

Brothers in Arms: Tracing the Trajectory of Colonial Muslim Politics in Zeenuth Futehally's *Zohra*

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Abstract

One area of the discourse of nationalism that is receiving increasing attention from postcolonial scholars, especially from those who have contributed to the Subaltern Studies Collective, is the problematics of the relation between the nationalist elites and the masses in colonial India. It foregrounds the undervaluing and omission of certain sections of people in the narrative of Indian nationalism. Representations of nationalist struggle almost always celebrate the inspiring acts of the individual members of the upper stratum of society. The contributions made by the weaker communities and unprivileged individuals are either overlooked or are inadequately represented. The Muslims have been no exception. The marginal role ascribed to the Muslims in the anti-colonial movements have been one of pores through which the seeds of separatist politics germinated resulting into a fractured independence of the country. Zeenuth Futehally's novel *Zohra* (1951) while offering a nuanced view of the Muslim life of colonial India during the 1920s and 1930s underscores the contradictions embedded in the nationalist thoughts and political movements of the Muslims of the country. The representation of the simultaneous presence of nationalist and separatist politics among the Muslims in Futehally's novel receives an added edge as it is presented through the eyes of a Muslim woman.

This article, in re-reading *Zohra*, would draw primarily on Partha Chatterjee's ideas on the pitfalls of nationalism to trace the uneven contours of nationalism that kept the Muslims almost always at the margins of nationalist movements and thereby led to their leaning towards a separatist politics. In doing so, the article will also try to configure the location of Muslim women as mere bystanders and trebly marginalized in the nationalist project.

Keywords: nationalism, marginalization, colonialism, partition, Muslim

Visalakshi Menon in her review of Zeenuth Futehally's novel *Zohra* published in *The Hindu* on 3 October 2004 referred to the possible fortunes and misfortunes of the author's relatives, some of whom had gone away to Pakistan and some chose to stay in India after the partition of the country. Through her speculations Menon has raised some important questions in which the personal gets inflected by the public and the political:

What was in the minds of those Muslims who chose to stay back in India after Partition? Were they constantly being called upon to explain their choice and openly profess their support for India? Did they, through their political actions and their writings, stress the commonalities, the ties that bound Hindus and Muslims together? (n. pag.)

The answer to these questions is critical in making sense of the representation of the nationalistic politics in the novel.¹ The novel published in 1951 presents the lives and thoughts of educated members from the Muslim community of the city of Hyderabad during the 1930s. In hindsight, one would recognise these days to be the period in which India was preparing for her fateful encounter with freedom and partition. The nationalist movement was gaining its shape through debates and negotiations. Hamid, Bashir and Zohra, around whom the narrative is woven, took part in such debates armed with logic and passion. *Zohra* allows us a critical glimpse into the mind-set of these people, especially as members of the Muslim community of Hyderabad during that critical time, and how they responded to the events and ideas of national importance which would later lead the country on its path to independence, partition and violence. The text strives to address not just the issue of nationalism as political movement but also other forms and strategies adopted by the nationalist strain of contemporary Indian politics.

It must be noted that there are very few works by Muslim writers of Indian English literature of the colonial period which try to address the issues of the rise of nationalism and the flowering of separatist politics among the Muslims of those days. Ahmed Ali's *Twilight in Delhi* (1940) chronicles the slow but certain disintegration of Muslim aristocracy in the light of encroaching British colonialism in the early 20th century India. The novel hints at the direction that Muslim politics would take in later decades but does not deal directly with that political trajectory. His short story "Our Lane" (1937), translated from the Urdu original "Hamari Gali" by the author, represents how the slow, uneventful life of the residents of a Muslim dominated area gets upended by the tides of freedom movement. The political and the personal collide in the story to underscore the complexities of India's struggle for independence. Aamir Ali's *Conflict* (1947) centres on the character of Shankar, an idealist young man from Maharashtra but the figure of Abdul Rashid, with his commitment to the nationalist cause manages to shade some light on Muslim participation in the freedom movement of the country. But, so far as women authors are concerned, Zeenuth Futehally seems to be the only author of the first half of 20th century who has foregrounded, with subtle hints and occasional broad strokes, the diverse and contradictory dimensions of Muslim participation in Indian freedom movement. Attia Hosain's *Sunlight on a Broken Column* (1961) is a fascinating coming-of-age story of a young Muslim woman as she bears witness to the birth of a politics that would lead to a fractured independence marred by violence. Zeenuth's novel therefore, remains a pioneering work and paves the way for later woman authors who would portray the Muslim politics of colonial India from the perspective of an insider, from the point of view of a Muslim woman.

