






Subverting Narratives of Nationalism: A Cross-National Study of Borges and Muktibodh

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Subverting Narratives of Nationalism: A Cross-National Study of Borges and Muktibodh

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Abstract

The mid-twentieth century Argentina and India witnessed a discursive construction and circulation of national identity closely entwined with literary production. This caused a surge in nationalistic sentiments, often culminating in socially discriminatory consequences. This paper shall analyse the role Jorge Luis Borges and Gajanan Madhav Muktibodh played in subverting nationalism, as members on the ideological margins of their respective countries. The study involves two interconnected inquiries in the authors' works. First, a study of reasons behind their rejection of nationalistic writing— their personal lives as affected by it, their discontent with literary movements they were part of, literary censorship, and loss of jobs on account of their ideological differences. Second, a study of the alternatives the two writers offered against nationalism— literary forms, styles, and techniques. Placing the two inquiries together, the paper will study their works as writings of resistance that surface through a fusion of political opinion and social critique. It will further argue how resistance through writing conditions guides their existence.

Keywords: Nationalism, Borges, Muktibodh, Modernism, Post- Colonial

Introduction

The contemporary global political canvas presents an upward emergence of right-wing populism. This rise primarily rooted in neo-liberal economic grievances (Fraser, 2018), has concerns of social security and national identity deeply entwined with it. Instances from countries like India, U.S. Russia, Brazil, Philippines, Argentina, Turkey, and Hungary among others, show a rising trend of national unification that reduces systemic drawbacks to biological threats. Implementation of the CAA, and subsequent lobbying for the NPR by the Indian government; construction of the U.S.- Mexico wall to prevent the entry of Central American refugees; Brazilian government enflaming the indigenous genocide; unidentified encounters under the garb of Philippine drug war, or Macri's xenophobic immigration policies against the Bolivian, Paraguayan and Peruvian people, are merely a few examples. The instances listed here have been driven by a common concern originating from the questions of national identity and security, influencing the vote- banks. Contemporary forms of nationalism that we see today manifest from here (Fraser, 2018).

The study of nationalism becomes complex when one observes that many countries under its sway have served as erstwhile colonies before. Nationalism is the inevitable tool that has been used to respond to colonial forces in different forms. Two of these contrasting forms have played a major role— traditionalism and modernity. While the former focuses on reviving the pre-colonial cultures and traditions circled mainly around religious and social hierarchies, the latter is more oriented towards the realization of enlightenment to organize the country on the path of liberation and freedom (Omvedt, 1993, p. 25). However, tradition and modernity may not be

understood here as two polarities but instead as two interacting frameworks which equally determine the characteristics of any nationalism. It may also be added that the emergence of nationalism through the interaction between tradition and modernity does not necessarily imply conservative attributes to traditionalism and rational features to modernity, as Partha Chatterjee argues in *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World* (Chatterjee, 1989, p. 622). Since the two frameworks that shape up nationalism are contradictory, the contents of aspirations and evidence cited by each are also bound to contradict the other.

It is in this contradiction between tradition and modernity that any post-colonial nationalism and a subsequent (re)construction of a nation is anchored. Literature plays a central role in documenting the (re)construction of a nation. . Bhabha, in *Nation and Narration* argues that the “supplementary movement of writing” (Bhabha, 1990, p. 305) materializes into social and cultural identifiers which define the nation and its people. Literature and nationalism together contribute to nation-building in varying degrees. The flexibility of literature makes it suitable for the purposes of both, establishing leadership as well as exercising a check on it. In the case of the latter, it serves as a mighty tool for those who refuse to support the relatively extremist forms of nationalism. This paper engages with two authors who may be studied in this regard— Jorge Luis Borges (1899-1986) and Gajanan Madhav Muktibodh (1917- 1964). It attempts to study the conceptual framework of nationalism through a cross-national (Rokkan, 1993) study of the works produced by the two authors during the mid-twentieth century.

Borges and Muktibodh never worked in each other’s company directly. Nonetheless, a comparative study of their works is possible. First, they both played key roles in leading the movement of literary modernism in their respective countries. Second, the national politics in Argentina and India during the mid-twentieth century was faced with a similar crisis of creating a unified national identity, owing to prolonged colonization in both countries. Third, being contemporaries, the two authors dedicated their lives to the discovery of the perfect form(s) of writing which would adequately capture the social and political realities of their respective countries. A comparative study of the two authors will thus help establish that literature across genres, both influences and is influenced by its immediate social, political and cultural milieu(Bhabha, 1990, p. 54).

