

Chapter II

Women, Nation, War: *Mandodari* and *A Tale from the Year 1857*

‘... as a woman, I have no country.
As a woman I want no country.
As a woman my country is the whole world.’

(*Three Guineas*, 99)

For women, Virginia Woolf's lexis from the *Three Guineas* may initially seem to be an impressive *mantra* for negotiating their national identity but toeing such oversimplified feminist conclusions would result in ignoring the complex and 'paradoxical' relations between woman and nation. History accounts for a shift in perception, for women's struggle with 'nation' has never been restricted to vouching for disenfranchisement in constructing a separate identity of their own, and at the same time demeaning the political notion of citizenship. Since its first formal turn in the post-French revolution period, when Mary Wollstonecraft appealed for the social recognition of women's rights to the Quebecois feminists' struggle for suffrage, women's criticism has been volleyed more against the patriarchal 'national' than nation in itself. But with prominence in complex nationalistic struggles in postcolonial nation states, women's relations with nation became increasingly problematic. Theatre, being inherently interventionist, responded to the woman-nation (dis)connects in its own way. In India, where the nationalist struggles essentially centered on the debates between the binaries of spirituality and materiality, moderates and extremists, home and the world; woman and nation became correlates referring to domestic spaces to be preserved. Hence, worth exploring is women's theatre's engagement with the nuanced location of women within the frame of Indian nationalism, which has continued to evolve from the pre-independence freedom struggle to 'hate mongering' (sometimes state-sponsored) both in the inter-national and intra-national contexts.

The use of theatre as an effective propagandist tool may be traced back to the *bhakti* movement (c.15th century) in 'Hindu' history, when poet-saints used theatre as a means of spreading and sustaining the movement throughout the country. However, the political role of theatre in India is most prominently realized only in the nineteenth century when theatre became a 'living' site for political struggle. Nationalism's primary condition was to make people conscious of their own life and times, national brotherhood, and more so of the political hindrances that thwart their national, social and communal progress. And theatre was often used unto 'ends' that propelled the British administration in India in taking suppressive measures on it. Dinabandhu Mitra's *Nildarpana* stands as one of such early attempts where the colonial procedures were severely criticized. Drawing on the 1858 revolutions in Bengal when the poor indigo cultivators refused to sow crops at the orders of the British planters, and were consequently put to death, the play marks the beginning of theatre's political tryst with the colonial government. It inspired a host of patriotic plays which were written to heighten the national sentiments of the mass. The British Government in India responded by the Dramatic Performances Act in 1876, which wielded strong censorial powers over the production of indigenous plays. Speaking on the political role of theatre in India, Farely Richmond argued that 'This period, marked by an unrestrained desire among Indian writers and producers to propagate independence, is also characterized by suppressive restrictions imposed by the colonial government on the publication and performance of plays' (Richmond 319).

Though throttled by the Act, Indian theatre continued producing nationalist plays employing newer strategies. While political allegories like *Kichak Vadh* (1907) used episodes from the epics to dramatize contemporary events and allegorize political personalities, a number of productions drew on 'historical figures who fought against political oppression'

(322). Though most of the plays were banned by the Government, whenever staged (sometimes even by daring the ban), they attracted unprecedented success. Therefore, political theatre's objective of igniting the popular imagination was somehow realized. The regional and folk theatres arose to the occasion as well.

Elsewhere in India, other playwrights glorified their own local patriots. In Assam, the struggle of the Ahom kings with the Burmese invaders was dramatized. In Maharashtra, Shivaji's exploits came to symbolize Tilak's political struggles. In Mysore, Ecchama Nayaka, Tipu Sultan, Nargund Baba Sahib and Kittur Chennamma provided the subject for many nationalistic dramas. And all over India, the battles between Rama and Ravana in the *Ramayana*, as well as those between Krishna and Kamsa in the *Puranas*, provided Indian patriots with ample scope for symbolizing the struggle for freedom from foreign oppression. (322)

These nationalistic attempts in theatre not only showcased the colonial impoverishment of the natives, but also induced the general ideal of freedom. However, apart from congregating public sentiments and resisting against colonial oppressions, theatre as an instrument of propagating nationalism endeavored nation building by exposing and critiquing social prejudices prevalent in the Indian society. Hence, social and economic abuses, religious bigotry, socio-cultural oppressions in the forms of casteism and untouchability, and women's suppression in terms of the practices of *sati*, dowry and child marriage recurred thematically. Owing to the changes in equations of global power and increasing international support over India's claim to independence alongside the heavy material and financial loss suffered by the British Government in the Second World War, the possibility of political freedom for India was already realized during the 1940s. These global changes, complemented by the enthusiastic 'Quit India Movement', growing apprehension of a second sepoy mutiny after the crushing of Indian National Army and an unprecedented political rise against the British

Government whose decisions during the First World War led to artificial famines across the province of Bengal, resulted in the independence of India. As an emerging republic in the late 1940s and early 1950s, India as a new nation-state threw up issues which Indian theatre practitioners espoused broaching themes that directly pertained to its challenges and aspirations. The Indian People's Theatre Association (formed in 1942) sought to express the popular sentiments concerning both national and local issues. Converging folk into street theatre, the IPTA staged such plays as *AajKaSawaal* (The Problems of Today), *SwathantraSangram* (Independence Struggle) and *BhookkiJwaala* (The Flames of Hunger). But IPTA's major success came with SombhuMitra's production of Bijan Bhattacharya's *Nabanna* (1944) as a protest against the 1943 Bengal famine. Though protest motif continued recurring in IPTA's productions, its Central Ballet Troupe produced *India Immortal* in 1945 which encompassed the last two thousand years of rich cultural heritage of the country. This was performed all throughout India, inspiring and appealing masses to rise to the occasion of freedom struggle.

The partition of India as a result of the two nation theory flaunted by the political leaders and the implementation of The Mountbatten Plan marked the 'labor' that caused an unforeseen amount of bloodshed amidst the biggest human exodus ever in the history of the world. The partition redefined the approach to 'nation' because it compelled the re-imagination of the 'self' as the 'other'. While Hindus and Sikhs in Lahore, Karachi, Islamabad, or Dhaka were forced to leave their homeland and enter the newly defined frontiers of India, most Muslims in India were pushed beyond the borders to Pakistan and East Pakistan (though India still remained home to millions of Muslims owing to its secular identity).

The IPTA produced a host of plays in this period, notable among which are Khwaja Abbas' *Main Kaun Hun?* (*Who Am I?*, 1947) dealing with a wounded soldier's predicament in failing to remember his camp (Hindu or Muslim) and the eventual return to memory

leaving all his persecutors with a sense of perennial guilt in their minds and R. Ghatak's *Dolil* (*The Written Deed*, 1947), which depicted the killings of innocent refugees who were preparing for a march to make their grievances known. Largely avoiding prejudices and religious fanaticism the IPTA took a secular approach positing social criticism as their mainstay. The post-independence period however is marked with IPTA's shift from nationalist propagandas to the left political ideologies, for its theatrical ventures became thematically synonymous with the demands of the left wing political parties. Ignoring the larger national issues, it increasingly became the instrument of left organizational fronts.