Locating Zeenuth Futehally

Since the early days of literary scholarship, some texts, by a collective agreement of readers, critics and academicians have come to be identified as "major" or important while some others have failed to receive adequate and consistent critical attention. Things have, to some extent, started to change during the second half of the twentieth

century. Some work have been done in recognising the spaces of marginality around writing of coloured people, women's writing, gay writing, writings from the non-European world, among others. Change of a similar kind can be seen in the Indian literary sphere also. In the last few decades, especially after the establishment of Postcolonial Studies as advocates of marginalised politics and identities, one notices a growing attempt in Indian literary scholarship to re-appraise forgotten authors and literary texts. Consequently, the Muslim women novelists of pre-independence India have started to emerge as subjects of serious literary analysis and interpretation. Zeenuth Futehally's novel *Zohra* is one such forgotten literary text which has come into prominence in the recent times. Though published in 1951ⁱⁱ, *Zohra* is certainly conceived much earlier in the pre-independence India. About the origin of the novel we know very little. Zeenuth Futehally was only eighteen years of age when she went to Japan with her husband Abu Futehally where her husband's family had a business firm. She also visited Philippines with her husband and it was probably in Manila, "as a transient visitor" to the foreign land that she, "first conceived of her book" (Patwardhan and Bhatt 34). However, her work on the book was, "an on and off affair, which lasted a period of fifteen years" (Patwardhan and Bhatt 34). Following the logic and time-line offered by Patwardhan and Bhatt, we can assume that *Zohra* was written in the decades immediately before the independence of the country.

Zohra is set in early-twentieth century Hyderabad. It narrates the life-story of an upper-class Muslim woman, Zohra, She grows up to receive liberal education but has to be confined within the boundaries set by a conservative Muslim society. She has to marry against her will at the age of eighteen even though she wanted to be educated at Santiniketan founded by Rabindranath Tagore that encourages creative inclinations of the students. The novel goes on to depict her increasing distance from her husband who cares little for her creative self and her friendship and love for her brother-in-law Hamid, who is a liberal nationalist Muslim. Zohra overcomes her desire for Hamid in the face of her great sense of duty towards her family. She could win over the conservative social conventions only when she dies an untimely death in a relatively young age. The novel, although a love story at its core, deals with several concomitant issues like modernity, nationalism, woman's right, representation of the Muslim world, to name only a few. The first edition of the novel published in 1951 had a foreword by E. M. Forster, who praised the book both for its "vivid ... picture of the old Moslem society of Hyderabad ... before it disappeared" and for its "convincing and charming" eponymous heroine who makes the book "not only an interesting document but a creative achievement"(261).ⁱⁱⁱ The introduction to the original 1951 edition was written by K P S Menon, the first Foreign Secretary of independent India. Menon has referred to the novel as a "genial companion" with whom many a reader can "enjoy a weekend" (264). Both Menon and Forster have failed to appreciate the novel's attempt to represent that unique Muslim voice, left usually as apologetic footnotes to the popular narrative on separatist politics of the colonial Muslims, a voice which makes no demand for a divided country but advocates active participation in the anti-colonial movements for an independent India. The problematics of the Muslim community's views and voice, often contradictory, at times ambivalent, on the country's struggle for independence would be the primary focus of this paper.