Locating Borges and Muktibodh in National Politics

The mid-twentieth century was a transitory phase for Argentina and India. While Argentina had gained independence back in 1816, it was now grappling with the diversity of its cosmopolitan population which had decentred the possibility of Argentine culture. Almost a century after its independence it was confronted with the necessity of a national cultural identity. This led to a conflict between conservative and socialist ideologies. The conservative radical of the two factions believed that the revival of suburbs and rural traditionalism would restore the Argentine spirit (Sarlo, 1993a). The other faction, socialists, stood by the living and working conditions of the immigrants (Rock, 1972), so that Argentina would become more receptive towards its cosmopolitan crowd. However, with the military coup of 1930, the radical- right asserted its rule in Argentina.

India’s struggle towards independence brought two opposing views at loggerheads in the country. Ranajit Guha, while categorizing both as elitist (Guha, 1982), differentiates between them

by referring to one as the colonial faction whereas the other as nationalistic. The former worked through a process of negotiation with the Raj, whereas the latter through consistent conspiracies and manoeuvres to resist and oppose it. The former category joined it only after realizing that adopting the culture of the colonizer brought no difference to them being treated as unequal, subordinate citizens. Therefore, they returned to their native culture and participated in its revivalism. The latter category, staunchly rejected the colonizer's culture and therefore, was never faced with the issue of adopting it. Nonetheless, a matter they were confronted with was the relevance of traditional revivalism in the present. In order to update the tradition according to the demands of growing modernity, religio-cultural reforms were initiated. These reforms looked at Hinduism anew through figures such as Dayanand Saraswati, Swami Vivekanand, and Sister Nivedita. Sumit Sarkar in *Writing Social History* calls it the transition from Hindu to Hinduism (Sarkar, 1998, p. 370).

The domestic transition taking place in the two countries was further aggravated due to the influence of the Second World War and the Cold War, creating a widespread atmosphere of ambivalence and indeterminacy. Consequently, the literary history of the two countries underwent a series of changes. This may be understood better through Bhabha's view of the transitional history of a nation, which he claims highly influences the narratives (Bhabha, 1990, p. 2) and discourses that produce a nation. In the sphere of literature, this period is characterized by a complex adoption of Modernism. The adoption is complex as it includes a string of overlapping, intermediary movements like Surrealism, Ultraism, Vanguardia, and Boom in Argentina; and Shadowism, Progressivism, Experimentalism, New Poetry, and New Story in India. The active literary participation of Borges and Muktibodh in these movements and the narratives produced thereof, make the narrative method inevitable in mapping the history of these countries.

The Chilean humanist and scholar Andres Bello suggests, "the history of a country does not exist except in incomplete and scattered documents, in vague traditions that must be weighed and judged, the narrative method is indispensable." (Bello, 1999, p. 180) Nonetheless, the writing of history through narratives is never a neutral chronicle since it is institutionalized by statism (Guha, 2009, p. 307). Once written, it culturally manifests the geographical borders, lending social meaning of belonging to them. As a counter-measure against the characteristic rigidity of these narratives, there are also narratives that are grounded in imagination. The imaginative compositions introduce instability to the often biased historical re(construction) of a nation, as will be evident from the writings of Borges and Muktibodh in this paper.

The unstable imaginative literature is important on account of two reasons. First, the role played by it is crucial to the perception of 'nation' in a post-colonial country where there is an underlying tendency to totalize history as a homogeneous narrative (Bhabha, 1990, p. 77). Second, the literary movement towards modernism, amidst domestic political shifts, in both countries was characterized by transitory instability. It is the instability of these narratives that lends them particularity and strength, as Fanon observes in *The Wretched of the Earth* (Fanon, 1965, p. 226). Therefore, the narrative method maintains plurality in the narration of the nation by refuting the possibility of stable national culture as forcibly derived from these literary narratives. A quick succession of uneven events cannot be forcibly united into a singular stable history. It may thus be established that the instability of mid-twentieth century Argentina and India was marked by shifting power dynamics, apparent from the political as well as literary transitions taking place.