The first notable theatre event in the post-independence period, however, is the 1956 drama seminar organized by the Sangeet Natak Academy with the objective of framing 'guidelines' for the future of Indian drama. With S. Radhakrishnan citing Sanskrit performance tradition as the repository to pan Indian theatre, J. C. Mathur asserted Hindi theatre as its rightful heir and proposed that regional professional theatres must produce plays in Hindi along with their own vernacular productions (Mathur 10).

The notion being acknowledged by Sachin Sengupta (director of the seminar) and supported by Mulk Raj Anand, who advised the translation of vernacular plays into Hindi, a rush of translation works followed. Plays by prominent regional playwrights like Vijay Tendulkar, Girish Karnad, and Badal Sarkar among others, were translated into Hindi. But regional theatres preserved their individual identities, though folk traditions increasingly merged with the mainstream. Hence the Nehruvian dream of 'one India/ one art' was not realised, for such homogenisation would be a mere reiteration of the colonial system of affairs in Indian terms. In another seminar organised by the Sangeet Natak Academy (SNA) in 1971, when the cultural relevance of traditional theatre was debated, Suresh Awasthi, the secretary of SNA from 1965 to 1975 defined the predominant theatre practice in the then India as 'Theatre of Roots' for the productions of Urban theatre directors where traditional

and folk elements converged with urban themes. ‘Practitioners of such a hybrid aesthetic such as Girish Karnad, K. N. Panikkar, Habib Tanvir, UtpalDutt, and RatanThiyam had somewhat unselfconsciously and organically been experimenting with integrating elements of Yakshagana, Sanskrit drama, Naccha, Jatra, and Thang-ta, Raslila, and Pung-cholom respectively.’ (Mitra, 68) Retaining the heterogeneity of Indian theatre, these theatre productions therefore re-questioned the definition of national theatre in India. Making an exhaustive study of these performances, Erin B. Mee opined that the theatre of roots was ‘a post-Independence effort to decolonize the aesthetics of modern Indian theatre by challenging ...colonial culture ... reclaiming the aesthetics of performance and by addressing the politics of aesthetics’. (Mee, 5)The same tradition continued and further developed throughout the 1960s and 70s which was further complimented by the unfolding of contemporary political events both in and around the country which forced it into war with the neighbors followed by the civic and political crisis of the ‘emergency’.With the nation building process and attempts to preserve its civic and political integrity underway at the same time, theatre’s engagement with nation became more nuanced.

This chapter probes into the same 'association' through the prism of Indian women’s theatre. But making a comprehensive study of the relations between two such entities (India as a nation-state and Indian women’s theatre), which are still in the process of 'becoming' both on theoretical and hermeneutical levels, renders the pursuit difficult if not impossible. Hence, I choose two important women productions - Tripurari Sharma’s *AzizunNisa: A Tale from the year 1857*(1999) and Varsha Adalza’s *Mandodari* (1996) as evocative of approaches of women in engaging with nation especially in the time of war, when nationalism and patriotism emerge as essential correlates.

Nation, Imagination, Nationalism

Set in Kanpur, *A Tale from the Year 1857: Azizun Nisa* dramatizes the story of a courtesan, Azizun who responding to the call of the nation, readily renounces her career and becomes one among the sepahis during the sepoy mutiny and contributes against the British. Though Tripurari Sharma makes a deeper study into history through Azizun, Varsha Adalja in *Mandodari* reworks characters from the popular Hindu myth *Ramayana*, to build a plot that revolves around a relatively lesser known/important character Mandodari whose tryst with an imaginary Kaaldevtaa ultimately decides the outcome of the war between Rama and Raavana. Therefore, both Sharma and Adalja seek to redefine women's positions with respect to nation and war and in the process re-imagine the 'national'.

Benedict Anderson defines nation as 'an imagined political community' (Anderson 49). It is 'imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign' (49). Hence imagination, to Anderson, is constitutive of a nation, which is limited because 'even the largest of them (nations) encompassing perhaps a billion living human beings, has finite, if elastic, boundaries, beyond which lie other nations' (50) and sovereign because 'the concept was born in an age in which Enlightenment and Revolution were destroying the legitimacy of the divinely-ordained, hierarchical dynastic realm' (50). However, such a definition entails a series of questions. Firstly, in looking at the nation as imagination, Anderson writes, it is 'imagined because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion' (49). Hence, Anderson suggests that in general, a nation, however small, is large enough to shelter groups which can never have full-fledged inter-personal relationships with each other. To reinforce this argument, he further says that 'all communities larger than primordial villages of face-to-face contact (and perhaps even these) are imagined. Communities are to be

distinguished, not by their falsity and genuineness, but by the style in which they are imagined.' (49). But to hold that 'communities larger than primordial villages of face-to-face contact' will use a particular 'style' of imagination to produce forth a nation is confusing, because 'it is after all a hermeneutic truism that all social relations – even those between 'primordial villagers – work through the shared understanding (and misunderstanding) of those involved' (Poole 11). Secondly, since the act of defining is 'political' in itself, Anderson's definition of the nation as sovereign is essentially fraught with Eurocentric sensibility of world history. He relates the sovereignty of nation with a period in Europe when 'the legitimacy of the divinely-ordained, hierarchical dynastic realm' (50) was substituted with the republic. In India, however, the concept of nation was realized way earlier when Chandragupta Maurya in 321BCE brought the entire region between Afghanistan and Myanmar together under one empire. Of course, empire is not coterminous with nation but with *political* imagination invoked upon, the political map of the then India (except the Deccan), was roughly synonymous with the Mauryan empire. Imagination for Anderson, is exclusively *creative* of the nation as a political community. But, since imagination is mitochondrial for any social existence, free play of unqualified imagination may produce ambiguous and multiple identities, delimited by no pre-existing essence of the national. Again, community and one's communal identity is never apolitically imaginable. Therefore, for the imagination to conceive of and then identify with a nation, it must undergo a nationalist education that results in a condition conducive to the production of a 'political community' as nation. Hence, instrumental imagination, initiated by the political discourse of nationalism fabricates the meta-narrative – nation. But this narrative is never fully realized unless the imagination is recognized collectively, which is arrived at only when most of the members of the 'community' is made conscious of it. Therefore nation becomes a product of collective instrumental imagination mediated by the aegis of social and objective

consciousness. But mere production of 'nation' does not presuppose its re-production. Hence it is made possible through repeated performances of such national cultural and political elements as language, literature, history, tradition, myths, customs, institutions, heroes and icons, politics, symbols (national flag, emblems), constitution, legal, political and electoral structures, and sometimes religion or even secularism.

However, in *A Tale from the Year 1857*, Tripurari Sharma presents the waking up to the realization of nation in multiple provisos. Azizun here is not the traditional woman who is constructed in conformity to the national idiom. She is not the 'type' courtesan whose art ends in mere commercial entertainment. Sharma portrays her as an already inspired woman whose imagination of the nation needs no nationalist instrumental education. But while portraying Shamsuddin, the second most important character of the play, she makes nation appear to him as a part of the cultural, social, religious and political experience. For Mohd. Ali, nation becomes synonymous with Nana Saheb, while for Adila, Lucknow, under the custody of Nana is her nation. Hence if nation is conceived in terms of the collective performative instrumental imagination, it can also refer to the regional and the communal, which are politically conceived in their own rights. Anthony D. Smith addresses the problematic by defining the nation and *ethnie* (the term he uses for ethnic communities) separately.