At the Margin: Critical Interest or the Lack of it

As has already been mentioned some of the writings of Muslim women of the colonial period have now been receiving critical attention. One can find occasional research articles on *Zohra* but most of the scholars have paid very little or no attention to the representation of Muslim politics in the novel. Dorothy M. Spencer in her introductory essay on the rise of Indian fiction in English in her *Indian fiction in English: An Annotated Bibliography* has not mentioned Futehally. But in the section of the annotated list of fictions she has commented on “the wealth of detail” in *Zohra* (63). Meenakshi Mukherjee in *The Twice Born Fiction* has been rather harsh in her opinion of Futehally’s novel and has claimed that the novel suffers from “sentimentality” and “romantic idealism” (55, 56). M E Derrett in *The Modern Indian Novel in English: A Comparative Approach* has referred to Futehally’s work several times as truthful representation of the life of a community and has also paid attention to the episodic nature of the novel: “apparent lack of planning could be realistic portrayal of fact rather than an inadequate skill on the part of the author” (99). However, it can be seen that none of these early critical pieces on Futehally has addressed the question of nationalism so central to her novel. Among the later critics Eunice De Souza has made significant contribution to the renewal of interest in *Zohra*. She has included excerpts from the text in two of her anthologies namely *Purdah: An Anthology* and *Women's Voices: Selections from Nineteenth and Early-twentieth Century Indian Writing in English*. But, Eunice De Souza has also not tried to foreground the question of nationalism in *Zohra*. Ambreen Hai’s essay “Adultery behind Purdah and the Politics of Indian Muslim Nationalism in Zeenuth Futehally’s *Zohra*” published in 2013 is first serious attempt to configure the Muslim political consciousness in the last few decades of the colonial period as represented by Futehally. However, Hai has given an overall appreciation of the text with more emphasis on the cultural function of *Zohra* shedding light on issues like purdah.

Zohra thus does cultural work on two fronts: within the Indian Muslim community, it questions the systems of purdah and arranged marriage, emphasizing the damage they do and argues implicitly for reform in favor of women's education, opportunity, and freedom of choice. Within the Indian nation more broadly, it suggests the progressive potential of Indian Muslims like Hamid (*Zohra*'s brother-in-law) who devotes himself both to the anticolonial nationalist movement and social reform with his exemplary, inextricably twofold support of national and women's independence. (Hai 4).

Hai has also given a detailed account of the dilemma faced by the people of Hyderabad as the then Nizam of the princely state planned not to join independent India. This paper of mine will certainly take cue from Ambreen Hai but will be more precise in dealing with the specific issue of the emergence and growth of national consciousness and separatist politics among the Muslims and how the two contradictory facets failed to find a point of commonality as can be seen in the views and actions of the two brothers, Hamid and Rashid.

Theorising Nationalism vis-à-vis the Muslims of Colonial India

The problematics of the relation between colonial modernity and anti-colonial nationalism have been dealt with by critics and scholars from numerous angles and the relation is generally accepted to be mutually constitutive. Jurgen Habermas identifies

modernity as a “radicalised consciousness” which “freed itself from all historical ties”. According to this argument of Habermas, the emergence of modernity seems to denote not just the dilution and dissolution of the spell of classical European traditions but also the course of Europe coming to “know itself” (“Modernity versus Postmodernity” 4). This idea of self-knowledge embedded in the processes of modernity gives rise to the ideal of being freed from an unthinking loyalty to tradition and a belief in dogmas and superstitions. The idea of freedom and autonomy in the world of thought and discourse leads to the question of self-rule and independence in political, economic and social spheres. Partha Chatterjee in course of explaining the idea of a modernity that is national has commented: “Modernity is the first social philosophy which conjures up in the minds of the most ordinary people dreams of independence and self-rule” (“Our Modernity”18). Chatterjee in the same lecture has argued that in many colonised countries like India, modernity was supposed to help the cause of colonialism but it worked in opposition to that goal:

“. . . modernity was put forward as the strongest argument in favour of the continued colonial subjection of India: foreign rule was necessary, we were told, because Indians must first become enlightened. And then it was the same logic of modernity which one day led us to the discovery that imperialism was illegitimate; independence was our desired goal. The burden of reason, dreams of freedom; the desire for power, resistance to power: all of these are elements of modernity (19).

