Imagining Indian Nation-State: Rereading Qurratulain Hyder's Select Novels in Contemporary Scenario

Sk Sagir Ali
Midnapore College (Autonomous), West Bengal, India

Research Fellow(remote), University of Religions and Denominations (URD), Pardisan, Qom, IslamicRepublic of Iran.

Abstract

Given the contemporary hyper-nationalist ambience in the Indian subcontinent, the reading of Qurratulain Hyder is significant, especially from the decolonial nationalist perspective of her select translated Urdu novels.The paper examines the events and metaphors in both novels (*River of Fire* and *My Temples, Too*) through a decolonial and transmodern lens.This approach entails establishing a relationship between history and human experience. Additionally, the paper suggests a more intricate connection between modernity and the manifold cultural aspects of the Nation-State while acknowledging the "essential ambivalence within the system of differences" as discussed by Laclau (1996, 38) as well as its impact on various disciplinary frameworks. It examines religion, culture and ethnicity in pre-modern India as a more permeable affair with the proponent of an inclusive, tolerant Indian culture, where several nations, worldviews and religions come together, reconcile, inter-marry, break up, and grow apart under the emergence of nationalist consciousness. The paper also interrogates the question of ethnicity as propounded by the Modernist Nation-state, and attempts to understand how the question of ethnic origins is debunked in the novels of Qurratulain Hyder via a cosmopolitan precolonial turn.

Keywords: Qurratulain Hyder, Communal Trauma, Ambivalence, Nation-State, Decolonial, Ethnicity.

Introduction

This study explores Qurratulain Hyder's novels against the backdrop of the current climate of religious intolerance and majoritarian populism. It achieves this by framing her literary contributions within the framework of decolonial poetics and premodernist cosmopolitan historiography, thereby challenging the monolithic conception of the nation-state, its claims of ethnic homogeneity, and religious uniformity. A primary focus of this research is to present Hyder's work as a deliberate endeavor to construct a decolonial cosmopolitan historical

narrative. Decoloniality, in this context, is a multifaceted theoretical and practical framework that critically engages with the enduring legacies and structures of colonialism. It emphasizes the need to dismantle entrenched colonial ideologies, hierarchies, and epistemologies that continue to shape contemporary socio-cultural landscapes. Decoloniality does not merely highlight historical injustices; it interrogates the ongoing manifestations of coloniality in various domains, from academia to policymaking. By incorporating decoloniality, this study not only aims to debunk the myth of singular origins and the prevailing idea of exclusive nationalist identity but also delves deeper into the intricate dynamics of ethnicity. It underscores the nuanced mosaic of precolonial ethnic diversity and its syncretic impact on our nationalist narrative. Through the lens of decoloniality, this research sheds light on the multifaceted dimensions of identity and belonging, emphasizing the importance of recognizing and valuing diverse knowledge systems, histories, and experiences within a decolonized framework.

Qurratulain Hyder (1927–2007) divested Urdu literature of its fixation with the world of romance and fantasy, moving instead to the convincing texture of decolonized realism from religious and sociopolitical perspectives with the evocation of an unceasing stream of thoughts that emanate from her characters. In her first novel, *Mere bhi sanamkhane* (*My Temples, Too*) which appeared in 1947, and in the1959 magnum opus *Aag ka Darya* (self-translated in 1998 as *River of Fire*), Hyder with effective *raison dêtre* and streams of the characters' thoughts builds up a cohesive picture of subcontinental ethos using innovative techniques of narration and great plasticity of language only to provide the nationalist experience with a syncretic ethos under the affective realm of a split religious and national identity. She combines a large array of resources and materials, including letters and personal anecdotes, to justify the subjective authenticity of expression in opposition to the objective rigidity of thought espoused by political blocs. This often entails the exposure of spaces of convergence and confluence where

dominant discourses of religious politics render them invisible. This comprises the expressive and representational elasticity of her narrative. Though her novels encompass historical periods and dynasties and contain recurring themes of Hindu-Muslim religious violence under the backdrop of the partition of India and Pakistan, they chronicle the Nation-State's healthy cultural merging in order to express a cultural space greater than a nation. Rather, the latter is an entity that is produced under specific historical conditions and contexts, and the cultural space that exceeds such time-bound constructs and thus precedes the nation are the main frames of his works. It examines religion and culture in premodern India as a more permeable affair with the proponent of an inclusive, tolerant Indian culture, where several nations, worldviews, and religions come together, reconcile, inter-marry, break up, and grow apart under the emergence of nationalist consciousness.