'I propose to define the concept of nation as a 'named human community occupying a homeland, and having common myths and a shared history, a common public culture, a single economy and common rights and duties for all members'. The concept of *ethnie* can in turn be defined as 'a named human community connected to a homeland, possessing common myths of ancestry, shared memories, one or more elements of shared culture, and a measure of solidarity, at least among the elites'.'

(Smith 13)

However, in explaining the proposition, he clarifies that ‘these are really summaries of pure or ideal-types of ‘nation’ and ‘*ethnie*’, derived from a stylization of the respective beliefs and sentiments of elite members of *ethnies* and of nations. They do not list common denominators.’(13) But he asserts that the definitions do ‘highlight their distinctive elements and the key differences between them’ (13). In a conversation with Shamsuddin where he complains about being 'robbed' of his religious sentiments while serving as a soldier for the British administration in India, Azizun is therefore seen confiding her concern and articulating conscience about her nation as ‘homeland’. That she identifies with and owes her exclusivity to the nation is betrayed in her anguish in the thought of being increasingly captured by the outsiders (here the British):

Now Avadh has also fallen to them... I tremble to think...the way our entire homeland is being taken over by strangers. (Sharma 126)

Hence, making sense of a homeland may ignite the imagination of nation in an individual/ community. But this recognition is robust when the certain ‘homeland’ is under threat from alien force(s). Identifying the British antagonists as the other, Azizun is more national in the macrocosmic sense of the term because nation here obliterates the mutual differences constantly at play within the communities in order to produce a trans-regional reference.

Like Azizun, Mandodari’s approach to the idea of nation in Adalja’s *Mandodari* is subject to the moment of crisis. Both of them are ‘inspired’ individuals and both grow politically charged at the face of national catastrophe. Though Mandodari is critical of Ravana’s misrule in his kingdom and anguished with the future of her nation (Lanka), it is only at the reference to Lanka's destruction that Mandodari turns protective. She begs, prays and ultimately challenges Kaaldevata.

KAALDEVATA: I have come to destroy this golden Lanka

MANDODARI: O lord, be merciful. Be kind to us and spare us from your terrible anger.

KAALDEVATA: The decision of Kaal is unalterable, Devi. The reign of Ravana and the power of his mighty kingdom are over.

MANDODARI: Please don't say that, lord. The queen of this mighty empire bows at your feet. Please go away from here. ...

KAALDEVATA: Lanka's destruction is destined.

MANDODARI: But I shall not allow this to happen. This task of yours must remain unfulfilled. (Adalja 101)

Mandodari braves Kaaldevata '... your (Kaaldevata's) task will remain unfulfilled' (102) (*bracketing mine*) and the entire play revolves around a strategic fight between the two. Therefore Adalja draws the character of Mandodari in the light of those women who can even defy the authority of Kaal. Hence the intelligent reference to Anusuya and Savitri in the play (Anusuya and Savitri being mythological examples of 'ordinary' (Adalja 102) women who defeated Kaal). Her defiance is also exemplary of a woman's rejection of the despotic patriarchal authority. She refuses to accept the decision of Kaal on Lanka. Even though she is akin to Azizun in putting on the role of a protector at the moment of national need, her experience of the nation is different. Azizun confronts nation's crisis at a point when the soldiers were revolting against the British misrule; but, for Mandodari, the situation turns more critical for she is pitted against both her husband who is the ruler of her country and the Kaaldevata who is bent on killing her husband and destroying his kingdom. In association with the soldiers, Azizun's objective is to go beyond the confines of the feminine stereotype and free her nation from the foreign political and cultural oppressions, while Mandodari has

to stake her identity as a wife and free her 'land' from the tyranny resulting from her husband's over-ambition. Further, being the queen herself, she has to protect her nation from an imminent apocalypse. As reported in the play, Ravana is the king of 'three worlds', which entails that his kingdom transcends the boundaries of a single nation and unifies transnational political differences. But, Mandodari, though queen of the entire kingdom, reduces the actual 'national' to the ethnical and locates it in a specific homeland where her community shares common cultural elements. Hence she refers to her nation as 'my clan', 'my city', 'my people' and 'my land'(101-114). Notable here is Mandodari's passions in identifying with her country (homeland). She personalizes what generally is impersonally imagined.

In sync with Mandodari's approach to 'nation', is Anthony D. Smith's idea of associating nation with 'occupying' the 'homeland'. But he substitutes nation with *ethnies* and opines that they 'need not have a public culture, only some common cultural elements – it could be language, religion, customs or shared institutions – whereas a common public culture is a key attribute of nations' (14). But differentiating nation and community in such terms invites problems of their own, especially when a poly-ethnic country like India is taken into account. Nation here emerges as a meta-whole consisting of an assortment of *ethnies*, which are individual wholes in themselves.

In India, where the terms *jati* and *desh*, are loosely used as alternatives for both nation and *ethnies*, the idea of homeland in terms of belonging to a 'human community' appears ambiguous. *Jati* refers to the ethnic identity of an individual, which often glosses over his political identity as an Indian. There are numerous examples of jati-based discriminations and movements that have painted the political canvas of the country grey, be it the anti-Bengali drives in Assam in the '60s or the anti-Bihari in Maharashtra in the recent past or the consistent discrimination faced by the North East Indians in other parts of the country. Hence, *jati* here refers to the deep and continuous cultural affinity of a person to a certain

‘homeland’, which is also part of a greater ‘homeland’, viz. the nation, to which his connection is relatively more ‘symbolic’. The concept of ‘homeland’ is more curiously drawn in terms of *desh* for it is not just a colloquial translation of ‘nation’, but also a reference to particular regions in popular idiom and vernacular legends of the country. It is associated with a person’s strong rootedness in a particular province, the socio-cultural, linguistic, ethnic and political specificity, which forms the *desh*/nation for him. This is so metaphorically enmeshed in a typical member of such a *desh* that it becomes an essential personality for him. India as a *desh* (held as a macrocosm) therefore is an integration of many smaller *desh*-es. Hence unlike Mandodari’s consideration of Lanka in *Mandodari*, the concept of homeland as exclusively national may not seem plausible for a poly-ethnic land like India.

Smith also identifies the nation-*ethnie* divide with claims to ‘public culture’. But in the process he never gives a proper definition of ‘public culture’, though he recognizes ‘language, religion, customs or shared institutions’ as cultural elements in the *ethnies*. If we then hold public culture as an assortment of such common characteristics that enable members of a nation to imagine themselves as a part of it, the difficulty in separating the nation/ *ethnie* remains. The political imagination that constitutes a nation in terms of ‘public culture’ can produce an *ethnie* as well, for, each community has its own intra-communal structures to which are subordinated the shared experiences of that culture, be it in terms of language, religion, rituals, ethnicity, colour, race, history and memory, or be it by way of the political and administrative bodies that hold the entire edifice together. Therefore, to differentiate between nation and community/*ethnie/jati/desh*, there may emerge a language failure. But the nation – community debate may be temporarily resolved by positing the idea of ‘nationhood’ as ‘an advanced stage in the ongoing process of political and social integration, reached through the gradual broadening of social communication between societies as they evolve into a community, then into a people, and finally into a nation.’