It is this modernity which is national and teaches “to employ the methods of reason ... enables us to identify the forms of our own particular modernity” that has led to anti-colonial nationalism in our country (Our Modernity 9). However anti-colonial nationalism is neither monolithic nor homogeneous. Chatterjee has argued that there is distinct difference between nationalism as a political movement and nationalism as a cultural construct (*The Nation and Its Fragments* 5-6). While the first one tries to build resistance against the oppression of the colonial state, with a goal to end it, nationalism as a cultural construct has the aim of instilling a sense of superiority and sovereignty among the colonised people. Of course these two manifestations of anti-colonial nationalism are mutually constitutive.

Nationalist narrative employs strategically selective identities to conceive homogeneous and exclusive national traditions. But, this homogeneity of the construction fails to accommodate the great diversity of the community, leaving out some sections in the margins of the narrative. This exclusionary nature of the project of nationalism, on the one hand, creates a periphery beyond which lies a great number of people and on the other, represents the interests of the select dominant power groups. The exclusionary nature of the project of nationalism led to a separatist politics among the Muslims of India as they have been relegated to the margins of the narrative of nationalism.

This article of mine while interrogating the contours of nationalism revealed in Zeenuth Futehally’s novel *Zohra* will focus on the way nationalism as a political movement was gaining a distinct shape and direction among the colonial Muslims in the first few decades of twentieth century and how the idea of an inclusive national culture celebrated by the Muslims was being outdone by the separatist religio-centric political movement. The enquiry gains an added dimension as it takes into account the location of a Muslim woman, namely Zohra, the eponymous heroine of Futehally’s novel in the narrative of

nationalism. The exclusionary character of Indian nationalism keeps not only the Muslims at the footnotes, same is done with women. The article will also try to make sense of the process of this exclusion.

Zohra and Gandhian Ideology

Zohra is set in the 1920s and 1930s, a time in which some of the stormy episodes of India's struggle for independence, like Non-cooperation movement, Salt Satyagraha and Civil Disobedience Movement took place. Futehally's novel referring to these events brings into focus nationalism in the form of a political movement. Gandhian ideology guided these political movements and therefore, is an important presence in *Zohra*. In Zohra's view, Mahatma Gandhi is more than a political leader who was leading the countrymen in the fight against colonial oppression. Even when she was very young she knew about Gandhi's influence on the lives of women as he was "bringing emancipation to the women of India, even causing a number of Muslim women to shed purdah in the zeal to work for the national cause" (35). Zohra's worshipful attitude is indicative of the fact that Mahatma Gandhi will be present in the narrative almost as a saint.

India's struggle for independence in those days was following the footsteps of Mahatma Gandhi. Use of homespun Khaddar instead of fabrics made in Britain was a Gandhian method in facing the economic oppression and raising a voice of protest. Not surprisingly, there are discussions on the use of Khaddar in Futehally's novel. In 1926, when Zohra leaves Hyderabad for the first time to go to Bombay with Bashir and his sister Safia to welcome Hamid on his return from England she reveals her support for the Swadeshi Movement by buying Khaddar instead of British "mill made" silk saris (119). Later, when Hamid would be actively participating in Indian freedom movement he would wear only dresses made of Khaddar. Thus, Futehally's narrative, like many other fictions on the theme of Indian nationalism, projects Khaddar as an important symbol.

After Hamid comes back to India, his voice becomes the most important one in the debates presented in the novel on issues of nationalism and anti-colonial struggle and he expresses his views on the role of Gandhi also. On the very first occasion when Hamid refers to Mahatma Gandhi, one can easily note the great respect he has for this frail old man. He is no less an admirer of Gandhi than Zohra is. In fact, Hamid and Zohra connect for the first time when his sister Safia makes fun of them as "Gandhian disciples," and a "glance of understanding passed between them" (125).

Gandhian Whirlwind: Hamid's Participation in Indian Freedom Movements^{iv}

Hamid was one among the innumerable Indians who were inspired by Gandhi's Dandi March for Salt Satyagraha. Hamid was arrested and was sent for two years in prison. However, when the news of Hamid's arrest reached Hyderabad, the reaction among his friends varied widely: "When news reached Hyderabad of Hamid's arrest, his friends accepted it with mixed feelings. They grumbled, cursed, felt strangely elated, and celebrated the occasion" (213). The reactions of Hamid's mother Masuma Begum and his brother Bashir were tears of desperation and cynical criticism respectively. Tom Nairn has made use of the two-faced figure of Janus to bring out the "essential ambiguity of nationalism" (Nairn 71). The different and contradictory reactions to Hamid's imprisonment is an illustration of "the essential ambiguity of nationalism." It successfully hints at the fault lines inherent within the narrative of nationalism.

