



International Journal of English Language & Translation Studies

Journal homepage: <http://www.eltjournal.org>



Understanding the Nation: Mystifying, De-Mystifying India in Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's *Queen of Dreams*

[PP: 128-138]

Mr. Soumyajyoti Banerjee
Department of Applied Science
Haldia Institute of Technology
Haldia, West Bengal,
India

Dr. Amrita Basu
Department of Applied Science
Haldia Institute of Technology
Haldia, West Bengal
India

ARTICLE INFO

Article History

The paper received
on: **31/07/2014**

Accepted after
peer-review on:
19/08/2014

Published on:
01/09/2014

Keywords:

Myth,
Nation,
Discourse,
Understanding,
Immigration

ABSTRACT

This paper discusses the concepts of Myth and Nation in Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's novel *Queen of Dreams*. Against a narrative backdrop of immigrant community life in America (Indian family moving to the West and settling there) this paper analyses the roles these concepts play in the life of the immigrants. It also focuses on the relation between these two ideas. We shall see how the perception of second or third generation immigrants in America (or any other Western country) regarding their nation (their native land) is based on formulation of myths. The paradigmatic concerns they face and manipulate while trying to understand their nation are also analysed. The paper also portrays the articulation of an existential flux which such individuals or communities feel from a ceaseless struggle between Western value-systems and their traditional Eastern ethics. We shall see how in trying to understand the nation the immigrant community eventually resorts to an Orientalist discursive practice; that of defining the East which is readily available for their interpretation. We shall also witness how when they are faced with a crisis of identity, myths can break down revealing the true nature in which a nation works.

Cite this article as: Banerjee, Soumyajyoti & Basu, Amrita (2014) Understanding the Nation: Mystifying, De-Mystifying India in Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's *Queen of Dreams*. *International Journal of English Language & Translation Studies*. 2(3), 128-138 Retrieved from <http://www.eltjournal.org>



1. Introduction

The paper attempts an analysis of the concepts of Myth and Nation in Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's novel *Queen of Dreams*. We shall analyse the roles these concepts play in the narrative text. We shall see how the idea of nation can be formed based on mythical notions, especially in immigrant communities moving from the East to the West and settling there. We shall also see how their understanding of the ideological construct called nation can quintessentially be in transience. In order to carry out the analysis, we shall follow certain operational procedures, and let theory evolve with the analysis of the selected text. Before beginning the analysis let us look at the operational procedures that we shall follow.

We shall segregate the proposed text into segments (part of a sentence, a sentence or a group of sentences) as contiguously as possible. The segmentation of the narrative text is totally arbitrary and rests upon the convenience of the author(s). This is because our analysis is strictly discursive and as such semantic and stylistic elements can be trespassed. For our analysis, we shall take up only the segments which figure (directly or indirectly) the female protagonist (Rakhi) of the selected novel. The reason behind taking up sections where Rakhi figures prominently will be discussed later. We shall number these segments from 1. We shall call these segments 'extracts,' as in they are 'extracted' from the text.

For each extract we shall discern the meaning(s) it gives rise to. Meaning, here, does not stand for the semantic meaning but the meaning at the supra-sentential level; the connotative meaning (reading between the lines). The connotations of words, phrases, clauses or sentences can lead to various echoes which may be distributed randomly throughout the body of the narrative. The extracts can thus serve as

threads which bind the narrative together in one holistic discourse, with a polyphony of connotations.

There shall be progression in our analysis. We shall try to cover the length of the narrative. But, since we shall concentrate only on the sections of the narrative where Rakhi, the female protagonist figures, the extracts can be far removed---in space and time---in the narrative. Their spatial and temporal displacement does not mean that they will bear no link. The connotative meanings and their corresponding theoretical concepts that we want to study, shall provide the links which bind the narrative together. Our attempt will be to unfold theory as we move along with the narrative. There will thus be chronological and ideological joints in the narrative, which will help us deal with the concepts (proposed in paragraph 1).