Qurratulain Hyder and the Poetics of Discontent in the Post-Partition Era

Qurratulain Hyder, a prominent figure in Urdu fiction within the Indian subcontinent, transcends religious discourse in her novels *River of Fire* (1998) and *My Temples, Too* (2004). She incorporates temporal and spatial discontents as delineated by Bakhtin, which encapsulate the essence of "real historical time and place." (Bakhtin 1981,84). Born in Aligarh, Uttar Pradesh, in 1927, Hyder vividly portrays the landscape of colonial India's communal violence, exclusionary processes, cartographical segregation, and forceful separations, effectively sketching the literary panorama of the Partition and the nationalist dialogues of twentieth-century India. These two texts are profoundly intertwined with the contemporary milieu of India and the broader subcontinent, marked by an inflated sense of nationalism and a revival of colonial norms, consequently neglecting the interstitial spaces that could foster relational harmony among inherently disparate and incongruent constructs. This neglect culminates in the erosion of what Sukrita Paul Kumar argues as the "composite culture in India against the backdrop of the Partition of the subcontinent" (Kumar 2002, 87). Hyder's construction of a

"synthesized past based on an alternative historiography" (Nandi 2012, 279) creates a distinctive niche, seeking to unravel the cultural influences of a cosmopolitan colonial nation-state rife with growing tensions of "differentiated solidarity" (Young 2000, 224). This solidarity entails collective praxis centered on individualized concerns, without an inherent impetus to converge into alignment with other concerns, mirroring the original premise. It navigates the possibilities of spatial structures of exclusion to relegate the cultural differences of community clustering fraught with the stigmatising discourses and practices to a "cultural space larger than a nation." (Sangari 2005, 35) The days of the Raj under the British imperial frameworks and the pan-Indian syncretism of the Mughals in Hyder's treatment absorbs the ethos of Indian syncretism and the chronicle of Partition that Asaduddin presents as "the disorientation of a people who, for no fault of their own found themselves strangers in the country of their birth one fine morning" (Asaduddin 1991, 85) The utopian possibilities of interpreting space and time in *River of Fire* and *My Temples, Too*, through the lens of the oral tradition of *dastan* (epic romance), paradoxically harbour an underlying dystopian culture. This reflects the fragmented nature of the postcolonial nation-state, influenced by concepts like the "coloniality of power" and the "decoloniality of knowledge." (Dube 2019, xvi).

In *River of Fire*, Qurratulain Hyder interrogates the human consciousness and the ruptures of time through the fictional/actual events unfolding in four different phases of Indian history: the Magadhan period, the Sultanate period, the British period, and post-partition period, with the characters of Gautam Nelimbar, Hari Shankar, Abul Mansoor Kamaluddin, and Champa. From the fourth century BC to the 1950s within the text, Qurratulain Hyder's construction of historical narrative relies on the technique of "emplotment", as outlined by Robinson (2011, X). This approach involves weaving a sequence of historical events to interpret the core of discursive practices surrounding the Partition of 1947. The repeated use of the same character names across different reincarnations stands as evidence of syncretism and

the interlacing of their stories. This contributes to the collective concept of syncretism, a theme absent from official narratives across various historical epochs. In this context, the notion of "Ganga-Jamuni culture" endures as an uninterrupted representation of syncretism through the centuries (Jalil 2011,10). This representation highlights the intricate relationship between religious beliefs and the formation of Indian identity, resonating among both men and women within the nation-state. In a contextual passage in the novel, the narratorial voice observes,