Hamid's stay at the British prison was painful but not too unbearable. Hamid was popular and was accepted as a leader by the inmates of the jail. Hamid's emergence as the leader of the freedom fighters in the prison and outside foregrounds the active Muslim participation, at times in the roles of leaders, in the Indian freedom movement led by Mahatma Gandhi and Congress. In this regard *Zohra* is certainly a pioneering text as one finds in almost no narrative of the time a credible account of Muslim participation in the freedom movement.^v The participation of Hamid in Gandhian freedom movement becomes all the more unique if we take into account the fact that Hamid is from Hyderabad, a princely state ruler of which did not want the state to be a part of independent India.

Bashir's Choice and the Rise of Separatist Muslim Politics

There are many occasions in the novel when the two brothers Bashir and Hamid are engaged in debates over the issue of India's freedom movement. The debate often turns bitter. The debates between these two brothers highlight some of the most crucial aspects of separatist Muslim politics as opposed to a secular and inclusive understanding of nationalism. Not only do these debates present two contesting voices asserting two completely opposite opinions on the issues of nationalist politics, but also manage to present a development in Bashir's personality and attitude that is paradigmatic of the general changes in attitudes and opinions of educated Indian Muslim in the last few decades of British rule. If we, considering the time span of the novel i.e. 1920s and 1930s, trace the historical location of the work, and place it alongside the patterns and movements in Muslim politics of the time, we will be able to see a clear parallel between the development in the political thoughts of Bashir and the assertion of separatist identity by Indian Muslim politicians of the time.

Bashir, from the very beginning of the novel, fits perfectly to the model of a western educated young man with modern outlook on life. He had returned from abroad after obtaining a degree of doctorate in Physics from Cambridge University. In India he is involved in developing a university at Hyderabad. He seems to have little time for religion. And yet, Bashir in the later years would be sarcastic to Zohra's apparent negligence of religious duties because she spent some time in teaching the poor girls of her locality. The bitterness in his voice was very unlike of the liberal intellectual who fervently advocated for a woman's university: "yes, of course, I forgot your classes. Your widow's sewing class, and your orphan's something or the other, and your ... what else?" Bashir conceded but it was obvious he was irritated by all this" (228). This episode brings into focus Bashir's progress in Muslim separatist politics which was fed on religious fundamentalism and had influenced many of the young, educated Muslims of the time. It can easily be seen that the progressive man of education has undergone a great change and likes to place religion at the centre of his discourses. Bashir's debates with Hamid on political matters also bear witness to the development of a separatist politics guided by religious identity. To make sense of the development of Bashir's separatist politics, we must understand the origin and dynamics of that politics in colonial India. Conversely, it might be said that Bashir's advances in separatist politics gestures towards the general progress of separatist Muslim politics in India.

Politically, Indian Muslims started to participate in organized anti-British campaign by the year 1900. However, it was Mahatma Gandhi, who first tried seriously to include the Muslims in the fight against colonial oppression. He attended a joint conference of