Having thus spoken of what we shall do, it is but obvious that we talk about what we shall not do. We shall desist from certain problems:

1. We shall not deal with the author's intention, her literary history and her contemporaneity.
2. We shall not get apprehensive about certain meanings we overlook or forget (as we are not attempting a 'strict' stylistic or textual analysis, rather a conceptual one).
3. We shall not take the text as a closed structure. The text (and its narrative) shall be dealt with as a structuration of other texts and narrative voices. In short, we shall look at the text as an ensemble of infinite signs, symbols and codes (structured by language itself); as 'Intertextual'. Before beginning the analysis we shall look at the concepts (proposed in paragraph 1) in brief.

2. Myths and Immigrant Life

Barthes (2000: 124) states that "myth hides nothing: its function is to distort, not to make disappear". From Barthes' quote we can say that myths serve the process of explaining the world around us. Graves



states that myths are justifications for an existing social system. He says that it can also be a politically coded message regarding certain distinct attributes or social makeup of a people. It can be used as a commentary on the existing world itself; about an existing (for the perceiver or the thinker at least) social system or 'reality.' But for the purpose of our present study, we shall resort to the definition of myth (short and simple yet intricate) given by Hayden White (2000), who simply states that myth is "a mode of discourse" (P: 149). Discourse (or 'discursive practices), according to Foucault (1969), comprises a particular uniformity in defining an object, supplying a set of ideas which can be used to explain that object. Discourse then demarcates what can and cannot be said about that object. This demarcation is an arbitrary procedure. It leads to what we can call the 'truth-paradigm.' As discourse defines and explains an object, there is no 'truth' exterior to it. Jonathan Cook (2005) in explaining the concept of Foucauldian discourse very aptly states that truth is the unrecognised fiction of a successful discourse. This specific, unalterable truth factor in a discourse gives rise to generalized assumptions about the object of discourse. It negates the seemingly discontinuous and diverse elements in that object which discourse studies, imparting a fallacious unity to it. It simplifies its study down to a particular line of thought (the ultimate 'truth'), beyond which nothing is possible. This results in a fallacy of oversimplification and stereotyping. The fallacies of generalization and stereotyping (this is this and that is that) result in the formation of myths. Foucault writes regarding the myth of the concept of the 'author': "Even within our civilization the same type of texts have not always required authors; there was a time when these texts...were accepted...without any question about the identity of their author".

Edward Said (1979) points out the fallacy of myth-formation in his book *Orientalism* where he shows how western explorers and scholars made some stereotypical, generic ideas about eastern cultures and religiously held onto them. Because myths are stereotypes (regarding anything at all), they are very hard to let go. They are extremely resilient and do not perish easily. But when that happens immediately a discourse is born; the contention between what is thought to be and what really is. Here let us consider the concept of discourse given by Partha Chatterjee (1993) who conceives of discourse as a relentless contentious relationship. Discourse is, thus, also, scepticism and argument against such elementary assumptions which we can call myths. Discourse analyses how a myth is formed and explains its true nature. It discards the specific argument on object positions, which we previously called the truth-paradigm. It is a critical engagement with the rudimentary knowledge(s) trying to figure out what lies beneath the truth-paradigm; also whether that paradigm can be broken. Discourse, thus, permeates the *essential* levels of human existence.

In the postcolonial debate the idea of nation has become a discursive field. Nation as an entity in itself is no longer subject to territorial or demographic definitions. Postcolonial discourse places the concepts of nation, nationalism and related ideas in a totally different plane. In the postcolonial discursive domain nation becomes a complex of several intertwined concerns which are politically motivated. When we use the term political we do not just mean state level politics but also the politics at the societal, communal, domestic and individual level, which we can refer to in Gramscian terms as the civil society. This politics (the workings of which as regards nation can be called nationalism or nationalist agenda) produces myths (remember the 'truth-paradigm') regarding



the nation and its constituents (nationalism for example). For the immigrant community myths regarding the nation they left behind is an obvious outcome as they try to hold on to their traditional roots through those specific myths. This, however, becomes more prominent in the children of immigrant families. Born and brought up in the West but still very much a part of an Oriental ethos (at their homes at least) they are torn between the ethics of the West and the East. As Ivekovic (2005) writes,

‘Speaking philosophically, historically and psychoanalytically, in such extreme situations, it is the “second” or “third generation” that may sometimes bring about something new...But a second or third generation will grow in the shade of past events, without the burden of suspicion or guilt...and it will be able to ask the only relevant question from which a new insight may grow, the question about the role of “one’s own” side in the constitutive events.’ (P: 31)