> *How much can one know?* The nawab had quoted Sauda. How would Gautam know about the Urdu poets Sauda, Mir, Nazir and Insha and the overtly political poetry they had written after the rise of British power in India? Or Mus-hafi, who had openly said in a couplet: "How cunningly the Firangis have taken away the glory and wealth of Hindustan!" Who had heard of them in Britain? Lord Byron could sing of the Isles of Greece, stir the West and go off to fight the Terrible Turk. The Greeks were admired for their War of Independence, but 1857 was condemned as the native rebels' mutiny.' (Hyder 1998, 227)

The dialogue between Gautam Narayan Dutt and Nawab Kamman not only presents a comprehensive overview of the events in Awadh and other areas during the 1857 incidents but also constructs a discursive framework for understanding the various moments and locations that shaped those narratives. Functioning as an attentive listener, Gautam's perspective within the imperial discourse fluctuates between an inherent alignment with the contours of colonial modernity and a significant connection with Nawab Kamman. (228) This dynamic interaction introduces questions without censorious constraints, influenced by the notions of Western enlightenment. The distinct approaches of Gautam Nilambar in the Ancient era, Kamaluddin in the Medieval period, Cyril Ashley/Gautam Nilambar Dutt/Nawab Kamman in the British era, and Kamal Reza in the Modern period, along with the telescopic view of recurring patterns, the repetition of character names, and symbols like dreams, coins, and rivers, all contribute to

the discourse. (231) While these multifaceted discourses interact and dynamically engage with each other influenced by colonialism, a pivotal dimension of this interplay resides in its reference to a transmodern past of the subcontinent. Transmodernity, in this context, signifies a conceptual framework that transcends the limitations of both modernity and tradition. It represents an alternative cosmopolitan vision that challenges the reductive narratives propagated by colonial modernity and its associated paradigms. Transmodernity emphasizes the fusion of diverse cultural, philosophical, and epistemological traditions, advocating for a more inclusive and holistic understanding of history and identity. It underscores the interconnectedness of global histories, while also recognizing the unique contributions and perspectives of marginalized voices and communities. By invoking transmodernity, this discourse seeks to reimagine and reconstruct narratives that reflect the rich complexity and pluralism inherent in the subcontinent's historical and cultural landscape.

Cosmopolitan Precoloniality and the Search for Ethnic Origins

Hyder's juxtaposing of "history, fiction and parable" with "multiple narratives" and "multiple epistemologies" in sketching out the shift from the Sultanate period to the advent of Europeans in India (Taj 2009,196) with the socio-cultural moorings from 1939 onwards functions to ensure a stable resistance to the colonial gaze. The caste-ridden society of *Shravasti*, *bhikshus* and sages, a planet of princes and princesses with Buddhist and Brahmanic religiosity, and the future theories of India— "roop and aroop, form and formlessness, bhav and abhav" (Hyder, 1998, 60) rhizomed to create complicated patterns of symbiosis and relationships. The myriad *gharanas* within the realm of Hindustani classical music, intertwined with the intricate tapestry of Islamic historiography, intersect with the arrival of Syed Kamaluddin Hyder in India. His lively scholarly pursuits in the culturally vibrant city of Jaunpur, along with the fusion of Indian and Islamic cultural elements, are firmly rooted in the depicted scene, painted with compelling detail.

> The Muslim thread was present in every pattern of Indian tapestry—was all this going to be erased by the demand for Pakistan? The thought disturbed old nationalists like Asad Mamoo. Young people had dreams of their own of a socialist India.The Urdu press called Sarojini Naidu Bulbul-i-Hind–Nightingale of India. The Nizam's government had done a lot for women's education – Sarojini Naidu was one of those sent to England on a state scholarship. She became a firebrand Congress leader, but at the same time was emotionally loyal to the Nizam – so how could India be defined in general terms? Human allegiance is complex and unfathomable. No Hindu-Muslim rift in the princely states – the problem is characteristic of post-1857 British India. Jaipur and Gwalior, both Hindu states, have the most spectacular Moharrum celebrations, patronised by the Maharajas. (Hyder, 1998, 314)