Muslim and Hindu leaders in November 1919 at Delhi on the issue of *Khilafat* movement. It was the time when Rowlat Bill, popularly known as “Black Act”, was made public. And there was also the Jallianwala Bagh massacre of April 1919. The stage was set and Mahatma Gandhi started a non-cooperation campaign in February 1920. In June 1920, there was an all-party Hindu-Muslim conference at Allahabad and Gandhi joined the meeting where important Muslim leaders were present to chart a nation-wide programme of non-cooperation with the government. Apparently it looks that Hindus and Muslims of the country participated jointly in a freedom movement for the country during this time. However, the issue of participation was far more complicated than it appears to be. “Hindus and Muslims were fairly launched not upon a common struggle but upon a joint struggle; they worked together, but not as one (Hardy 190). Indian Muslims’ opposition to the British power was occasioned mainly by a sense of Pan-Islamism that was closely linked to the fate of Ottoman sultan’s claim to be the caliph of all Muslims. The Gandhian model of non-cooperation worked well for some time for both the communities. But, with the rise of Mustafa Kamal in Turkey the *Khilafat* movement in India lost impetus. The next decade was expected to carry forward the ambience of Hindu-Muslim cooperation that flourished during the *Khilafat* and non-cooperation movements. But, communal tension between Hindus and Muslims grew throughout the 1920s, especially in the provinces where the reforms of 1919 had been introduced. At the street level communal riots occurred in many parts of the country. The hatred of the streets was rooted in dissatisfaction and frustration in matters of education and jobs. “Rivalry among the educated for scarce loaves and fishes or merely loaves, was not allowed to become merely personal ... there were continual reminders from all over India that the Hindus were Hindus and that Muslims were Muslims” (Hardy 208). The rise of fear and expectation among the Muslims, the deflation of emotion after the fall of *Khilafat*, the growing communal hostility -- all contributed towards developing the separatist sentiment in Muslim political thoughts. Of course, it took almost two more decades before this separatist sentiment took complete hold of Muslim politics. However, from 1935 onwards, and even a little before that, opinions were being heard for an entirely separate Muslim nation. In 1935, when Government of India Act was passed, neither Mohammad Ali Jinnah nor Muslim League with their separatist agenda was at the centre of Muslim politics in India. After the 1937 election, Jinnah started a widespread campaign to popularise the Muslim league among Muslims and his efforts were supplemented by Hindu idiom of political expression used by some of the Congress leaders. The beginning of war in 1939 increased the stake of Muslim League as the British started to count it as useful counterweight to Congress. The separatist politics took its concrete form on 23 March, 1940, the day All India Muslim League passed the “Pakistan” resolution. Muslim League fought the 1945 provincial election on the sole issue of Pakistan as answer to all the problems of the Muslims of India and registered a victory. By this time, “the enfranchised Muslims of British India had recorded their conviction that the things they did not share with their non-Muslim neighbours were more important than the things which they did share, and that this conviction required political expression in the partition of the subcontinent and the creation of Pakistan” (Hardy 252). Pride over past power, leaning heavily on religious identity and the fear of Hindu supremacy -- all worked together to bring the separatist Muslim politics to its height and the leadership and devotion of the western educated Muslims were crucial to this culmination.

Bashir was one of these western educated Muslim men who chose the path opposite to the one adopted by liberals like Hamid. When Hamid and Bashir engaged themselves in a debate over Gandhi's role in India's struggle, his opinion not only differs from that of Hamid but it reflects the opinion of a large number of Indian Muslims who argued for the inseparable relation between politics and the religion of Islam. Bashir clearly states his dislike for Mahatma Gandhi's path in India's struggle for freedom: "I have lost faith in Gandhiji's methods since he suspended the mass Civil Disobedience movement in 1922. At that time, England's embarrassments were many--Ireland, the Middle East. Had Gandhiji provided unflinching leadership then, we may well have gained independence by now" (124). The episode he refers to is the Chauri Chaura incident. In his arguments with Hamid, Bashir is very critical of Hindu society and stresses on the difference between the cultures of the Hindus and the Muslims. He asks: "What indeed is there in common between us?" (203). Bashir's final question about the lack of commonality in the quoted statement is emblematic of the feeling of mistrust that has raised its ugly head. In yet another conversation with Hamid, Bashir brings together the lost pride of the Muslim rule and the feeling of present insecurity at the possibility of a Hindu ruled India. He says, ". . . in a democracy we shall always be under the Hindus. We cannot tolerate that. We belong to the race of conquerors" (234). Bashir's skepticism on the chances of Muslims flourishing in a Hindu-dominated India is predicated by this desire to be the rulers and not the ruled. Bashir adds an air of finality to his arguments with one last evidence of the difference between Hindus and Muslims: "Altogether, it's their way of life against ours--the two can never meet. How can we come closer to each other when they won't even eat with us?" (205). The finality in Bashir's tone manages to remove any sense of doubt that could be traced previously. One can understand that Bashir would certainly follow in future the path that has been charted by Jinnah which demands a separate nation for the Muslims.