Moreover, because they are educated in western knowledge systems their perception about the East (which comprises their parent’s native land) is inescapably Orientalist: mythic knowledge(s) about the Orient and its various aspects (see Said (1979), *Orientalism*). For them, the Orient can be a place filled with amazing mysteries and fantastic stories, most certainly unlike the West that is modern, regular and normal (because it *is* the norm in the orientalist discourse). These children of immigrant families tend to form myths of their own to try to know a nation they have never seen, but have only tried to imagine from stories they hear from their parents and from their formal education in the West. The Orient casts a magic shadow on these individuals who find it extremely difficult to come out of it. As a result they make general statements on the seemingly undeveloped,

non-modern (i.e. non-Western) East. They hold onto their generalizations because they are influenced by the ‘truth-paradigm.’ They do not feel diaspora like their parents but cannot let go of the elusive East either. Studying such characters, along with the narrative, becomes interesting. South-East Asian English literature (we are taking novels into account) often posit such dilemmatic existences and characters.

The novel under consideration, *Queen of Dreams* by Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni (2004), has a central character, Rakhi, who is constantly haunted by India, an India she doesn’t know but tries to imagine through the stories and legends her mother tells her. Rakhi’s mother is a dream-teller who comes and settles in America with her husband. Rakhi is born, brought up and educated in America. India, as a nation, for her, is a place of exotic mysteries and legends. She is torn between the India she imagines and her cultural assimilation in America. Rakhi is a painter but runs a joint restaurant with her friend Belle. When their business (their livelihood) is endangered by an American competitor, and when a chain of catastrophes see Rakhi and her family branded as ‘terrorists’, Rakhi starts realising the ideas of nation and nationalism. Her revelations lead her to discern the true nature of things and also the essence of what was till then elusive to her: India.

Having spoken of the concepts briefly we can begin our analysis. Before we begin there is one last thing to point out. The reason behind choosing the segments where Rakhi figures, for our analysis, is that the character of Rakhi helps us in dealing with the theoretical concepts for our study. It is important to state here that the character of Rakhi (in the novel) serves as the symbolic code or the representative code. As Rakhi’s character serves as a symbol, it is oblique. Its understanding (because it is a symbolic code) can –or will



necessarily-be implicit, varied and subject to individual perceptions. We shall take the word 'symbol' in a general sense, as that feature of language which allows us an understanding of an articulation of meaning beyond the usual enunciation. Theoretical interpretations which will be drawn from the analysis of the extracts will also indispensably be subjective, with various ramifications. So, we shall not unnecessarily concern about 'apparent' meanings of the symbolic code, as meaning is 'not-absolute', and neither is a symbol. The names of the speakers in the extracts are given in first brackets. Where there are no names given it means that they belong to the anonymous second person narrative voice.

3. Analysis

1. "I would have preferred the stories to have come from my mother, and to have been set in India, where she grew up, a land that seemed to me to be shaded with unending mystery." (Rakhi)

a) Since the beginning of the narrative Rakhi tries to visualise India through her mother's eyes. She wants the stories to come from her mother precisely because her mother grew up in India. It is obvious that she knows India quite well.

b) The word 'mystery' is crucial from the point of view of narrative actions. A mystery here begins a sequence. In effect it implies consequent actions, like: a) to investigate and b) to unveil. Rakhi is disappointed however as her mother breaks the spell by announcing "that India wasn't all that mysterious." She describes India as "just another place" which for Rakhi is not convincing, primarily for two reasons: 1) she does not want to let go of the spell that 'her' magical India has cast upon her; and 2) her understanding of India as a nation has already been tampered with by Orientalist discourse of the Orient. We must note here that Rakhi, since her birth resides in America.

c) Rakhi's idea of India resembles that of the early navigators and explorers of distant lands for whom India was a place of magic and profound myths. Rakhi, however, is a 'modern.' Why then is her idea similar to the antique explorers? It is an extension of the discourse already created (on the Orient by the West) which continues even in modern times. Rakhi also falls prey to the Orientalist knowledge systems. She cannot think outside of what her formal education in the West has taught her. She is caught in the web of the 'truth-paradigm.'

