel writer, journalist and literary critic actually named Cicely Isabel Fairfield but wrote under a pen name and is famously known for *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon: A Journey Through Yugoslavia*, which is a travel literature charting Balkan and Nazi history during her stay in Yugoslavia.

<sup>16</sup> Rebecca West, intr. Geoff Dyer, (2006). *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon: A Journey Through Yugoslavia*. Edinburgh.

<sup>17</sup> A reference to Dora and the case studies conducted on her by Sigmund Freud. Dora is the [pseudonym](#) given by Freud to a patient Ida Bauer (1882–1945) whom he diagnosed with [hysteria](#). Her most manifest hysterical symptom was [aphonia](#), or loss of voice.

<sup>18</sup> Strachey, J. (1953). The Standard Edition of the *Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Volume VII (1901-1905): A Case of Hysteria, Three Essays on Sexuality and Other Works*, i-vi. The Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psychoanalysis, London.

system of cultural signification as the representation of social life. Nation-ness is thus expressed in discourses and narratives. Thus, representations of Nations waver between vocabularies. An attempt will now be made to see some of the commonly known definitions of Nation and to salvage tools and strategies which the woman writer has been appropriating within the literary traditions. Certainly, as Homi Bhabha (Bhabha, 1990) points out that if the genesis of the concept of the nation “wavers between vocabularies”, then how does one address the polyphony in those various ‘vocabulary of discourse’ (Oakeshott, 1975: 201) like,

...race of the Other; the comfort of social belonging, the hidden injuries of class; the customs of taste, the powers of political affiliation; the sense of social order, the sensibility of sexuality..., the langue of the law and the parole of the people. (Bhabha, 1990: 2).

Hannah Arendt says, “the society of the nation in the modern world is ‘that curiously hybrid realm where private interests assume public significance’ (Arendt, 1958: 33-35.) Bhabha also points out that the “emergence of the political ‘rationality’ of the nation as a form of narrative-textual strategies, metaphoric displacements, sub-texts and figurative stratagems-has its own history.” (Bhabha, 1990: 2) Thus one can see there is a ‘symbol-fetishism’ (Bhabha, 1990) which underlies most discourses on narrating of the nation and hence one must keep oneself open to the role of all possible ‘metaphoric displacements’ and ‘sub-texts’ which are often employed by various writers in narrating the nation in their works. It is thus one aim of this article to locate all such linguistic tools and ‘narrative-textual strategies’ which contemporary women writers have been using to narrate a parallel history of themselves. Some of these metaphors like the imagery of the female body as the territory and landscape in the narratives of the nation, are often recycled and the woman writer often uses the female body itself to write about herself, shifting the focus away from the greater cause of the Nation. This is perhaps a kind of metaphorical Saturnalia<sup>19</sup>. Thus it would be the right place here to borrow Bhabha’s remarks, that,

to encounter the nation *as it is written* displays a temporality of culture and social consciousness more in tune with the partial, over determined process by which textual meaning is produced through the articulation of difference in language...such an approach contests the traditional authority of those national objects of knowledge-Tradition, People, the Reason of State...To study the nation through its narrative address does not merely draw attention to its language and rhetoric; it also attempts to alter the conceptual object itself. (Bhabha, 1990: 2-3)

Benedict Anderson has also pointed out that the Nation often hides behind terms like tradition, folklore and community (Anderson, 1983). Thus, the concept of the Nation itself changes and often while reading texts, one can see that there is a tendency where the Nation can suddenly start resembling a woman or one of the woman characters starts resembling like the Nation in discourse!<sup>20</sup> What Bhabha suggests is one should try to develop some strategies like textuality, discourse, enunciation, *écriture*, ‘the

<sup>19</sup> Saturnalia was an ancient Roman festival celebrated in the honour of the deity Saturn and there were revelries and carnivals where all social order was inverted and for that period of festivity masters would serve slaves while similar role reversals would be staged out temporarily.

<sup>20</sup> This can be substantiated from a close reading of Bangladeshi Diasporic writer Tahmima Anam’s novel *A Golden Age* where the female protagonist Rehana starts resembling like the nation herself.

unconscious as a language' to address the fluid grounds of the 'nation-space'. What seems to offer a quantum of hope for the discourse on Nation by the women, is Bhabha's stance on seeing the act of narrating of the Nation through the cultural representations as being antagonistic to what political addressals to Nation have been establishing so far. The interstices of culture contain the,

thresholds of meanings that must be crossed, erased, and translated...The boundary is Janus-faced<sup>21</sup> and the problem of outside/inside must always itself be a process of hybridity, incorporating new 'people' in relation to the body politic, generating other sites of meaning and, inevitably, in the political process, producing unmanned sites of political antagonism and unpredictable forces for political representation. The address to nation as narration stresses the insistence of political power and cultural authority in what Derrida describes as the 'irreducible excess of the syntactic over the semantic' (Derrida, 1981: 221). What emerges as an effect of such 'incomplete signification' is a turning of boundaries and limits into the in-between spaces through which the meanings of cultural and political authority are negotiated... (Bhabha, 1990: 4).