The intricacies of the second movement, where Hindu-Muslim cultural elements blend, culminate with heightened precision in the third movement. This progression signifies a seamless transition of cultural fusion leading to the refined essence of the subsequent movement – "faery tale kingdom" of Oudh (178). The final movement embodies what is referred to as the "Indo-Muslim lifestyle," comprising a blend of "Persian-Turki-Mughal and regional Rajput Hindu cultures." This movement, in its entirety, constructs the essence of what is denoted as "Indianness" (310). The Muslim League starts questioning this defined "Indianness" as Kamal confirms that, there be "no alternate India" – where, everybody is referred to as bhaiya, chacha, dada – a "big self-contained joint-family, sub-divided based on caste. Muslims are merely another caste. There is no inter-dining, but this taboo is considered part of tradition. No religious rancour. Upper caste Hindus do not dine with the lower castes of their own community, either" (310). However, the biases and divisiveness of the Muslim League and Hindu Mahasabha reach a climax with the Partition as a Maharashtrian pandit of Shastriya Sangeet and an Ustad who gives a concert belong to two "different civilizations" and the "new business of Culture" is reinterpreted as "pure Hindu" or "pure Muslim" by the Mahasabha and the Muslim League. (313)

By employing alternative rhizomatic historical connections, combined with an all-encompassing and syncretic Indian culture and ethos, Hyder's delineation of the tissues of traditions and chronicles navigates the formations of the historicised legacies of the complex nature of the cultural landscape of the Indian nation-state during the period of colonisation. While an alternative discursive locus already exists in Indian history, colonial modernity works to create a collective amnesia and builds itself on binarized fixities that are at odds with the former. In the context of coexisting conflict and religious diversity from 1942 to 1947, Hyder's literary work commemorates the process of "decolonization and Independence" (Ahmed 2000, 118).

This celebration carries a sense of accomplishment, which, as per Aijaz Ahmed's viewpoint, is entwined with the "anguish linked to the Partition" (118), while simultaneously not lacking anti-colonial sentiment or nationalist consciousness. He further claims, "The moment of decolonization itself is experienced in the whole range of Urdu literature of the period not in a celebratory mode but as a defeat, a disorientation, a diaspora" (118). Taking a cue from Faiz Ahmed Faiz, the search for the "promised Dawn" (Faiz,1996) is ultimately made futile by the process of limited decolonization as the political shift in sovereignty while it's cultural standards remain deeply colonized by a false consciousness of segregated identities. At the end of the novel when Hari says that Kamal has deserted, "betrayed" them, and gone away for "good" only to let them down, and they together could have "challenged the galaxies", Gautam retorts, "We have all betrayed one another," "Can these western visitors to Shravasti understand the pain in our souls? In India's, in Kamal's, in mine?" (Hyder, 1998, 569). The hermeneutic lens of the socio-cultural mosaic in the *River of Fire* finds its strategies to redefine nationalism by making it an anticolonial struggle. As Partha Chatterjee contends in *The Nation and Its Fragments* (1993), although the idea of individuality in anti-colonial and nationalist discourses in colonized countries mimicked the ways of colonial modernity, it nevertheless

gave way to newer hybrid spaces for radical subject formations. The colonial rule of India with its lack of democratic structures and modern institutions characterizing the post-Enlightenment Europe behooves the notion of the national self with the need of an Indian modernity.