2. "That was when I made the other discovery, the one that would nudge and gnaw and mock at me all my growing-up years. My mother was a dream teller." (Rakhi)

a) The word 'discovery' continues the sequence initiated by the word 'mystery.' The enigma posited in the previous section leads Rakhi to explore and discover. The imagery of European explorers in distant lands returns here.

b) What Rakhi discovers would, according to her, reroute her entire existence. Perhaps knowing that her mother was a dream teller came as a shock to Rakhi. It was only recently that her mother had made Rakhi aware that India was *not* a magic place where unusual things happened. It was a regular place like any other. But dream tellers are an unusual lot, and rare. There is something magical about them surely. Her mother was a dream teller *and* an Indian. The facts contradicted each other. There ought to be something mystical about the place which gave Rakhi her mother, a dream teller. India kept getting more mysterious, and this time it was for the true nature of her mother.

3. "At home we rarely ate anything but Indian; that was the one way in which my mother kept her culture." (Rakhi)

a) Because the outside world (in the novel the American society) is non-compliant with Indian ways, it becomes important to



revive the Indian tradition by eating Indian food at home. Nation and food are historically inextricably joined. To feel part of a particular nation, to 'keep one's culture', when one lives in a foreign land, can necessarily involve food (of the native land) as connect.

b) We must also note the use of the word 'her.' Rakhi doesn't say 'our culture' but "her culture." This suggests a sense of alienation she feels from the Indian culture. She is not yet a part of it. She is yet to understand the nation she desires to decode. Rakhi's mother (as we learn from the novel) had to leave India and come to America when she was a grown up. It is but obvious that she feels diaspora. Rakhi on the contrary was born in America. She can't feel the same way about India as her mother does. For her trying to know India as a nation involves bits and pieces of traditional experiences which apparently juxtapose with the American society she interacts with regularly outside her home. That is why she says 'at home', which means that outside home they may or may not eat non-Indian food.

4. "Until now, most of her paintings had been about India – an imagined India...."

The human mind is frequently drawn toward the unknown. Being an artist, a creator, Rakhi's mind is also attracted toward the realm she knows very little of - but wants to know more about – India. The nation to Rakhi remains an imagined one. She tries to gather the Indian ethos from some photographs which at best serve as momentary events in Indian spacio-temporality.

5. "They have nursed each other through...the pressures that only Indian parents know how to apply to their offspring."

a) While speaking about the relation between Rakhi and her friend Belle, the author brings what we would like to call 'the Indian parenthood myth', which forms

a part of Indian nationhood (at least in the West). Living in 'the land of the free', growing up there, Rakhi and Belle turn to the obvious comparison between traditional Indian parental ethics and American parental values.

b) The word 'only' is notable as it results in the myth formation. The word is also used as a tool for isolation. Indian parental pressure on their children is seen as unlike anything anywhere around the world, and in a negative sense. Because it comes from parents of Indian origin, parental pressure is seen not as an individual or family trait but as an essential trait of Indianness. Though it is not necessary or likely that every parent of Indian origin would do the same, still their vision is marked by a specialist argument (which forms the cornerstone of the orientalist discourse) which generalises and transforms a mere psychological feature into a profoundly sensitive myth: *Indian parents are like that.*

6. "Leaning on the western wall is an oil painting, almost done: sunset on the peaks of Kanchenjunga."

a) As mentioned earlier Rakhi's formulation of Indian nationhood results from an array of varied experiences. This time it is from a painting of one of India's most revered mountain peaks. It is just another painting from which Rakhi tries to assimilate the 'real' India.

b) Note that the painting leans on the western wall. Whether intentional or not it raises some interesting connotations. A painting about an Oriental landscape inclined on the western wall: India has already started to influence Rakhi's life.

7. "I can sense Belle's anxiety even before I enter the Chai House." (Rakhi)

Rakhi and Belle run a restaurant. The name of the restaurant is important here: Chai House. Both Rakhi and Belle had a choice of any other name, American or Western. Why it is that this name was chosen? In her professional life (where Belle and she run a



restaurant) and her personal life where she is a painter, Rakhi has had choices of keeping anything Indian out of her life. Still she chooses to paint Indian landscapes and have an Indian name for her restaurant. This symbolizes her urge to retain the flavour of a country which she desperately wants to know, through her own creation, her paintings and her workplace (where seemingly the outside world cannot interfere).