(Dikshit 110) Nation and community therefore may coexist in the political imagination as stages in socio-political processes of integration, where social communication both recognized and delimited in terms of linguistic, cultural, racial, economic, historic and political kinship makes possible the evolution of community into nation. I understand the national social communication to be both 'recognized' and delimited' because conceptualizing nation necessitates both de-territorializing the communal and territorializing the national. Mandodari recognizes the importance of communal contingency for her 'land', but at the same time wishes for an integration of factions in order to experience a better national life. With repeated references to Lanka as 'Ravanasura's golden city' on one hand and 'my land', 'my city', and 'my people' on the other, she invokes a discrete division between the hypothetical existences of Ravana's Lanka which is marked with his high ambitions and innocuous means, and the Lanka in its own right which is not synonymous with an individual's aspiration. She lauds the collective communal identity over the 'three worlds' won by her husband. But on another occasion while speaking to Seeta before war, she desires sacrifice of factional difference:

'All these people scattered in different factions, forever fighting each other, could be united and could at last live happily in one kingdom under one emperor. This is the dream I had, Seeta, that I hoped to see reflected in your eyes. We have a great opportunity to serve humanity, and prevent further hatred and bloodshed...' (Adalja 111)

Mandodari not only appeals for forfeiting differences between the enemy sections but also implores Seeta to sacrifice 'herself' to Ravana: "Surrender to Ravana, Seeta, and stop this war' (110). But in both the cases, Mandodari calls for the sacrifice of identity: national, communal and the personal, which, though interrelated, are mutually frustrating as well. Seeta, who has been uprooted from her 'home' amongst her own men, is expected to re-

imagine the Lanka as her own land. Failure of social communication is obviously imminent. Seeta denies being the subject of Ravana's aspiration.

If Seeta's frustration is considered in the context of the partition of British-India, it can be argued that mere attempts toward social communications are not enough to argue for the birth of India, Pakistan or Bangladesh or any other postcolonial nation-state which has suffered the labor of 'partition'. The political partition of 'British India' into India and Pakistan in two wings of the East and the West (the East referring to present Bangladesh), is not merely a partition of a great land mass into three halves but also a strategy to compromise with the failure of social communication across religio-cultural differences, not to mention the politics involved in initiating such differences that resulted in the bloodshed of millions. However, Gyanendra Pandey points out in *Remembering Partition* that 'what all this has left behind is an extraordinary love-hate relationship: on the one hand deep resentment and animosity, and the most militant of nationalism – Pakistani against Indian, Indian against Pakistani, now backed up by nuclear weapons; on the other a considerable sense of nostalgia, frequently articulated in the view that this was a partition of siblings that should never have happened' (2). Partition therefore is also about sharing; sharing a common history, a common mythic past and ubiquitous 'shadow lines' that unite the common mass across the borders. Hence the birth of a nation-state like India encourages the co-existence of nationalism and communalism as antithetical forces. But, Jawaharlal Nehru, the first prime minister of independent India, spoke about 'nationalism' in a different light in his address to the Eleventh Conference of the Institute of Pacific Relations in 1953.

What exactly is nationalism? I do not know; and it is extremely difficult to define. In the case of a country under foreign domination, it is easy to describe what nationalism is. It is anti-foreign power. But in a free country, what is nationalism? Certainly it is something positive, though opinions may vary. Even so, I think a large element of it is

negative, and sometimes we find that nationalism, which is a healthy force in a country, a progressive force, a liberating force, becomes – may be after liberation – unhealthy, retrogressive, reactionary, or expansionist and looks with greedy eyes on other countries, as did those countries against which it fought for its freedom... All that is “nationalism”. (qtd. *The Nation Form*, 19)

If Nehru’s definition of nationalism as ‘anti-foreign power’ is considered, its militant form also must be directed towards the ‘foreign power’. But as Gyanendra Pandey observes in *Remembering Partition*(2001), militant form of nationalism is adverse to the ‘interests’ of nation(Pandey 2), because it essentially aims at building meta-narratives that promote singularity of culture, history, language, religion and politics and in the process seek to obliterate the existing socio-cultural uniqueness, the linguistic differences and the incoherence in religious and racial identities.

In *Azizun Nisa*, Tripurari Sharma tries to provide a definition to 'militant nationalism' in exposing the nationalists' attempts towardobliterating contradictory voices in producing their own narrative of national struggles. Azizun’s association with nationalism is correlated with her imagining the nation as an essence which erases any possible inconsistency. She is not merely critical of the factions who do not support the mutiny of the soldiers, but also justifies the mass murder, bloodshed and terror unleashed by the Indian soldiers in the name of nationalism. Mohd. Ali is criticised for being a non-participant in the final gory attempt of the Indian soldiers to defeat the Britishers. Ali Khan too is denounced for betraying his fellow countrymen and siding with the British on the pretext of becoming ‘friendly with whoever is in power’ (Sharma 164). Even when the catholicity of Azizun's art is questioned, her answer is evocative of her commitments –

ZUBAIDA: ... A dedicated artiste should close all the curtains and till the milieu changes for the better, engross herself with the composition of new songs.

AZIZUN: A bloodbath may rage outside but the ink must flow inside! (151)

Art therefore must cater to the national cause for Azizun. Again, when Zubaida questions Azizun's vulnerable participation in matters of rebellion, Sarwar puts forward a narrative of nationalist education so that disparate voices may be neutralised.

SARWAR: Everyone is fighting one's battle, Zubaida Bi, with one's own share of the poison. Even my mother can't be kept separate because the fight is between the pure and the defiled; the fresh and the stale; between man and man. And it's right that it should be so because she's gone where all must go. The right and the wrong lead to the same result, meet the same end. (151)

But Azizun, Sarwar and the other nationalists view nationalism in a context where the 'nation' is under the political control of foreign power. With a change in the political identity of the citizens, the narratives of nationalism may undergo change too, for, both 'nation' and 'identity' is re-imagined. Hence, 'identity' not only as a socio-cultural, political product but also as a 'personal' means of integration (and disintegration) must be brought into more critical consideration, more so, in the light of women's relation to the national.