Thus, "it is from such narrative positions between cultures and nations, theories and texts, the political, the poetic and the painterly, the past and the present..."(Bhabha, 1990: 4) that this article tries to locate the woman as the historiographer who attempts to write her own personal history in fiction in response to the simultaneous history of the nation.

Walter Benjamin remarks that 'information is inseparable from propaganda- it is that news which we receive from all parts of the globe that is already 'shot through with explanations'(Benjamin, 1969: 89). The newspaper and the novel form have been attested spaces for the 'national print media' because as Brennan points out that 'news' has become the 'nemesis of national fiction'. (Bhabha, 1990: 56) So what constitutes 'national news', 'historical news' and how much all-inclusive are they? But it was the genre of the novel form that shaped the concept of the 'nation as an imagined community'<sup>22</sup>. The nation and the novel thus often seem to mimic each other in the polyphony and multiplicity in the number of distinct 'national life', languages and cuisine. Further, in our context of study, there is a discernible pattern in the way the women writers seem to offer a heroic memory in place of 'nationalism's heroic narratives'<sup>23</sup> in their novels.

#### 4. Nations arising from Imagined Spaces

In his essay, Timothy Brennan talks about the 'myths of the nation', which have multiple resonances in being interpreted as, "...myth as distortion or lie; myth as mythology, legend, or oral tradition; myth as literature..."(Brennan, 1990: 44-70). However, Malinowski opines that,

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<sup>21</sup> Janus, after whom January is named is the god of beginnings and transition in ancient Roman mythology and is two faced because he looks at both the past and future at the same time.

<sup>22</sup> Nation as an imagined community was coined by Anderson. Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities*. London: Verso and New Left Books, 1983.

<sup>23</sup> 'Nationalism's heroic narratives' is a term used by Timothy Brennan in his essay 'The National Longing for Form'. *Nation and Narration*. ed. Homi K. Bhabha. 1990, pg 44-70.

myth acts as a charter for the present-day social order; it supplies a retrospective pattern of moral values, sociological order, and magical belief, the function of which is to strengthen tradition and endow it with a greater value and prestige by tracing it back to a higher, better, more supernatural reality of initial events. (Worsley, 1964: 5).

Nations thus also arise out of ‘conditions of belonging’. Eric Hobsbawm (Hobsbawm, 1983) and Ranger too have opined that literary myths are also often creators of nations. Brennan points out rightly that the fetish for ‘Nation’ and ‘Nationalism’ gathered a tempo in the Third World fiction, post Second World War. Foucault further supports this by saying that the Nation is a “‘discursive formation’- not simply an allegory or imaginative vision, but a gestative political structure which the Third World artist is consciously building or suffering the lack of.” (Brennan, 1990: 46-47) Hence as suggested by Foucault, the trope of nationalism should be used to address concepts like ‘belonging’. If one stretches this concept of ‘belonging’ further to the concept of Nation in Diaspora literature, then one will perhaps also see that Gordon Lewis (Lewis, 1978: 304) terms [Diaspora] as ‘a colonialism in reverse’. (Brennan, 1990: 47). Thus when the postcolonialists go and start settling down in what may be called the ‘imperial centres’, then what are they equipped with is the language of colonial masters, with a local twang and cultural vocabulary and imagery. Actually the process of de-colonization perhaps never takes place fully; there’s always a re-location, a re-colonization taking place as contexts of belonging keep shifting. So, in our case of literally and metaphorically postcolonial women, who have been allegedly and often truly liberated from their male colonial masters, they then try to re-colonize the language used by male writers in fictional historiographies of the nation and add the vocabulary of their female experiences and imagery. There is thus an improvisation which takes place. Moreover, Nationalism is an ideology implying unequal opportunities and scope for development. Jose Carlos Mariategui<sup>24</sup> is of the opinion that, “the nation...is an abstraction, an allegory, a myth that does not correspond to a reality that can be scientifically defined.” (Brennan, 1990: 48) However Brennan thinks that, “Race, geography, tradition, language, size... seem finally insufficient for determining national essence, and yet people die for nations, fight wars for them and write fictions on their behalf.”