8. "I can just see myself...shrouded in fat and a polyester salwarkameez...rolling out makkikirotis for my in-laws...." (Belle)

a) The word 'just' is ambiguous. It can probably have two connotations: (i) it is used as a temporality, as 'I saw him just now' or (ii) it eliminates further choice, as 'I saw just him.' 'I can just see myself' means that Belle sees 'just herself' (no one else) or she can see herself 'just then' (at that very moment).

b) Though Belle speaks of the possible future, she has and the changes it would bring in her, her statement is not just limited to herself. It is a general remark on Indian women and family system. But not every Indian woman is engaged in serving her in-laws and wearing 'salwarkameez'. Belle has seen her family but she has not seen India at large. Yet she comments on Indian nationhood with surety. This results in a sedimentary discourse, creating paradigmatic conclusions – as facts – based on trivial evidences. The discourse creates a myth about India, the way it supposedly is. This is yet another example of the typical orientalist discursive practice: creating a specious unity for differentiable socio-psychological elements. There can never be an elementary logic or statement about Indian nationhood (where Indian women figure prominently) simply because Indian nationhood is diverse. Exemplary discourse on such assorted social existences is the heresy of what Edward Said has termed Orientalism.

9. "He brings back...palakpaneer, tandoori chicken, pooris – items that take hours of preparation time. (Rakhi)

The lines above are yet another example of the orientalist myth formation about India. This time it is about the Indian culinary tradition. A list of typical Indian food items are given first, then an adverse judgement is passed on them: 'items that take hours of preparation time.' Rakhi compares Indian food with Chinese (which is made very easily and quickly). Her statement is supported not by hard facts but by her own assumptions. Her comments typify Indian food (of which she lists only a mere handful) and cooking tradition. Her understanding is of a mythical nature which cannot be extended as a generic remark on a nation of a billion people.

10. "Though she talked freely with me about matters that were taboo in Indian families – boyfriends, bodily changes, bad things that happened at school...." (Rakhi)

Here is yet another orientalist myth about the Indian family system and the relationship between Indian parents and children. Rakhi gives a list of topics that she presumes Indian parents don't discuss with their children. She then remarks that they are not discussed because they are considered 'taboo' or forbidden. The question arises that if taboo how does Rakhi's mother discuss those forbidden things with her. Two possible implications come up here: a) that this tradition is part of other Indian families excepting theirs; b) their family is *not* Indian, so they can be discussed 'freely.' The second option is immaterial as they are an Indian family no doubt. The first option if considered entails that other Indian families can be there where they are *not* considered taboo. If it is so then Rakhi's observation is baseless and is procured from mythical perspectives about Indian traditionality (which necessarily is negative in Western discourses).



11. “Then she started telling me the story of Shangri-La.” (Rakhi)

The obvious question that comes to mind when one thinks of the character of Rakhi is her uncanny obsession for India. It is not as if she considers herself alienated from her ‘real’ homeland. She does not suffer the pangs of diaspora either. Why then is India so enchanting to her? Part of the answer to the question may be found in the extract above. Rakhi, since her childhood is fed with mythical stories about Shangri-La, the mystic land in the Himalayas (an elemental symbol of the Indian ethos). Rakhi’s mother enthralled Rakhi with stories of wonder that were based in India. It is but obvious that they had a tremendous impact on Rakhi’s psyche. Even as she grew up she could not let go of her elusive India, one she wanted to decode so desperately. Her childhood experiences resulted in her myth formation about India as a nation.

12. “They have decided to transform the Chai House into an Indian snack shop, a chaerdokan, as it would be called in Calcutta.”

Rakhi and Belle’s restaurant business face a crisis from the Java coffee shop opened right across the street. Customers vacate the Chai House and throng Java. Facing probable closure Rakhi’s father and Rakhi come up with an idea. They plan to give their restaurant an authentic Indian feel. So they ‘decide to transform’ it into a traditional Indian snack shop.

a) The most important word in the extract is ‘transform.’ The Chai House is Rakhi’s own space (seemingly unaffected by outside interferences). But a sudden crisis has Rakhi turn once again to India. Slowly, it seems, she gets into the Indian ethos to protect her business.

b) The question we ask here is why, though she is an American (born and brought up in America), does she have to resort to an Indianised transformation of her Chai House? Why can she not protect her

business by selling something purely American? Nation as we see in this case exceeds boundaries. Nation comprises not momentary space-time constraints but an extended socio-economic-cultural experience that bears a global mark. Otherwise, how would a ‘chaerdokan’ matter to Rakhi during crisis when it has not mattered to her till then? This suggests that Rakhi begins to feel an ontological separation from the American nation, which she thinks is averse towards her plight. It will not come to protect her during trying times. The only retreat she can find is in her unknown India.