Within the novel, the process of delving into the past through the lens of state-defined identity is perceived by each character as a fleeting temporal experience of a lost era. This past proves elusive in its reenactment within the modern social context, thereby unsettling the very essence of their existence. The novel commences and concludes with the haunting questions of "who the hell am I?" (Hyder 1998, 568) and the metaphor of the river of change. This river represents the shifting concept of citizenship during the partition, laden with an inherent tension of belonging and adherence to the nation-state. These elements contribute to the disillusionment with nationalism, eventually leading to its failure. As Faisal Devji astutely identifies, this highlights the agency-related framework of the nation-state,

> Insofar as partition is problematized at all, it is done so as a "horror" which cannot be grasped by a narrative, or as "a mindless cycle of violence." And this simply removes the event from normality and history both by withholding rational agency from its participants, and by separating it from one's own narrative reason. It is the nation's disclaiming of responsibility for its own actions—its dehistoricization of the event into something uniquely elemental. (Devji, 1992, 16-17)

Religious Syncretism and the Uncanny of the Modern Nation-state

Qurrutalain Hyder examines the seriousness of "communal solidarity" (Dasgupta, 2021,58) and the *sui generis* of ethnicity in *My Temples, Too* with the social betrayals and historical tragedies resulting from the discourse around Partition in the Indian subcontinent. The rigid and undifferentiated forms of representation reflect an essentialist nationalist historiography, where notable gaps persist regarding the various disruptions that shape the imbalanced narratives of

the events preceding the partition. This is especially evident in the context of Indian soldiers who, following their participation in the Second World War on behalf of the Empire, returned home. Their experiences gesture towards fragmented aspects that defy assimilation into any fixed "metaphysical" framework assumed to represent an unvaried historical reality. This challenges the notion of an absolute history, often mythologized, that surrounds the formation of the nation-state. Drawing from a couplet by Iqbal to imagine the title of her novel, *Tere bhi sanamkhaney, mere bhi sanamkhane/Donon ke sanam khaki, donon ke sanam fani* (You have your temples, as I have mine/Both of them have clay idols, both equally perishable) (Hyder, 2004, 2-3), Hyder showcases the communal nationalism of the great Ganga Jamuni *tehzib* that the literary critic Abdul Mughni describes as *Mere bhi Sanamkhaney* —"an entire generation's tragedy" (Mughni, 1990, 29). Set in Lucknow during the years 1945-1947, *My Temples, Too* focuses on the Karwaha Raj family which is part of the *taluqdaars* (landholders) of the North Indian Muslim elite. The novel revolves around a young lady of Muslim aristocracy, Rajkumari Rakshanda Ifran Ali and her family home, Ghufran Manzil, in Lucknow. Rajkumari Rakshanda and her close associates— the successors of the Awadhi Nawabi culture of poetry, music, and arts, are feudal landowners and English schooled Nehruvian secularists. Though a Shia Muslim and returned from a pilgrimage to holy sites in Iraq, Rajkumari Rakshanda takes on the title of "Rajkumari"- the Princess, as "The kings of Oudh knew nothing about the Two-Nation Theory, nor had their people acquired political consciousness" (Hyder 2004,130). The kings of Oudh and nawabs used to offer Hindu titles to their Muslim feudatory noblemen and Rakshanda is the mantle bearer of these barons. Rakshanda's father, Kunwar Irfan Ali while reciting Urdu poetry with his Hindu Taluqdar friends, imagines himself as a solid rock of the "Old Order" which believes intensely in an integrated India in this new world of "pedagogues and professional politicians" (51). Over time, Rakshanda and her companions gradually unravel their conflicting perception of a unified India. Syed Iftikhar, who disapproves the "subversive

influence" (18) of *The New Era*—the magazine that Rakshanda publishes, is an impassioned supporter of Partition and the Muslim League. He finds the nationalist Muslims as "mistaken" and as "[self-] deluding" as the Congress, the representative of Hindu interests (25). As the vortex of events exhibits the flare of "communalism" by eschewing the syncretic *Ganga-Jamni* (Indo-Muslim) culture, Ayesha Jalal, a famed scholar examines "communalism" as a distorted inquiring trope which hardly recognises the Hindu-Muslim dynamics in colonial India. Jalal postulates that the Morely-Minto Reforms of 1909 which shape autonomous electorates for Muslims were "a momentous step", (Jalal 1998,7) which provides Muslims the status of an all-India political category but one effectively consigned to being a perpetual minority in any scheme of constitutional reforms. The structural contradiction between communally compartmentalized electorates and the localization and provincialization of political horizons was to have large consequences for India's regionally differentiated, economically disparate, and ideologically divided Muslims and, by extension, for Congress's agendas of inclusionary and secular nationalism. (Jalal 1998,7) The separation of domains as chalked out by the electorate system symbolized the inculcation of a certain consciousness of separation thereby being an apt exemplar of material/political construction of the mental/ideal in India. It might be argued that Hyder's *My Temples, Too* attempts to relinquish the binary between "secular" and "religious" as well as "communalism" and "nationalism",