If Argentina was struggling under a military coup, India was undergoing a transfer of power from Raj to the Indian government. The partition of 1947 made it worse, plundering the country economically, politically, and culturally. Beyond the domestic turmoil, there was an over-weighing rejection of these countries in the global power structure. Anibal Quijano's study in *Coloniality at Large* may be referred to here (Moraña et al., 2008, p. 190). According to Quijano, on one side are the powerful, developed countries which are recognized in terms of the virtuous norms; whereas on the other side are the developing countries, always recognized through the lack of those norms. If hegemony is characterized by rationality, scientific temperament, civility, modernity, and northernism; the 'other' is always known by its irrationality, mythic history, primitiveness, traditionality, and southernism, respectively. Both Argentina and India have been at the receiving end of this hierarchized perception of countries in terms of binary in global politics.

Space created by this disjunctive and unequal recognition opens avenues for narrating countries like Argentina and India. "It invents nations where they do not exist" (Gellner, 1964, p. 169). During the mid-twentieth century in Argentina and India, it resulted in an upsurge of revivalist narratives mostly mythic and at times allegorical in nature, talking about the origins and glorious past of these countries. On one hand, this stood in defiance of the Western ideas of enlightenment, refusing to be embarrassed by the east-west distinctions Quijano discusses. However, on the other hand, this also led to an overlapped reception of myths as history, undercutting the idea of truth or factual accuracy. Levi Strauss' distinction between myths and history substantiates this well. According to him, myths are stagnant and therefore belong to a closed system. Their closed characteristic gets altered when they are layered successively to qualify as history since the latter belongs to an open system (Lévi-Strauss, 1978, p. 17).

The mythic creation of the collective identity of Gauchos in Argentina or Hindus in India exemplify how the cultural, social, and political signifiers are often clubbed together to establish the illusion of purity. Therefore, myths cannot be accounted for for factual accuracy or truth. These rising mythic narratives grounded in nationalism, left little room for any critical evaluation. In both countries historicized myths were overlaid with religious reservations of the nationalists—Catholicism in Argentina (Spektorowski, 1994, p. 164) and Hinduism in India. Figures such as Julio Meinville and Leonardo Castellani with their firm subscription to the mandates of Fascism and Catholicism were influential amongst the masses. Their writings endorsed Fascism as a preface to the ultimate answer—Catholicism (Spektorowski, 1994, p. 162). Other major leaders with pro-Fascist or pro-Axis affiliations were Leopold Lugones and Manuel Galvez.

In India, nationalists were a little variegated on account of regional differences. For an instance, Elleke Boehmer's study of Bengal's freedom radicals (Boehmer, 2005, p. 111) informs us of a spiritual undercurrent where the leaders were either categorized as revolutionaries or mystics. This included people like Aurobindo, Sister Nivedita, and Bipin Chandra Pal, and it also stands to be true of other parts of India. The figure of goddess Kali (Chatterjee, 1993, p. 9) invoking a "warlike-spirituality" (Boehmer, 2005, p. 45) would be a suitable example. Of these leaders, Pal belonged to the Lal- Bal- Pal triad known for their radical anti-colonial stance. The other two members, Bal Gangadhar Tilak and Lala Lajpat Rai were actively involved with Hindu traditionalist revivalism. Similar to Argentina, Indian leaders like Subhash Chandra Bose too, lent support to the Axis members during the Second World War. The near-fundamentalist orientation of nationalist

narratives created a dominant presence for itself, while also steadily becoming more intolerant towards differing narratives and opinions.

Amidst this series of shifting power dynamics, authors like Borges and Muktibodh occupied ideological margins. Writing against the dominant current, Borges undertook the task of stretching the narratives of mythic origins far beyond the markers of truth. This distancing from facticity while remaining loyal to the overall truth value of exclusion and discrimination made his writing universal (Kefala, 2011, p. 41) instead of national(istic). Poems in *Fervor de Buenos Aires* may be approached through this universalist perspective. With a universal appeal, his writings stood true to depicting other countries, especially one like India which was undergoing a similar series of changes. This also became a founding causality of his entry into Vanguardia. One of the symbolic representations of this is through the image of the orilla. The orillas used in his poems symbolize a point of reconciliation between past and present, between tradition and modernity, and between the creoles and the immigrants, respectively.