Rakhi now has access to her mother’s secret journals. She comes to know of things that are so mysterious to her that she can hardly believe them. She learns of ancient texts such as the *Brihat Swapna Sarita* and the *Swapna Purana*. She comes to know about the rituals in dream telling. Suddenly the myths and fantastic stories about India begin to make sense to her. She starts unraveling her ‘true’ mother and with it India. She understands that a nation is a multifaceted complex of experiences and not merely a one dimensional linearity where a people live out their lives. So understanding the nation entails avoiding generalized notions (myths, legends, stories etc. that makes a nation being perceived as something) about a singularity of experience which is necessarily and unavoidably unalterable.

Rakhi hears her father share mythical stories from the Indian epics, the Ramayana and the Mahabharata regarding the history of various Indian food items with Sonny and his friends. Previously Rakhi had ridiculed Indian food for their long preparation time. Now she gets to know about their links with ancient Indian history. India begins to take a webbed shape with numerous space-time links between the past and the present. All of a sudden India starts becoming a demystified



nation which cannot be pinned down to any specialized discourse, precisely because there is no specialized discourse which can define a nation (but only a collection of discursive practices).

Belle's and Rakhi's restaurant business starts reviving again. Rakhi's father suggests that they can innovate to the buffet system where the customers can pay a minimum amount and order what they want. He feels it could work on the customer's trust factor and increase their influx. Here the following conversation ensues between Rakhi and her father:

13. "I frown. 'Is this how you did business in the tea shops in India?'" (Rakhi

He bursts out laughing. "Are you kidding! Customers there would have robbed us blind." (Rakhi's father)

Rakhi thinks her father (who has worked in a tea shop in India previously) has applied the same method for increasing the sales back in India. To her disappointment her father negates her view totally by telling her that in India it would have spelt catastrophe for the business. Customers in India would have made full use of the system only to their advantage. Rakhi is confused about it. She fears whether it will work at all. But she is surprised when she finds out that the trick has indeed worked; that customers have increased and they have not incurred any loss. Rakhi is confounded yet again and asks her father about what she feels is strange behaviour on part of the immigrant community. Why did they not do what her father told they would have done in India? Here Rakhi's father replies:

14. 'Maybe because they helped rebuild it, they feel it's theirs. They don't want to lose it.'

This is another case where the nation (as an idea or an ideological construct) surpasses topographical limitations. It can bring a sense of belongingness even in places where it faces an existential crisis. The immigrant community even with their

American citizenship *feels* alien. Alienation creates a community psychology of self-protection which gradually morphs into a national psyche, simply because it is too hard to forget the roots entirely. Rarity breeds specialty. In India the marketing would not work precisely because there is no existential crisis. Therefore, individual profit becomes greater than the community. But on a foreign land a community has to watch each other's back. That is why protecting Rakhi's restaurant was so important. It was one place where they can be themselves; they can be Indian without any inhibitions. It is the unique way in which nation and nationalism work. There are no discreet norms to govern them. They, thus, cannot be limited to some specific discourse. Nation creates its own discourses as it interacts with an array of human experiences which *essentially* include the politics of power.

Rakhi's concept of India, her concept of nation has undergone change. She now understands that nation and nationality cannot be put under some explicit categories. She receives a package containing paintings by Indian painters. The paintings are nothing like she has ever seen. They are of such variety that Rakhi is unsure if they are Indian. So far paintings about India meant scenes of the market place, poor people, beautiful mountains etc. She understands the meaning the paintings convey. She understands that art cannot be constrained to some boundary. More importantly she now decodes the mystery that has long since troubled her: a) what is India? and b) what does it mean to be Indian? She finally discovers that "All this time she's been putting boundaries around that word, too, what it can mean" ("that word" meaning the word 'Indian'). It becomes clear to her that nation as a concept cannot be bound to paradigmatic boundaries of thought-perception or discourses. Being Indian does not entail a



perfectly predictable singularity of experience (as is thought in most Western discourses on the Orient). Here let us consider the next extract:

15. 'She doesn't have to change to claim her Indianness; she doesn't have to try to become her mother.'