> The majoritarian premises of Indian and Pakistani 'nationalism' derive equally from the colonial project of religious enumeration. While Indian nationalism asserts its inclusionary idioms in the secular garb and Pakistani nationalism in an inclusionary religious mode, neither avoids the pernicious process of exclusion resulting from the implicit denial of difference. It is the singular and homogenizing agendas of both nation-states which have wittingly or unwittingly created the space for religious bigots seeking political power to target vulnerable minorities (18).

The Shifting Paradigms of a Transcolonial Community

Hyder's novel stands as a significant counterpoint to the colonial mindset that lurks within expressions of anti-colonial and postcolonial nationalisms. It serves as a profound lesson in the genuine decolonization of consciousness. Hyder's deliberate effort to engage with the complexities of society, including palpable communal divisions, and the divergent narratives of cultural histories, underscores the paradoxes embedded in divisive markers and the erosion of trust. Her depiction of the Partition delves into the weighty communal legacy of violence, entwined with the dominant practice of othering within the framework of religious nationalism. The way Hyder depicts the hegemonic narratives of communal separation, along with their theoretical underpinnings, unveils a postcolonial reiteration of these discourse standards, akin to the unabashed mimicry of their colonial predecessors.

Although Syed Iftikhar, the editor of the Muslim League's newspaper, aligns with the idea of Pakistan, he is resolute in remaining within India as an outsider in the aftermath of the Partition. Unfortunately, his own Muslim community does not offer support. As he seeks to affirm his loyalty to India by meeting with Congress leader Pandit Govindballabh Pant, his acknowledgment is met with rejection, illustrating the predicament of Indian Muslims who find themselves caught between conflicting nationalistic sentiments. The ensuing dialogue between a Muslim who has long opposed Partition and the disheartened Syed Iftikhar underscores that the process of decolonization is entangled with conceptualizations largely derived from the colonizer's conscious effort to establish a binary representation of two cultures, rather than recognizing the intricate and interconnected patterns that characterized pre-colonial relationships:

> You demanded it, did you not? Hindus are going to pay you back in the same coin. That particular feudal culture that you wanted to preserve doesn't exist in the place where

> Pakistan has come into being. It was the peculiar product of this area, and…" "But the country of Pakistan ..." Syed Iftikhar would argue – "Pakistan, my dear sir, is not a country, it is a state of mind. You must go there if you cannot reconcile to the new set-up. You cannot live here and have divided loyalties…" (Hyder 2004,144)

The concept of nationhood and suspicions of loyalty are inherently linked to the essence of modernity. The dichotomy between "us" and "them" within Indian nationalism during the late 1940s instigated a shift from inclusive nationalism to a delineation between Hindu/India and Muslim/foreigner. This divide, termed as a "conceptual split" (Pandey 1999, 621), underscores the intertwined nature of colonial power dynamics and the creation of colonial distinctions. The underlying notion that "Hindus are the true Indians" while Muslims are regarded with uncertainty and subjected to trials (621) emerges from a set of purely cognitive considerations that gather simultaneous insights about colonial subjects, without delving into their sequential dynamics and histories. The examination of Muslim citizens' loyalty in India, as Gyanendra Pandey points out, leans towards transforming the equation of "the nation = the people" into "the nation = the state." Pandey further explains,

> Loyalty to the nation – the most generally touted test of true, unquestioned citizenship becomes loyalty to an already existing state and the interests of that state… the test of loyalty is in fact required only of those who are not "real," "natural" citizens. Neither of these concepts – that of the real citizen, nor that of loyalty to the nation-state is as neutral as it appears. (611)

To him, no nation-state is "natural" and no citizens are "pure" as they might claim to be, rather, they are at the same time Hindu, Muslim, Bengali, Kannadiga, shopkeeper, laborer, man, woman, father, mother, lower caste and upper caste. Within the framework of colonial governance, expressions of pluriversality are intentionally omitted from the dominion of colonial authority, achieved through strategies that enforce uniform identities. This results in

the formation of segmented identity subjects and modernity that aligns with the colonial agenda.