What is most interesting is when Ernest Gellner says, that, “Nationalism is not the awakening of nations to self-consciousness; it invents nations where they do not exist.” (Brennan, 1990: 50) It is from this imagined space that this article wishes to locate a narrative of the nation and to ascertain if this narrative of the nation can be conceived out of a woman’s experiences or not? Thus, I propose to use the culinary trope as an instance to determine whether ‘food’ could be one of those ‘imagined communities’ from where narratives of nation by the women can spring forth. One can look for the ways in which some women writers have re-cycled the form and structure of the male narratives of nation and made use of that ‘tradition’ in a way where ‘tradition... became a useable past’ as Hobsbawm says.

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<sup>24</sup> Jose Carlos Mariategui is a organizer of Quechua-speaking minority in 1920’s of Peru.



## 5. Do we need a Dialect of the Sexes ?

Schleiermacher had said that,

Only one language is firmly implanted in an individual...For every language is a particular mode of thought and what is cogitated in one language can never be repeated in the same way in another. (Kedourie, 1960:63)

Then it could justify the primary need for a vocabulary for portraying female experiences, in a female language and since food related activities of nourishing and cooking and serving have been traditionally allocated to the female hence it holds possibilities to offer itself to this new need for language and Brennan had also pointed out that,

it was in the novel that previously foreign languages met each other on the same terrain, forming an unsettled mixture of ideas and styles, themselves representing previously distinct peoples now forced to create the rationale for a common life. (Brennan, 1990: 49)

This heteroglossia, thus perhaps holds the key to a uniform and equidistant representation of the experiences of the sexes, because there cannot be one monolithic entity called monolingualism because there will be as many languages as there are countries, communities, religions, and sexes! Also, since language is not recognized only on the basis of its linguistic and scriptural qualities, it also always is recognized by the various garnishing of the culture, idioms, metaphors, religion and folkways of its people in its vocabulary. For example, some languages do not have the equivalent of certain words in their vocabulary simply because those objects and situations never entered their lived experiences. Similarly certain other languages and dialects like Dari<sup>25</sup> use antonymns as prefixes and like Hindi<sup>26</sup> and English, also use non-affirmatives as prefixes but they substitute it as the main vocabulary itself! Sometimes they use literal meanings and connotations and situations as taxonomical names<sup>27</sup> as their main vocabulary. Thus within the multiplicity of experiences, then, do we have a place within the nation's narrative for a female language? Is there space for a dialect of the sexes? Mikhail Bakhtin had remarked about the novel form that,

...the world becomes polyglot, once and for all and irreversibly. The period of national languages, coexisting but closed and deaf to each other, comes to an end...the naïve and stubborn co-existence of 'languages' within a given national language also comes to an end-that

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<sup>25</sup> Dari is a dialect of Persian, used in Afghanistan and is the second official language after Pashton. Dari is the Sassanid court language in Afghanistan and it has close similarities with another Persian dialect called Hazaragi, which is spoken mainly by Hazara ethnic groups from Hazarajat province in Afghanistan as well as those diasporics in Australia and America.

<sup>26</sup> Hindi is the most popularly spoken language in the Indian subcontinent.

<sup>27</sup> So, sometimes for languages and dialects such as these like Dari, a walnut is called *charmagh*, meaning four brains because the innards of the walnut indeed look like four brains! Persian calls a walnut as '*giridi*'. Similarly, after the Bamiyan niches in Afghanistan were detonated and the colossal Buddha's were destroyed in 2001 by Talibans, the local Hazaragi dialect taxonomically named the empty niches as '*na Buddha*', meaning 'no buddha' in Dari. Further, idolatry is called as '*botparast*', while idol-breaking is called, '*bot shikani*' and these words when broken are exactly literal meanings!

is, there are no more peaceful dialects and jargons, literary languages, generic languages within literary languages, epochs in language, and so on. (Bakhtin, 1981: 12)

And Brennan also seems critical of this continual splintering of the nation and its narratives into languages and says,

If languages imply nations, how many nations would eventually sprout from the hopeless polyglot entities...? If new collectivities are formed on a basis other than papal or dynastic authority, on what basis? How is a continual chaotic splintering to be prevented? (Brennan, 1990: 51)

Why such contentment with this linearity of religion and monarchy in narratives of nation-building? Regis Debray comments that,

[L]ike language, the nation is an invariable which cuts across modes of production...We should not become obsessed by the determinate historical form of the nation-state but try to see what that form is made out of. (Debray, 1977: 26)

But, this won't be too disheartening if one borrows from the federal character of some of the Nation states and emulate their distribution systems. Further, Bakhtin also says that,