The function of orillas expands beyond their symbolic signification. According to Sarlo, they act as ideologemes (Sarlo, 1993b) which strike a balance between the mythification required for de-realization while also not falling prey to the bait of nationalistic glorification. His persistence in referring to his continent as "South America" (Fiddian, 2017, p. 160) over "Latin America" testifies to the flexibility of transcending strict cultural parameters of identity and entering a larger realm of shared identity. In "The Full Extent of My Hope" he says,

"I want neither progressivism nor criollismo in the way those words are commonly used. The first means subjecting ourselves to being almost- North- Americans or almost-Europeans, a tenacious being almost- others. The second, once a word of action (the horseman's mockery of pedestrians, the mockery of those born on their feet), is today a word of nostalgia (the slack appetite for the countryside, the illusion of feeling oneself a bit like Moreira). Not much fervour in either, and I'm sorry about that with regard to criollismo" (Borges, 2010, p. 47).

Similar to Borges, Muktibodh too, was not an uncritical believer of established norms and narratives. His life was short-lived but was spent during the years of significant turbulence at the national as well as international levels. He was born in 1917 when India's anticolonial assertion started taking a new turn towards Gandhian nationalism. He completed his education in Madhya Pradesh and began working there as a school- teacher. To improve his living conditions, he soon moved to Nagpur where he worked as an editor and journalist. It was the publication of his poems in *Tar Saptak*, 1943 that gave Muktibodh his meagre share of fame as an author during his life. In the subsequent years his inclination towards Marxist intellectual ideas became stronger which manifested through his involvement with the Progressive Writer's Association. However, his financial and health conditions over the next few years only worsened, leading to his death in 1964.

According to Namvar Singh, the genius (Singh, 2009, p. 4) of Muktibodh lay in blending the social critique and political opinions as part of the representative aspect of the narrative to complement the meticulously created compositional aspect. Nothingness of depth is a recurrent symbol in Muktibodh's works. It manifests through different forms such as void, kund (deep reservoir) or chimneys. This acutely surfaces through lines from his poem "शून्य" ("The Void"). Not only do these

lines express turmoil and emptiness within an individual but is also representative of the same in the heart of a newly decolonized country. These lines express an emptiness that is devouring the country.

भीतर जो शून्य है

उसका एक जबड़ा है

जबड़े में मांस काट खाने के दाँत हैं;

उनको खा जाएँगे,

तुमको खा जाएँगे।

The void within us

has jaws,

jaws with predatory teeth;

teeth that will chew all up,

teeth that will chew you too.

A chief contributor to the turmoil that seized the two countries was the tension between the beliefs of postcolonial rebirth (Gopal, 2007, p. 160) and postcolonial reconstruction. The difference between the two may be better elucidated through the contradiction between independence and liberation (Fanon, 1965, p. 102). Achieving independence does not guarantee liberation from the issues that have been existing from the pre-colonial and pre-national times. These issues are often relegated by nationalist movements during the independence struggle and remain unresolved. The concept of postcolonial rebirth apathetically presupposes that the country is free from the issues of gender, caste, or class. Such apathetic blanket imposition of the idea of being reborn violently suppresses and subsequently erases the history of systemic hierarchized discrimination against the minorities of the country.

The Making of Ideological Minorities

Both Borges and Muktibodh differed from the postcolonial rebirth approach as is evident from their participation in various literary movements of the mid-twentieth century. They put more emphasis on producing literature that would be mindful of the violent historical past of discrimination. Nonetheless, their non-participation in the celebratory rebirth of their respective countries should not be assumed as an implication of their disinterest in the affairs of the nation. It also becomes important at this juncture to emphasize the complex origin of nationalist movements and the plurality that characterizes them. It is on this account that the third-world scholarship on nationalism has constantly resisted being clubbed under a model-like study. One of the most prominent works here would be Aijaz Ahmad's "Jameson's Rhetoric of Otherness and the National Allegory" where he argues in favour of the third-world writers' eclectic authorship and how it should not necessarily be reduced to national allegories (Ahmad, 1987). According to Ahmad canonical reductionism should be eliminated by introducing flexibility and plurality in writing.