Hyder, in *My Temples, Too,* puts forth the cultural memory from inclusive elements of coexistence and of perceived enmity as well as resonances that testify to suffering within a widespread mood of nationalist euphoria. Amid the observance of the Iranian new year, Nauroz, by individuals hailing from various religious affiliations, the staff at Ghufran Manzil, Kunwar Irfan's palace, partake in the festivities much like their own celebration of Holi – a spring festival held in March characterized by the playful application of local colors on acquaintances and passers-by. Even Muslim women employ vermilion for the (Iranian) festival: "There were big feasts, the chandeliers and lotus-shaped lamps were lit, and the servant-girls threw coloured water on each other. They had waited all year for the day when they could drench Peechu and Polu Bhaiya with red and green water" (Hyder, 2004, 52). But, later on, Hyder portrays the riots in which Peechu dies in a lament that compares such events to wars and strife in Europe: "But you see, all this happens in abnormal circumstances… Revolutions and wars and civil strifes …Look at what happened in Europe just two years earlier" (165). At the end of the novel, communal strife renders people vulnerable and they are targeted wherever they form a minority. To prevent this, they erase the nameplates from their houses and struggle to pass off as Hindus when they are attacked on trains and in the streets. After the communal riots, a Sikh Captain, whose erstwhile family was assassinated, finds Polu and Rakhshanda on the same train he is on and as he thinks of revenge, he notices something like a brass *lota.* He is perplexed as their suitcases are marked as the Rajkumar and Rajkumari of Karwaha Raj. The questions of identity, citizenship, language, culture, and belonging with a supposedly homogeneous Indian nationalism resurface and the text refers to "a new India and the fifth largest Muslim state in the world" (165). The independence of the Indian subcontinent, according to Faisal Devji, divulges the notion of the "unachieved" nationalism, as this sense of

potential failure acts in two ways. First, if one focuses on the European ideal of liberal democracy, Indian nationalism appears to be successful as it does not engage in the Enlightenment "teleology" of progress; and secondly, if Indian Muslims embody a "fundamental anxiety of nationalism" (Devji, 1992, 1) because of their alleged concomitant association with the Pakistani Muslims, nationalism may appear as "unachieved" as there is a loophole in the representation of India as a democratic nation-state. With the palpable non presence of Muslims, Indian nationalism succour to the anxiety of the "nationalist hegemony" (6). The apprehension felt by Indian Muslims epitomizes the fragmented essence of the Indian nation-state, reflecting a yearning for autonomy in regions like Kashmir, Assam, and various other parts of the nation.

Hyder's troubled realization in her two novels, *My Temples, Too* and *River of Fire,* can be compared to limitations of authentic decolonization in contemporary Indian nationalist discourses in which the loyalty of Muslims to the Indian nation-state has always been questioned. Muslims under the governance of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's right-wing Bharatiya Janata Party are required to showcase their allegiance to India. This demand for loyalty is based on a sweeping narrative that often conceals its true intention under the guise of national authenticity. The depiction of the past in Hyder's novels seems to verge on mythification, suggesting the existence of numerous identities when viewed from a contemporary standpoint. This representation starkly contrasts with the monopolistic grasp that the present holds over the historical interpretation of "communal consciousness" (Jalal 1998, 8). Such a discourse continues to thrive in the collective consciousness beyond the colonial enterprise. Muslim nationalism which resulted in the formation of Pakistan "serves to name a political form in which nationality is defined by the rejection of an old land for a new, thus attenuating the historical role that blood and soil play in the language of Old World nationalism" (Devji 2013, 3). Muslim citizens, united by their shared religious convictions and