National Identity, Woman and War

We have an *identity* because we *identify* with figures or representations which are made available to us. The concept of identity implies that there is a constitutive linkage between forms of *subjectivity*, i.e. the ways in which we conceive of

ourselves, and forms of social *objectivity*, the patterns of social life within which we exist.(Poole 45)

It is 'identity' which relates self to society, because different facets of an individual's identity are 'constituted in and through particular forms of social life' (45). But 'identity' as such is dynamic in nature which holds the tension between self and society both in 'crisis' as well as in relief, for it is subject to a person's social situation at a given point in time on the one hand and on the other is conceived only in his/her *commitment* to the nuances of social life, which prerequisites sacrifice of the personal for social. However, John Locke in his famous discussion in *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* considered the 'person' to be a legal concept for his legal accountability is associated with another individual existing prior to him. In sync with Locke, hundred years later, Imanuel Kant agreed that a person to be so must remain morally and legally responsible. For Kant, a person can only be conceived in terms of reason, because mere human aspects of a person are incapable of justifying the moral realm. A person therefore as such has no value unless and until he is 'the subject of morally practical reason' (47). Since moral and legal responsibility is crucial to the existence of a person, Ross Poole argues that 'being a person is only *one* of the forms taken by the self, and that there are *other* modes of identity, other ways of saying 'I'' (48).

Hegel, however, identifies personhood with forms of social life. He holds that Locke and Kant were right in connecting the legal and moral realms with the existence of a person but got the connection in the wrong way round. For Hegel, a person practices law and morality not because he is a 'person' but it is because of these practices that he becomes one. Hence *becoming* person is about making conscious rational decisions rather than existing unintelligibly as mere humans. However, this consciousness is not initiated by isolated self-awareness but by the social situatedness of a person which is embodied in the assortment of legal and moral institutions and practices. In the light of above discussion if we consider the

national identity of a person, it can be claimed that it refers to a person's commitment to a *certain* set of legal and moral codes, unique or fundamental to that nation. But how does consciousness lead to the practice of nation in order to acquire national identity? Since national identity 'underlies all our other identities' (Poole 67), it must enjoy privilege over them. This prioritization asks for a greater submission to the national than any other regional, communal or contingent structures. Hence national identity claims the *sacrifice* of the personal before the communal and henceforth communal to the national. Such sacrifices are embodied in a nation's history, tradition, myths, language, culture, politics and the 'spirit'. The sacrifice of self, therefore is not made in terms of unconditional surrendering of the personal but depersonalizing oneself in order to achieve a greater sense of 'political' identity. Thus achieved, national identity unifies the historical, cultural, linguistic, communal and regional differences of the masses, along with safeguarding political, religious, social and legal rights of the individuals. To these, is attached the sense of belongingness not just in terms of the political individual's claims to the nation, but also the nation's claims over its people. The national identity therefore brings together three essential components of citizenship, 'membership, rights and participation', which Richard Bellamy defines as 'a condition of civic equality' that 'not only secures equal rights to the enjoyment of the collective goods provided by the political association but also involves equal duties to promote and sustain them – including the good of democratic citizenship itself.' (17). But sheltered in overlapping discourses of freedom, autonomy, democracy, postcoloniality, internationality, globalization, women, gays, lesbians etc. the concept of citizenship is widely contested.

The anti-colonial nationalist struggles for independence in the third world countries promised sovereign, equal and autonomous citizenship, but after independence, politically motivated democratic citizenship grew around compromises between contradictory

tendencies of 'universalism and particularism, freedom and order, individual rights and collective responsibilities, identity and difference, nation and individual' (Davis and Werbner 2). Since compromise in any form presupposes a hegemonic relation between unequals, 'democratic citizenship' with respect to women, whose place in history toggled between 'subjectified and subject-making (non)citizens' (5), opened up few aporias.

The anti-colonial struggles of the now postcolonial nation states invoked the stereotypical triad of woman-nation-home, equating the woman with a domestic territory which must be preserved from outside aggression. From either side this equation was based on objectifying women as possession, though nationalist narratives framed the strategy of controlling in terms of protection. Cherrie Moraga in reference to the Chicanos writes:

Chicanos are an occupied nation within a nation, and women and women's sexuality are occupied within the Chicano nation. If women's bodies and those of men and women who transgress their gender roles have been historically regarded as territories to be conquered, they are also territories to be liberated. Feminism has taught us this. The nationalism I seek is one that decolonizes the brown and female body as it decolonizes the brown and female earth. (Moraga 150)

In the same light, Indian nationalism too associated nation with women, forming a gendered narrative of nation which invariably considered nationalism masculine. Speaking on the nature of Indian nationalism, Partha Chatterjee argued that woman was equated with home: the unpolitical, spiritual, chaste and private space which was to be preserved from the threats of colonial exploitation. Women in the Indian nationalist struggle accepted such gendered association which was destined to result in the reinforcement of patriarchy as the face of Indian anti-colonial movement for Independence. Chatterjee therefore remarks:

Women from the new middle class in nineteenth-century India thus became active agents in the nationalist project – complicit in the framing of its hegemonic strategies as much as they were resistant to them because of their subordination under the new forms of patriarchy. (148)

What holds true for the Chicano and the Indian nationalist struggles in relation to women, nation and nationalism, is almost echoed in other anti-colonial nationalist struggles as well, though their geo-spatial, cultural politics were conditioned by their unique associations. One of the noted postcolonial critics, Elleke Boehmer, therefore argued, that man has a *metonymic* presence in relation to the national while women are mere *metaphors* implicitly representing national values and territories (229). Such symbolic presence is further explored by Nira Yuval-Davis and she connects women and nation in terms of reproduction. She argues that in being the biological producers of national population, women are also the cultural reproducers for they embody the collective that forms the matrix which represents the 'essence' of a country. It is this 'essence' which the colonial forces are keen to exploit. Hence women undergo rigorous monitoring in terms of their dress codes, social behavior, roles and perceptions by nationalist fundamentalists. Yuval-Davis also argues that women are discriminated even in their claims to citizenship, for legislative processes have always dealt with women's issues, rights and duties in separate terms. Moving beyond the legal issues, Yuval-Davis explores women's relation to nation in crisis such as the war. For her, wars have always been gendered. Be it a civil or an international war, women are the worst affected by war 'machineries'. The invading armies among other strategies use rape as one of the worst weapons to not merely unleash terror upon the civilians but also to deflate the native army ideologically for most of the nations equate women to motherland (130). However the accounts of material conditions of war zones show that not just the invading but also the

national armies'feed' on women, which almost always go unacknowledged by any legislation.

Narratives of war-time rapes and women's engagement with partition through theatre in India are best found in Kirti Jain's *Aur Kitne Tukde* (2001). Directed by Jain, the play is a reworking of Urvashi Butalia's book, *The Other Side of Silence* which chronicles the experiences of women during the partition of India. The play presents four women, Sadia, Vimla, Zahida and Harnam from different cultural orientations similar in their experience of violence during partition. In *Rehearsing the Partition* (2006), Jish Menon points out that 'Through an analysis of Kirti Jain's 2001 theatre production of *Aur Kitne Tukde*, I consider how Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs appropriate colonialist and nationalist ideologies surrounding the notion of 'woman' as repository of cultural value. The women in Jain's play are not prior subjects who experience violence but rather the experience of violence makes (and unmakes) them as gendered, ethnic, and national subjects. I argue that they come into subjecthood after a violent objectification and are reconstituted by their experience of national and sexual violence'(29-47).