Similarly, in modern times the flourishing of the novel is always connected with the decomposition of stable verbal and ideological systems, and, on the other hand, to the reinforcement of linguistic heterology and to its impregnation by intentions, within the literary dialect as well as outside of it. (Todorov, 1984: 58)

Walter Benjamin has pointed out the existing conflict between originally oral literature and those like the novel form which are institutionalized as forms for national creation. We need to ask what is the range of these oral literatures? Is it just restricted to the male bardic oral traditions of epics and folklore, or can it also incorporate the other forms of 'orality' like 'womanspeak', women's gossips and silences? Further, if licence allows one to connote the character of being 'oral'- lip-like to the female vagina, then can we also have 'vaginal monologues'<sup>28</sup> and just so with the possibility of 'motherspeaks', 'mammary monologues' and milk-narratives? Nevertheless, to return back to the issue of duality and conflict in constructing narratives of nation through lives of its female citizens, Walter Benjamin has found yet another point that there is a conflict between the communal and the individual experiences. (Benjamin, 1969: 87) This will then become another of the fulcrum points of our discussion as we proceed on to see the Nation as the communal space as has been 'traditionally' and patriarchally been set, and try to perforate it with the individual and personal experiences, narratives, histories of the women and nudge enough to create a space for us within the framework itself.

## 6. Women inside Masculinized Memories: Women in Discourses on Nation?

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<sup>28</sup> *The Vagina Monologues* is an episodic play written by [Eve Ensler](#), in 1996. And was staged at the [Off Broadway Westside Theatre](#) and it posits the vagina as a tool of female empowerment, and the ultimate embodiment of individuality. <http://www.randomhouse.com/features/ensler/vm/qna.html>

In her essay Sylvia Walby points out that the gender question is rarely discussed in literatures on nations and nationalism. She gives an interesting and much needed relationship between nation and gender, that of citizenship which brings to question that looking at the narratives of nation from which women as narrator-craftsmen are missing, then in our case study is it suggesting that these narratives are written and controlled by a patriarchal world order? And hence are they not considering the female subjects as citizens of the Nation-state? Then can any narration-creation of a nation be complete without the participation of its subjects from all genders? Can the national construction thus remain whole unbiased in such exclusionist projects? So, what kind of gender relations are we having under the protégé of the nation? In the contemporary context one can perhaps agree with Walby's observation that, 'there is patriarchy or there is not.' (Walby, 1996: 235-254) But the question also arises as to what degrees are the women involved with national processes in the first place. Walby lists Yuval-Davis's work on the ways in which women get involved in it and it is,

as biological reproducers of members of ethnic collectivities; as reproducers of the boundaries of ethnic/ national groups; as participating centrally in the ideological reproduction of the collectivity and as transmitters of its culture; 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; as participants in national, economic, political and military struggles. (Arthias, Yuval-Davis, 1989)

However, it is quite evident that the word 'reproducer' is being used to cloaking for the women, extending their biological role further into all other realms. This can be used as a tool by the contemporary women writers in our context of study who will use what they have, their Body and ingrained skills and intuition with food to write about Nation themselves now, and not just let men write the nation on their bodies. Jayawardena's observations on the significance of feminist demands in the shaping of nationalist demands were because the, " ...the feminists were active in pushing for the emancipation of women in the Third World nationalist movements at the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth centuries" and also opines that "women's emancipation movements were conducted in the context of nationalist struggles".(Jayawardena, 1986) Her important observation was that imperialism and capitalism were catalysts in pushing towards women's emancipation at the same time as nationalistic claims for independence were being made. Enloe however suggests that, "nationalism has typically sprung from masculinized memory, masculinized humiliation and masculinized hope." (Enloe, 1986:44) Certainly to some extent most accounts of national history, violence during national and communal struggles written by men did portray horrifying narratives of women being raped and violated and tortured and humiliated during the Partition of India-Pakistan and also during the War of 1971 between Bangladesh and Pakistan, and similarly countless other times when wars are fought and women are raped, as the act of rape was metaphorically superimposed upon the body of the nation. But perhaps more than the women, some of these narratives were more about the horrors, trauma, shame and humiliation of those male witnesses of these atrocities on women; the feelings were mostly of those men to whom those violated women 'belonged' as wife, sister and daughters, hence it was also the collective humiliation, shame and horror of the patriarchy. These would be those narratives which

perhaps one can call portraying ‘masculinized memories’, because, very few of those violated women survived the trauma to narrate their stories and those who had survived were in such trauma and shock that they couldn’t relive those memories. And as Shumona Dasgupta (Dasgupta, 2011: 30-41) will prove in her essay that some of the survivors were eliminated from the living history because they were violated women and had no place in patriarchal societies. This genre of literature of the nation/woman being ravished and their trauma and oppression resembles another kind of Scar Literature<sup>29</sup> in the Third World. “Masculinity and the male body have played a significant role in the discursive articulation of nationalism in the Indian public sphere” (Daiva, 2010) and as Kavita Daiva has pointed out that, in the literature of the 1947 Partition, men as gendered subjects become “symbolic national icons; through their suffering masculinities, they index the violence of both colonialism and elite nationalism” (Dasgupta, 2011: 30-41).