These complex plural opinions regarding the idea of a national and thereby nationalism, indicate the presence of multiple forms of nationalisms. Some forms are dominant, backed by fundamentally charged support groups while others are not. It is in the latter, less glorifying, and more critical end of nationalism, that the works of Borges and Muktibodh should be situated. Their writing not only counters colonialism's narrative of civilizing the barbaric colonies but is also careful to not resort to cultural glorification in the name of extremist nationalism. Their works bring forth the urgency of the postcolonial reconstruction as opposed to postcolonial rebirth. Owing to their peripheral approach toward nationalism, the two writers often found themselves at the receiving end of extremist nationalist forces. They were exposed to severe public criticism, at times also escalating into a public ban.

Two years before Muktibodh's demise in September, 1964, he was confronted with a series of trials and ban protests led against his book *Bharat: Itihas Aur Sanskriti*. The ban is believed to have deeply distressed him, acting as one of the many reasons that triggered his ill-health. The book written as a school textbook and banned on the grounds of containing "objectionable and obscene matter about religion, history and great personalities" (Muktibodh, 2009, p. 239) was a work Muktibodh relied heavily upon, to improve his impoverished living conditions. The book was an attempt to compile the thoughts of various historians regarding India's culture and social formations. Muktibodh assumed the role of a curator whose aim was to inform the students of higher secondary schools about selective writing of history. A total of ten selections were included in the petition filed in the High court of Madhya Pradesh as potentially disruptive of public order, decency, and morality.

Most of these selections were outcomes of erroneous reading of the words. However, Muktibodh repeatedly insisted that these errors were a deliberate construction on the part of publishers and right-wing organizations such as the Rashtriya Swayam Sevak (RSS) which had formed a nexus against him. For an instance, a sentence was called out to be disrespectful towards Mahatma Gandhi as it mentioned the names of Kasturba Gandhi and Mahadev Desai together, creating an ambiguous pronunciation of Kasturba to be Desai's wife. Similarly, one of the selections where Muktibodh was praising the marvel of Jain sculptures through the example of Gomteshwara Bahubali, was misread to be insulting. The court dismissed the plea to remove eight such selections. The two selections it ordered to be eliminated from the text, commented on the interstitial spaces of flexibility that existed in the caste and racial structures in India.

To illustrate this, Muktibodh compiled passages from the works of Indian historians, which indicated Hindu gods Ram and Krishna were born out of a union between an Aryan and a non-Aryan parent. Another example talked about the sexual relations that Brahmin men often established with Shudra women. The court found the abovementioned two examples to be amply justified and intelligible on part of the author. Nonetheless, to contain the possibilities of future protests and agitations, it ordered the text be republished after the elimination of these excerpts. The court pronounced its final judgement in April, 1963 until which, for one complete year, Muktibodh faced severe public rejection and criticism. He understood that this arose from intolerance towards his ideological beliefs. In a clarificatory letter to the governor, he identified the ordeals he underwent for refusing to ultra-nationally and communally colour history, under three major threats (Muktibodh, 2009, p. 263).

First, the discriminatory writing and documentation of history to favour those situated at the apex of the power structures. Second, the shrinking of academic freedom and tolerance. Third, the communal and fringe nationalist elements embodied in right-wing organizations Muktibodh's frugal lifestyle is the price he had to pay for exercising his critical opinion. This is evident from a letter he wrote to Nemichandra Jain in 1945 where he described his utterly destitute condition as follows,

"I want to do and can do a lot. First, I want to be a well-placed man so that I may be truly self-dependent and quite assured of myself. I think I can earn Rs. 500 a year by books. I don't want to be in rags and broken chappals and looked down upon by the people. Don't want to be a tragic figure" (Lotz 2001, 108).

He switched jobs, often juggling between multiple professional roles of a writer, teacher, journalist, and editor. In 1954, he had to quit his job at the Secretariat as he was under constant espionage on account of his Marxist political inclinations. Muktibodh's life involved a constant tussle with his financial worries, which mostly stemmed from his political beliefs. In another letter written to Nemichandra Jain in 1949, he confesses,

"I have given up passing through those streets where the blessed physician, the grocer, the tea-shopwallah watch the debtors for a good hunt. We passed the last three months in this condition, changed doctors for want of money, used all tricks and tactics to keep them away" (Lotz 2001, 107).