But women playwright-directors in India have not been typical in their representation of women's relation to war. Modern Indian women theatre practitioners like Tripurari Sharma, Varsha Adalja, and Poile Sengupta instead of representing women as victims of war, rework popular events and characters from history and mythology to betray women's active participation in instrumentalising war and maneuver circumstances to influence the outcome of war. Hence Azizun emerges as a crafty 'executor' in the 1857 mutiny and Mandodari appears to be a strategist in war while Shoorpanakha in *Thus Spoke Shoorpanakha, so said Shakuni*, concoct a situation where wrongs done to her by history is avenged.

War has traditionally been seen as inter or intra state crisis which results in mass destruction, large scale devastation and heavy economic, political and anatomical losses. History has seen wars being fought along the fault lines of territorial possessions, wealth, power, culture, ethnicity and civilization, which has constantly reframed the world order. With reference to Michael Dibdin's novel, *Dead Lagoon*, Samuel P. Huntington quotes in *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*, 'There can be no true friends without true enemies. Unless we hate what we are not, we cannot love what we are...Those who deny them deny their family, their heritage, their culture, their birthright, their very selves!' (20) Huntington identifies 'the tendency to think in terms of two worlds', recurring 'throughout human history' to be one of the fundamental causes of war.

'People are always tempted to divide people into us and them, the in-group and the other, our civilization and those barbarians. Scholars have analyzed the world in terms of the Orient and the Occident, North and South, center and periphery. Muslims have traditionally divided the world into *Dar al-Islam* and *Dar al-Harb*, the abode of peace and the abode of war. This distinction was reflected, and in a sense reversed, at the end of the Cold War by American scholars who divided the world into 'zones of peace' and 'zones of turmoil'. The former included the West and Japan with about 15 percent of the world's population, the latter everyone else.' (32)

In *Azizun Nisa: A Tale from the Year 1857*, Tripurari Sharma has conceived war in similar light. The play is built around the 1857 *sepoy*mutiny which essentially had its inception in the absolute cultural separation between the 'native' Indians and the 'alien' British who 'lacked' the authentic knowledge of the religio-cultural structure of common Indian thought. She allows little space for the British voice and almost frames the entire narrative from Indian perspectives. But even in this asymmetrical framework she manages to present the disjunctions that amplified the separation between the two camps. In the introductory part of

the play, Shamsuddin is seen disturbed with the circumstances. In response to the Sentry's enquiry regarding his Namaaz, Shamsuddin says, 'When and where namaaz should be read does not need the permission of any foreigner; nor is any sermon on religion necessary' (Sharma 123). That the British didn't 'honour and respect' the Indian religious practices and moreover used them as instruments of oppression against fellow countrymen initiated the Indian soldiers against them. Hence the mutiny emerged as a fight between Indian 'religiosity' and British 'political' administration, where religion appeared as the fabric that constitute the very identity of the Indian soldiers and administration as one which was not only usurped by the 'foreigners' but also an alien form that aimed absolute separation between religion and administrative structures. Disenchanted with his job in the army, Shamsuddin vents his disgust thus:

No...there can be nothing right or wrong for a soldier; there is only the command...and to follow the command. I did the same ... they put the rifle in my hands. They gave me cartridges... I tore the cartridge covers with my teeth – put them in the gun and fired – night and day, morning and evening... did the same every time, everywhere ... I went on fighting, went on winning ... but lost each and every fight! My duty has become my sin now ... the cartridges that I tore with my teeth – those had grease from the meat prohibited by my religion ... That is what has happened. That's my reward for being dutiful ... the test for my loyalty. And that which has alienated me from my God ... separated me from Him. I have eaten their salt. Licked it. Now it's corroding my entire being ... tear this skin off my body ... separate it from me. (124 – 125)

Tripurari Sharma projects Shamsuddin's anguish as evocative of the resentment among the Indian soldiers and Indians at large. While *Azizun Nisa* portrays war as a result of the ever-widening gulf between the British and the Indians, war in *Mandodari* is fought at multiple

levels. It is not merely a war fought in the battle fields, but also a fight between pride and time (Kaal). Varsha Adalja gives time a visible presence in the play in the form of Kaaldevata, who is made to enter into a strategic game with Mandodari. The play can also be read as a narrative of the volatility of power in being pitted against the changeless authority of time. Right from the commencement of the play to its development into a tragedy for Ravana, power is invoked, referred to, suggested and misused as a means of political and personal oppression. Throughout the play, both Ravana and Mandodari make repeated references to the former's immense powers which made him the 'King of three worlds', its misuse in abducting Seeta, and the resultant war that entails his tragic end. Hence power and its misuse emerge as mitochondrial to war. In a series of lectures titled *Society Must be Defended*, Michelle Foucault hypothetically equates war with power and proposes that 'Power is war, the continuation of war by other means' (15) and inverting Clausewitz's proposition, 'War is merely the continuation of politics by other means' (Carl von Clausewitz), he suggests, 'politics is the continuation of war by other means' (Foucault 15). War, to Foucault, therefore is a permanent affair. He argues:

War is the motor behind institutions and order. In the smallest of its cogs, peace is waging a secret war. To put it another way, we have to interpret the war that is going on beneath peace; peace itself is a coded war. We are therefore at war with one another; a battlefield runs through the whole of society continuously and permanently, and it is this battlefield that puts us all on one side or the other. There is no such thing as a neutral subject. (51)

The 'golden city' of Lanka stands not just as a symbol of ambitious conquests, but also a home to permanent conflicts, confusions, anguish and suppression all amounting to war. In the very introduction to the play, Adalja sets the tone when Mandodari speaks on the state of affairs in Lanka: 'Having come here once, it is impossible to leave the kingdom of Lankesh'

(Adalja 100). That submission to the king's desires is the only alternative for any one in Lanka, is appropriated throughout the play. Mandodari's repeated attempts to explain the inevitable consequences of his actions, is ignored by Ravana, while Bibhisana's advices only turns him out of the kingdom.

RAVANA: Seeta dwells in my heart, Bibhisana.

Bibhisana: A King's personal prestige or insult has no importance in the matter of the kingdom's welfare.

RAVANA: Bibhisana, take care.

Bibhasana: When the wellbeing of a kingdom is threatened due to the rash act of a king, then the king is failing in his duty both as a king and a citizen.

RAVANA: Lankapati's city is golden; your Rama's city is made of clay.

BIBHISANA: People's welfare cannot be measured in terms of gold and clay. Safety, prosperity, unity, morality – these form the basis of a true nation.

RAVANA: You wicked fellow, get out of my sight right now. (108)

The play also unveils the inner recesses of Mandodari's anguished mind which betrays her qualms and her pains in being the wife of a lustful king. In an intense soliloquy, Mandodari discloses her innermost thoughts which hide her feminine desires, frustrations and uncertainties that shroud her status as a queen and a wife.

VOICE: Mandodari, are you jealous of Seeta?

MANDODARI: Why should I be jealous of Seeta?

VOICE: That's an untruth, Mandodari. You are jealous of the love Seeta and her husband share. They share their joys and sorrows; they wander in the forest together; they are ready to die for each other. You have not experienced such deep love, have you.?

MANDODARI: What do I lack? I have beautiful palaces, diamonds, ornaments ... I am very happy.

VOICE: No, you're not happy. Happiness does not come with palaces. ...