The Idea of a National Culture: Hamid's Pursuit of an Inclusive Politics

If Bashir's politics with its separatist leaning stands contrary to his westernized personal life no such conflict appears in case of Hamid. Futehally "as if to disprove the assumption that all Muslims thought alike or wished to separate from India, emphasizes both Zohra's and Hamid's eclecticism and commitment to a secular and hybrid understanding of Indianness" (Hai 336). Hamid participates in the freedom movement of the country. But, this participation in freedom movement is only one part of his greater aim to reach an understanding of the national culture of his country. Frantz Fanon has drawn attention to the relation between a pursuit of national culture and the fight for freedom: "To fight for national culture means in the first place to fight for the liberation of the nation, that material keystone which makes the building of a culture possible. There is no other fight for culture which can develop apart from the popular struggle" ("National Culture" 154). Taking cue from Fanon's opinion, we might say that Hamid's participation in the political movements of the colonised country is a natural corollary to his quest for a national culture. Hamid, in his love for the Islamic heritage, in his fascination for Buddhist and Jain art, in his familiarity with literature from various linguistic and religious traditions of India and in his preoccupation with the cultural world of India in general, seems to pursue that manifestation of nationalism which according to Partha Chatterjee attempts to fashion a "modern" national culture that is not western and in this cultural domain, "the nation is already sovereign, even when the state is in the hands of the colonial power" (*The Nation and its Fragments* 6).

Hamid appears to embrace an idea of India which is inclusive, variegated and hybrid. His choice of Indian dress, his love for Urdu, his fondness for Indian art bear witness to that. Hamid and Zohra, as they shared intellectual interest in Indian heritage and culture, talked on a wide variety of topics that included poetry. They quote from poets of various linguistic, regional and religious traditions. To talk about death they take recourse to Rabindranath Tagore who hails from Bengal. While they buy bangles from the streets of Hyderabad, they recite poems by Sarojini Naidu who is from Hyderabad. And of course Mirza Ghalib is a constant presence in their conversation. Ghalib represents the Urdu and Islamic tradition. The sense of Indianness that evolves out of these different literary sources is a great mix of multiple cultural traditions. Hamid's idea of Indianness can be related to the idea of national culture posited by Fanon. According to Frantz Fanon: "A national culture is the whole body of efforts made by a people in the sphere of thought to describe, justify, and praise the action through which that people has created itself and keeps itself in existence ..." ("National Culture" 155). Hamid's vision of an all-inclusive nation is hinted at in this eclectic selection of poets but is more clearly unfolded in the cave episode. In the cave episode when Hamid and Zohra visit Ellora and Ajanta Futehally brings together Buddhist frescos, Hindu and Jain architecture to highlight the multiple cultural traditions of which the Indian heritage is composed. The art inspires in Hamid and Zohra an intellectual understanding of Indian heritage and through their discussion on that heritage, which flows from one cultural tradition to another, Futehally presents her own vision of Indianness. At Ajanta, their attention is drawn to a lotus design on the ceiling of a cave. The guide explains that the lotus is a symbol of purity and goodness and the cycles of buds and flowers represent the central cycle of birth, life and death. However, he casually adds that the Nizam's elder daughter had the design woven into a sari border which made the design very popular among the common people. This episode is paradigmatic of the process of mutual acceptance that took place between different strains of Indian culture for thousands of years.

As an admirer of composite national culture that celebrates diversity of every kind it is no surprise that Hamid would follow an inclusive narrative of nationalism and would fight for an undivided country in true Gandhian manner.