Often women’s presence in some of these Partition and War narratives is acknowledged in merely “action and labour in the interest of the male subject of history, or in the service of mobilizing the national collective” (Dasgupta, 2011: 30-41). Walby reinforces Enloe’s point by saying that “nationalist movements have often grown out of men’s rather than women’s experiences” (Walby, 1996: 235-254) and this is thus another of the launching pads from which one can disembark on a journey to see how the contemporary women writers seek to add a feminine touch to the national memory and to thus ‘feminize Memory’ with female experiences and female language which had been missing from national communal memory. Enloe, suggests that,

nationalisms would be different if women’s experiences were foregrounded in the building of this culture and project...if this were to happen, then the nature of the relations between states, and the international order itself, might be different: if more nation-states grew out of feminist nationalists’ ideas and experiences, community identities within the international political system might be tempered by cross-national identities. (Enloe, 2011)

Walby places a very inevitable question that, “to what extent do women share the same national projects as men?”<sup>30</sup> and she also defines that national project connotes to the ‘range of collective strategies oriented towards the perceived needs of a nation which include nationalism, but may include others,’ (Walby, 1996: 241) and it will be our effort here to seek the range of this, ‘others’ also along with determining of the female intentions and loyalties in national projects. Walby shortlists one main reason as to why men and women have different reactions and affiliations towards the national project is embedded in the unequal gender relations. She lists three common ways in which gender relations are understood; that there is patriarchy or no patriarchy; there is only one main form of gender relation and the differences are trivial; the range of different practices is so great that every instance is unique, hence theorizations cannot take place. She rejects all three relations and taking an intermediate stance says,

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<sup>29</sup> Scar Literature or literature of the wounded was a literary genre in Chinese literary scene which emerged after the death of [Mao Zedong](#) in 1970’s and depicted the physical and psychological trauma suffered by the Chinese during the Cultural Revolution.

[http://contemporary.chinese.culture.academic.ru/674/Scar\\_literature](http://contemporary.chinese.culture.academic.ru/674/Scar_literature)

<sup>30</sup> Sylvia Walby, ‘Woman and Nation’, in *Mapping the Nation*. ed. Gopal Balakrishnan. New York and London: New Left Review. 1996. Pg. 241.

the development of middle-range concepts is an important part of the sociological enterprise,...and there are differences in the forms of gender relations...the solution to this problem is to theorize gender relations as composed of analytically separable structures. They are six: household production, employment, the state, violence, sexuality and culture. (Walby, 1996: 243)

What comes across as a very useful observation in Walby's study is that two forms of patriarchy emerge from this discourse.

Private patriarchy is characterized by the domination of the patriarchal relations in the household...[and] the mode of expropriation of the woman is individual, by the woman's husband or father...[and] the dominant strategy can be characterized as exclusionary, as women are excluded from activities in the public domain, and thereby constrained to the domestic. (Walby, 1996: 242-243)

While the other form of patriarchy is the public patriarchy, which is, "dominated by employment and the state, ...[ and where the mode of expropriation] is collective, by many men acting in common...[and] the dominant strategy is segregationist hereby women are allowed to enter all spheres, but segregated and subordinated there." (Walby, 1996: 242-243) As Walby observes that women have greater commitment to international peace and cooperation than to militaristic nationalism and thereafter, now springs forth a barrage of questions.

Are women as committed to national...projects as men? Is their project the same one as men's? Do women's nationalist...and other large-scale social projects have the same, or more global, or more local boundaries than those of men? Does women's greater non-violence have an effect upon their view of the 'national project', in that they are less prepared to pursue nationalist goals by force than men? Does this then make them appear less nationalistic, in that they are less prepared to use a particular means of pursuing that goal, and does that mean that they are actually less nationalistic? That is, is women's lesser militarism a cause of lesser nationalism? Or does it mean that women support a different nationalism? (Walby, 1996: 243)

One common sensical answer to these questions would be that if women's interests were covered in the agenda of the national projects, then it would definitely ensure maximum and much enthused female participation! Virginia Woolf had said, "As a woman I have no country: as a woman I want no country. As a woman my country is the whole world."(Woolf, 2012)

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