MANDODARI: Ah, Seeta, Seeta! Darkness has fallen upon this city since she came here. ... she is the cause of all this trouble my husband, my family, my people, and my city are facing. ...

MANDODARI: Lankesh has immense powers and divine weapons. If he wins the war and Rama is killed, then he will marry Seeta. She will become his queen in this palace and I will become her attendant ...

VOICE: What if Ravana is killed?

MANDODARI: Then too my future is bleak. Perhaps I shall then wander like a mad woman among the ashes of the burnt city ... or perhaps I shall become a sati and throw myself into the pyre of my dead husband. (112)

Adalja suggests Mandodari's plight as synonymous with Lanka's, which has also been reduced to a non-entity before the frenzied masculine desires of the king. Such phallic lack is mirrored in every Lankan, who is compelled to surrender her/his voice before Ravana's. Such a socio-political edifice, therefore invariably situates Mandodari and Seeta in the same frame. While Mandodari protests Seeta's abduction saying 'Kidnapping a helpless lady cannot be an act of valour. I don't find any bravery in it.'(103), she is herself confounded to the tyranny

her husband wields. Ravana seeks to win Seeta's consent – '... Look at me, Seeta. The beautiful queen Mandodari will be your attendant. All my riches will be yours. Come to me, Seeta' (105). Feminist suggestions in presenting the dynamics of a society which revolves around the patriarchal institutions of machismo may be easily assumed. However, as exponents of women's theatre which is critical of the socio-patriarchal structures but avoid demonizing the 'male', both Sharma and Adalja seek to represent nation and war as polyphonic political institutions which affect women as well as men. But, neither of the playwrights surrenders women's perspective. As much as *Azizun Nisa: A Tale from the Year, 1857*, is about the failure of Sepoy mutiny, it draws Azizun Nisa, as a woman who enthusiastically transforms herself from a courtesan to a soldier. Sharma has been keen not to magnify the gender question but focus exclusively on Azizun's 'amateurish' decision to participate in an armed rebellion of which she had no previous experience. She identifies herself more as a courtesan than a woman. When accused of prostitution she asserts herself as a dancer: '... I'm a dancer. I'm an artiste. I do not wear the veil but I'm not a public woman. People in the city ... acknowledge me as a courtesan, a poet-lyricist. I'm not in the flesh trade...' (Sharma 133).

When Azizun is questioned of her bravery, her response is not addressed from her biology but 'training'.

'Zubaida: How can you laugh, Azizun? Aren't you ever afraid?

AZIZUN: The tactics of living by myself in the middle of the bazaar; the combination of a little hard-heartedness and a little recklessness! ... I swear by my God, had I weapon in my hand then with one swing I would have stopped that man's inauspicious steps ... then whatever happened, I wouldn't have cared! ... That's the only lack in his training ... but this gives one a sense of identity, doesn't ... self-

esteem ... an elegant style! Can make one proud, truly. Whether it is the darkest night or the deepest forest, the step wouldn't falter.' (135).

Azizun denies and defies being reduced to her anatomy. But Sharma is also aware that such defiance cannot be typical to the society. Hence she introduces a character like Zubaida who appears as a foil to Azizun.

ZUBAIDA: This is a battle among men so let them fight it out. You are both ignorant and incapable of taking part.(151)

For Zubaida, battle is a man's affair and Azizun should not have participated in it. She criticizes Azizun's attempts to harm the 'fixed' gender roles. Mohd. Ali too, questions Azizun's interest in war, 'The matter is not of your interest. ... We're preparing for a battle. ... You might disapprove of my manner, but what is a woman's interest in matters of war?'(143) and Ali Khan humbles her in a sword encounter, 'I've never tasted defeat. You're a woman. So I shan't fight anymore. Get up and pick up your sword.'(165) But this doesn't weaken Azizun's spirits and she becomes more desperate to prove her prowess as a soldier.

AZIZUN: Yes, I must complete what I've set out to do. I'm not a mere woman. He should have treated me like a soldier. Fought and killed me. I'm not afraid to die. But no, in his eyes I remained a mere woman. He thought I was a coward. There's more to be done to be his match. I must become so strong and tough that one wouldn't know that one was facing a woman. Then there wouldn't be any need to show pity. (166)

Hence Azizun seeks to de-categorise herself as a woman, for 'woman' as 'construct' inspires patriarchal definitions which hinder her movement beyond the socially ordained stratifications. In her role-play as *sipahishe* not only challenges the gendered perception towards soldiery but also contributes towards an alternative narrative of women's

participation in the politico-national discourse. In *Mandodari*, Adalja too questions the gender codifications with Mandodari challenging Kaaldevata in a self-devised game of pawns. Kaaldevata is drawn as the custodian of patriarchal values which essentially abnegates the position of woman in affairs of state and war. Kaal arrives in Mandodari's palace and announces the destruction of Lanka. He presupposes Mandodari's unconditional surrender to the impending apocalypse. But Mandodari's challenge somewhat dislodges Kaaldevata, and he immediately retorts to the traditional masculine approach towards women as inferiors –

MANDODARI: Stop, O Kaaldevata. I invite you to accept my challenge that your task will remain unfulfilled.

KAALDEVATA: A challenge? To Kaalpurush? Foolish Lady, are you in your senses? I can demolish the portals of magnificent palaces with one breath. I can devastate glorious civilizations with a single stroke. I can dry oceans and send mountain peaks tumbling into the valleys. I make the earth tremble in fear. Is the might of Kaal being challenged by an ordinary woman? (102)

Adalja therefore makes patriarchy seem vulnerable before Mandodari's bold defiance. The latter reveals her identity as a strategist in war and the play further unfolds as a 'game' played between Kaaldevata and Mandodari where even Ravana, the height of patriarchal depravity, and Rama, the repository of values, are interplayed as mere pawns.

‘You may not know that I have helped Ravana many times with battle strategy. I have devised this game with such designs in mind.’(102)

Though Azizun and Mandodari share experience of being subordinated to patriarchal insolence both of them seek to instrumentalise the 'patriarchal machineries of war. Mandodari

protests against Ravana for using Seeta as a hock in his battle, but herself uses Seeta as a 'move' in her game of destruction with the Kaaldevata.

RAVANA: Your Rama killed Khara and Dushana. He cut off Shoorpanakha's nose. Do you ask me to bow to this man? His wife fell into my hands like a ripe fruit. Why should I not take her?

MANDODARI: Lankesh, a woman is not an object to be used to settle enmity nor a victim of lust. ... (105)

But when the occasion arrives, Mandodari pawns Seeta, requesting her to surrender herself to Ravana. Mandodari's narrative on woman at this juncture, while she tries to appease Seeta into sacrificing herself to the lust of Ravana, is enmeshed with traditional patriarchal indoctrinations, which make Seeta and Mandodari share similar quandaries.

MANDODARI: Here woman is an object of pleasure... a mere plaything to be used like a piece of linen that can be thrown away when it is soiled. To have power over woman is the right of man.

SEETA: Do women get no respect in asura culture? Among Aryans, woman is worshipped as a goddess.