the overlapping boundaries of faiths, grapple with continual questioning that diminishes their experiences to an everyday battle centred around insignificantly distinctive markers within a modest and non-exclusive social framework. The received notion of Indian Muslims' perceived "otherness" unsettles the modality of colonial domination's long history of negotiation with the psychological fear of the "other", the room for acceptance and assimilation within the tremendous fortitude to survive the Partition. Hyder's representation of polarised religious manifestation transcends the genealogical construction of Partition in relation to belonging, home, and territorial "ambiguity for residents of both territories vis-à-vis their specific psychological understanding of homeliness. In the novel, *My Temples, Too,* Peechu, the Hindu friend of the Muslim IPS officer, hears the doleful conversation of his colleagues: "Lahore is safe for you, you know. I personally think you should finally opt for Pakistan. Delhi is safe for us, we are Indian and you are Pakistani. Our national language is Hindi, yours is Urdu ... We wear a top-knot on our heads, you are beefeaters. We are two separate nations, divided by beef and topknots" (Hyder 2004,164). The exclusionary practice within the discourses of nationhood and belonging defines the space of "ambivalence" where the "us" and "them" binary endlessly binds the colonial and modern subject in tandem.

Beyond the Modernist Nation-state: A Community of Differential Solidarity

Qurratulain Hyder engages deeply in portraying an extraordinary emotional partition marked by resilience and fortitude, aiming to restore harmony across lines of distinction. She navigates this treacherous terrain, marked predominantly by vulnerability, which unveils the horrors stemming from the symptomatic manifestation of extreme violence. Through her chosen novels, Hyder serves as a testament, providing a vivid account of the dual nature of the cataclysmic Partition. Hyder's narratives bring to the forefront a critical examination of conventional attributions, revealing the stark costs of the loss of coexistence and "differential solidarity." These narratives succinctly explore the impact of processes like the "coloniality of

power" and post-colonial nation-building. By dissecting the intricacies and complications of suppressing differences during colonial rule, Hyder effectively dismantles the construct of nation/homeland/belonging. In doing so, she reimagines the narrative of nationhood through the lens of religious and cultural repercussions during the Partition era.

While the ideological construction of a modern postcolonial nation-state rested upon many of the *a priori* categorical imperatives of colonial modernity and the ways it structured and manifested its biopolitical threshold of power, Hyder attempts to gesture towards a form of strategic essentialism in Spivak's words which attempts to look for patterns of resistance in an otherwise complicated hierarchy of the past to the full-blown colonial and postcolonial binaries in the present and the hereafter. This goes beyond the narrow confines of the nation-state's fixed boundaries, and its inherent notions of citizenship and affirmation. Instead, it strives to establish a genuinely decolonized sense of communal unity and imaginative spirit, which connects to a dialogic realm of limitless interactions and ethical distinctions. When viewed in this light, the Partition event serves as an indication of alternative and more workable heterotopias, in contrast to the parallel space of nation-building, offering a fragmented perception of home and dwelling within an overarching historical backdrop of communal suffering and tragedy. Within the context of Qurratulain Hyder's literary endeavors, a crucial facet emerges in her exploration of ethnicity within the modern nation-state. Hyder's narratives not only unravel the multifaceted repercussions of Partition but also delve into the complexities of ethnicity in the postcolonial setting. She challenges the conventional attributions and scrutinizes the costs incurred due to the loss of coexistence and "differential solidarity" among ethnic groups. Hyder's discerning gaze exposes the intricate interplay between ethnicity and the modern nation-state, revealing how the nation-building process often exacerbates ethnic tensions. Through her work, she underscores the need for a more nuanced understanding of ethnicity and its role in shaping contemporary identities and political dynamics within the

nation-state. In doing so, Hyder contributes to a broader discourse on the intersection of ethnicity, nationalism, and the challenges of forging a cohesive identity in the modern postcolonial world.

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