Once she has understood what it means to be Indian, the mystic air around India vanishes. She knows she can be who she is (that she is not her mother who had a special gift) and still call herself Indian. She does not need to be someone with extraordinary powers to become Indian. For her now, being Indian is like being anyone from any other nation in the world. 'Things break down inside her'; perceptions transform themselves to reveal what was hidden. Here again we find that the sequence (that of an investigation) begun in the first part culminates into a holistic comprehension of where Rakhi belongs. The sequence is thus complete.

16. "Belle, I don't have to put up a flag to prove that I'm American." (Rakhi)

The word that we must note in the extract is 'prove.' Earlier we said that a crisis situation can spur a nationalist demonstration of integrity and oneness. In the novel, America, as a nation, faces a crisis when the twin towers are devastated by terrorists. The attack results in a national emergency. American citizens (even non-American immigrants) put up flags in front of their houses, offices etc. as a symbol of their unshaken faith as Americans. Rakhi is also suggested the same but refuses. Her newfound understanding of the ideas of nation and nationalism restrict her from doing so. According to her she does not have to 'prove' that she is an American. Unfortunately this spells disaster as they (Rakhi and her family which includes Belle and Sonny also) are branded as terrorists. They are attacked in their restaurant by a group of Americans. Rakhi's outlook towards nation and nationalism becomes

clear. She realizes that nationalism is nothing but a politicized power struggle where opposite forces of domination and subjugation collide with devastating results. She also recognizes that nation is an idea which transgresses political boundaries to create its own non-linear space-time continuum. Rakhi understands that nation (in this case India) cannot be known through fixed, orientalist, mythic knowledge systems. It can only be comprehended by removing all pre-conceptions and generalizations and by accepting it as a gamut of separate space-time events (many dimensional historiographies) strewn as socio-political-economic human experiences; as being, in its essence, intertextual.

About the Authors

Mr. Soumyajyoti Banerjee is an Assistant Professor at Haldia Institute of Technology, West Bengal, India. He holds Master's degree in English and is pursuing Ph.D. He has teaching experience of nearly five years and has had research publications in major, peer-reviewed national and international journals of repute.

Dr. Amrita Basu is an Assistant Professor at Haldia Institute of Technology, West Bengal, India. She is the Coordinator of English Undergraduate courses and Postgraduate courses in the Institute. She is Ph.D in English from IIT, Kharagpur. She has teaching experience of more than eight years and has more than thirty research publications in major, peer-reviewed reputed national and international journals.

References

- Barthes, R.** (2000). *Mythologies*. London: Vintage.
- Chatterjee, P.** (1993). *The Nation and Its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.



Cook, J. (2005). Discourse. In Fowler, R, (ed.), A Dictionary of Modern Critical Terms. London: Routledge.

Divakaruni, Chitra B. 2004. *Queen of Dreams*. Gurgaon: Hachette Book Publishing India

Foucault, M. (1969). What is an Author? In Language, Counter-Memory and Practice. (1977)

Graves, R. (1972) *Introduction to New Larousse Encyclopaedia of Mythology*. London, New York, Sydney, Toronto: Hamlyn.

Ivekovic, R. (2005). *Captive Gender: Ethnic Stereotypes and Cultural*

Boundaries. New Delhi: Women Unlimited.

Said, Edward W. (1979). *Orientalism*. New York: Vintage Books

Sanders, J. (2008). *Adaptation and Appropriation*. New Critical Idiom Series. Routledge: London.

White, H. (2000). Catastrophe, Communal Memory and Mythic Discourse: The Uses of Myth in the Reconstruction of Society. In Bo Stråth, (ed.), Myth and Memory in the Construction of Society. Brussels: P.I.E. Peter Lang s.a.

Wilbur, Stewart S. (1962). *A Handbook of Critical Approaches to Literature*. London: Collier-Macmillan.