MANDODARI: O Seeta, the daughter – in – law of the Suryavamshis, don't you think there is ambiguity in the treatment of women as goddesses? When the victorious kings confiscate kingdoms, don't they also take the women folk of the defeated kings? The gods keep apsaras for enjoyment. Your father – in – law has several queens. ...

MANDODARI: If Ravana gets you, he will not fight and many lives will be saved.
(110)

Hence Adalja represents Mandodari as capable of maneuvering patriarchal norms to her own ends. She is critical of the patriarchal praxis but she also uses the same for avoiding the destruction of her land on the other. But in the process, she appears vulnerable as well. 'I shall make myself the pawn in my game now, O Lord' (109), says Mandodari to Kaaldevata. However, all her moves apparently fail and Kaaldevata proclaims his own victory. He acknowledges Mandodari's love for her country and blesses her - 'May you always be honoured as a great sati.'(114). But in his blessing, he secretly harbours the paradox that women's attempt to participate in the 'masculine' endeavours of warfare and providing strategic and martial protection to the family and country at large, in place of earning socio-political importance, reduces her to the stereotypical category of 'sati'. The image of 'sati' has always been associated with the epitomization of women's sacrifice and commitment to the husband and his clan. Mandodari is therefore drawn into revealing her real intentions of killing her husband in order to seek redemption for her clan. She had devised the game of 'pawns' only to ensure that death is wrought on Ravana. Hence, as a contriver, she has undone the conventional 'expectations' of a woman. Instead of being elevated to the status of a sati, she has longed for the death of her lustful husband, and thereby be fooled Kaaldevata.

MANDODARI: ... I was waiting for my lord's death.

KAALDEVATA: What are you saying, Mandodari?

MANDODARI: How is it that you are omniscient yet did not know my thoughts? Well, to read a woman's heart one has to be a woman perhaps! How would you understand the agony of being the wife of such a lustful yet blind man?

KAALDEVATA: I don't understand you.

MANDODARI: Through Seeta's abduction and the ensuing war, I sought redemption of my clan. The arrow that killed Ravana, actually released his soul and gave the egoistic man his salvation. Though I am widowed now, I am a happy woman. I have succeeded in what I set out to do, ha, ha, ha. (114)

Mandodari's maneuvering of Seeta, as a pawn in war is echoed in *Azizun Nisa* as well. Azizun engineers the idea of killing unguarded women and children in the women's quarters after having suffered defeat elsewhere. She holds them as pawns in the battle between *sepahis* and the British soldiers heading towards them. Like Mandodari, she defies being perceived as a victim in war but conversely uses British women as wagers whose death would demoralize their army. Hence, nationalism takes the shape of ruthless militancy in the play, but Azizun and her colleagues execute the plan justifying war.

AZIZUN: Let them come. The huge army comes trampling across our homeland intending to rescue a few helpless women and children. How impatient must they be for this victory – to free them from the trap of the wicked. They'll hug them – kiss them – wipe their tears and assure them that they are completely safe. The smile of relief on those arrogant faces ... no they do not deserve that. Those who have no courage, why should their emotions win? In spite of their utmost efforts, they should taste only defeat at Kanpur ... their calmness and pace should be snatched ... their intentions should meet with only disappointment ... Let them not find that for which they come. Let all be finished. That would be a defeat to stun them and make them regret that they ever came here and that if they hadn't, perhaps they'd still be alive. ...

AZIZUN: This is a war ... and in a war, all must be ready to die. The difference lies in who gets into whose hands. (Sharma 175-178)

Though Zubaida and Mohd. Ali protest such large scale killing of 'innocent women', Hussaini and Adila help Azizun frame the plan and Sarwar becomes the instrument of execution. Hence, through Azizun, Sharma portrays a woman who is either devoid of the feminine notion of 'natural caregivers' or can suspend her womanhood in order to achieve success in war. She dispassionately unleashes terror on British women, considering them not as gendered victims of war but as the mere 'other' who are better sacrificed in order to preserve 'liberty' for the 'self'. Therefore, both Tripurari Sharma and Varsha Adalja present women characters as victims on one hand and perpetrators of violence on the other, a propos their respective locations during war. Seeta in *Mandodari* and the British women in *A Tale from the Year 1857: Azizun Nisa* suffer only due to their vulnerable locations in the entire course of events, while Mandodari and Azizun successfully manipulate war and associated operations because of the specific contingencies which inspire and condition their approach to war. However this does not discount the personal impulse of both the characters, which resisted the social compulsions of their sex.

Therefore both *Mandodari* and *Azizun Nisa* emerge as important productions which throw considerable light on the position of women playwrights and directors with regard to nation and war. Since the idea of nation can never be engaged in isolation from its history, culture, myth, language, religion and memory, women theatre directors try to locate their plays amidst the intersections of these cultural elements. Adalja presents *Mandodari* debunking the myth of Ramanyana which is primarily available as an epic. In almost all its written versions, the epic has maintained silence over Mandodari; for, an epic is chiefly about a grand action concerning two extra-ordinary individuals/families/clans etc, where seemingly insignificant voices find themselves overshadowed by the meta-narratives. Adalja's attempt to present the 'myth' through such a character which has been historically kept silent, therefore is appreciative of women's immutable existence amidst the epic battles which redefined the

concepts of nation, nationality, power and woman. Likewise, Tripurari Sharma makes AzizunNisa more alive in history, for amidst soldiers, she emerges as a soldier. Azizun brings into practice her nationalist imagination at a time when nation itself hasn't politically materialized.

But when state sponsored militant nationalism is brought into practice, it not only tries to produce a prejudiced meta-narrative of national history but also denies any alternate view. During the first production of the play, in the National School of Drama, Delhi, in 1999, *Azizun Nisa* met with severe criticisms from 'nationalists' who argued that it abuses history and showcases Indians involved in innocent bloodsheds (of British women and children). For them, such presentation endangers the image of Indian nationalism which has all through been projected as tolerant and non-violent. Sharma even received letters of disagreement with her presentation of women as actively participating in public bloodshed. But in an interview to this researcher, at NSD, Delhi, Tripurari Sharma said that her research and the stories about Azizun still popularly heard in Kanpur, supplement her portrayal in history even though not entirely non-fictitious. Hence, Sharma confronted 'militant nationalism' in her production of the play, following which the play had to be revised before its next production in India in 2007. But intriguingly the play earned much appreciation when it was produced in Pakistan under the patronage of Pir Zada foundations (Sharma Interview). The performance history of the play therefore exposes the nationalist narratives that not only claim to foil attempts toward unconditional introspection into history of Indian national struggle, but also promotes censoring the presentation of 'authentic history' in order to produce an 'acceptable' rhetoric.

Therefore in engaging with nation and war, contemporary Indian women theatre practitioners avoid taking any essential stand in representing women as victims or victimisers. Instead of reducing women to any particular narrative definition, they trace the individual

approaches of women to 'nation' and 'war' in their contingencies. Hence, nation as a political institution and war as either 'politics' or 'political crisis', emerge in the theatres of Indian women playwright-directors, not as essential forces that annihilate the 'independent' existence of women as citizens of a state but as notions which surely run the risk of being usurped by hetero-normative patriarchal nationalist indoctrination, if they are isolated from their contexts.