Outside the Fraternity: Zohra's Location in the Nationalist Discourse

As we see Bashir and Hamid offering two opposing views on politics and nationalism among the Muslims, we cannot but note the relatively passive figure of Zohra, the central character of the novel. Notwithstanding her well-articulated argument in favour of the nationalist cause delivered in course of her altercation with Bashir and her faith in the spirit of India as a nation of composite culture shared with Hamid, the location of Zohra as an individual in the narrative of nationalism appears to be purely peripheral. The question of Zohra's location in the anti-colonial nationalist discourse is an important one as it foregrounds the exclusionary face of nationalism, an aspect which is often left buried in myriad arguments on the historical compulsion of such a principle. Not everybody agrees to Benedict Anderson's argument on "horizontal" nature of nationalism: "Regardless of the actual inequality and exploitation that may prevail in each, the nation is always conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship. Ultimately, it is this fraternity that makes it possible" (7). It has been contented that nation as, "imagined communities pays so much attention to who is included in the nation it fails to consider those who are excluded, marginalised or co-opted, such as women, or lower classes,

racess, or castes. The ‘fraternity’ of the nation claims to represent them even as it does not include them as equals” (Loomba 165). Nationalism located its own subjectivity in the spiritual domain of culture, where it considered itself superior to the West and hence un-dominated and sovereign. Partha Chatterjee has identified the separation of the colonial social space into *ghar* and *bahir*, the home and the world, as an important factor in ascribing women a limited role in nationalist project (“Colonialism, Nationalism” 624).

Zohra wants to take active part in Gandhian freedom movement in the early years of her life but is curtly reminded of the impossibility of the proposal. Her participation in the anti-colonial movement can be only in the intellectual plane as her socio-cultural milieu would not allow her to cross the boundary of domesticity even for a cause like freedom movement of the country. Her participation in the debates over nationalistic issues also remains largely unimportant to the two brothers, Bashir and Hamid. She speaks passionately to Hamid about the diversity of the land. Yet, she always looks forward to Hamid as her mentor in understanding the questions of national culture. However, nowhere else does she look more marginalised than during the conversation between the two brothers. Hamid and Bashir are engaged in a bitter battle of words on the role of the Muslims in the freedom movement and Zohra plays the part of a mere spectator. Her armour is passionately felt arguments and yet she has to act as a passive observer in a battle that is supposedly beyond her boundary.

To conclude, we must admit that Futehally’s novel successfully offers a nuanced and complex view of the uneven contours of nationalism as we witness the rise of nationalist and separatist politics among the Muslim community of colonial India. The two brothers Bashir and Hamid are emblematic of all that is progressive among the community and yet the course of their action and attitude differs. Moments and choices like these would burden the land with a fractured independence. The eponymous heroine has to play the role of a bystander reiterating the exclusionary nature of the dominant discourse of Indian nationalism. The two brothers who were expected to be in arms against the colonizers are up in arms against each other and the lady of their life has to watch as mere spectator.

Notes

ⁱThe significance of V Menon’s speculation over Futehally’s relatives choosing Pakistan as their homeland and her argument on the need to understand the thoughts of those Muslims who chose to stay back in India can be better appreciated in case of Attia Hosain. In an interview on May 19, 1991 Hosain had stated: “I wanted to write about that agonizing heart break when we were all split up and a brother could not see a brother and a mother could not be with her dying son and families that had been proud to always collect together when there were weddings or deaths or births or anything, cannot be together.”

See: Hosain, Attia. “Interview”. *Harappa.com*. Harappa. 19 May 1991. Web. 11 Dec. 2013.

ⁱⁱZeenuth Futehally’s daughter Rummana Futehally Denby has been instrumental in the publication of a new edition of *Zohra* in 2004. The 2004 edition includes “Dedication”, “Foreword”, “Preface” and “Introduction to the First Edition” of the original book.

ⁱⁱⁱThe words of praise by E M Forster is all the more interesting as the novel contains a cave episode very dissimilar in spirit to the much-discussed cave scene of Forster's *A Passage to India*.

^{iv}M K Naik in *A History of Indian English Literature* has dedicated a chapter on the literature of the years between 1920 and 1947. Stressing on the importance of Mahatma Gandhi and his freedom movement, he has given the chapter the title - "The Gandhian Whirlwind".

^vThe only novel, having some merit and belonging to the early years of the previous century that focused on Muslim participation in freedom movement is Aamir Ali's *Conflict* (1947).

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