Similarly, Borges' livelihood too, for a considerable period, remained affected due to his ideological inclinations. After Borges moved to Buenos Aires in 1921, he started giving shape to his ultraist ideas that surfaced quite prominently through his role in the ultraist magazine, *Martin Fierro*. Borges' earlier encounters with literary movements in Europe occurred to be overlapped with the upheaval created by the first world war. He understood literature to be closely entwined with politics. However, *Martin Fierro* owing to its political neutrality, proved to be restricting Borges' writerly aspirations. Evidently, it interfered with Borges' open support for Hipólito Yrigoyen. At this, Borges unhesitatingly resigned from the board of *Martin Fierro*. Over the next few years, he struggled with his political disappointments that left incomplete his reimagination of an inclusive form of criollismo. Not only did he foresee an approaching fascist tendency that would overtake Argentina through the *coup de tat* of 1930, but also eventually felt that Argentina's cultural and social causes would remain defeated during Yrigoyen's second term.

Borges was critical of Perón's labour-oriented policies and saw in them his personal ambition to manufacture the masses' opinion. He signed petitions opposing a complete takeover by Perón but it remained futile. Nonetheless, Peron avenged this opposition in 1946 by promoting Borges to the post of inspector of chicken and rabbits from his earlier held post of the librarian. Borges was quick to resign from the new office, notwithstanding his financial woes. Two years later, his dissenting views led to the imprisonment of his mother and sister who had participated in a protest march against Perón's dictatorial policies, as Borges describes in one of his interviews with Richard Burgin. This insult did not dissuade him from speaking against Perón's regime, neither during nor after his downfall. This is evident from the same interview where Borges elaborates on the similarities that Perón shares with leaders like Hitler and Mussoloni,

"Perón was a coward. Besides, I think Hitler believed in himself and Perón didn't. Perón knew he was a humbug. And all his henchmen knew he was a humbug. They were all out for loot. Very different..... Perón was more like Mussolini. Though Mussolini was far more intelligent than Perón.....But Perón could be very cruel. I mean he had people tortured, killed" (Burgin & Borges, 1969, p. 121).

Emir Rodriguez Monegal in "Borges and Politics" addresses Borges' radical anti-establishment outlook towards politics (Monegal et al., 1978, p. 69), almost extending into a strong dislike for prolonged status-quoism. Upon carefully analyzing Monegal's thoughts it can be observed that the lives of both Borges and Muktibodh, were modelled equally on dissent against dictatorial regimes, as they were on discontent with literary movements of which they were a part. Despite being ideological minorities, they kept their commitments above their personal ambitions. Even a slight deviation from these commitments as effectuated by a literary movement resulted in their withdrawal from it, including the ones founded by them.

Writing as Resistance

The participation of both the authors in literary movements of their respective countries was brief but noteworthy. The literature they produced was situated at the intersection between their immediate social and political conditions. Their unique approach gave a new identity to the literary movement of modernism by creating a confluence of art and politics on the one hand, and individual and society on the other. In *Taar Saptak* Muktibodh talks about the potential role art and aesthetics can play in society. He firmly believed that the very site of art was the common person and therefore, it was important for them to be conscious of their reality. While he believed that art had a larger role to play in society, he knew its purpose would remain unfulfilled without an individual leading it. It was in this attempt to strike a balance between an individual's desire and their responsibility towards society, that he could never completely fit into a literary movement.

"कला का केन्द्र व्यक्ति है, पर उसी केन्द्र को अब दिशाव्यापी करने की आवश्यकता है। फिर युगसन्धि काल में कार्यकर्ता उत्पन्न होते हैं, कलाकार नहीं, इस धारणा को वास्तविकता के द्वारा ग़लत साबित करना ही पड़ेगा।" (Muktibodh, 1943, p. 11)

"A person is the centre of art, but it is necessary for this person to move in the right direction. Further, the belief that the transitory phase between two eras produces workers and not artists, will have to be proven wrong".

These lines from *Taar Saptak*, published in 1943, are important for two reasons. First, they highlight the necessity of political foregrounding of literary art during a transitory phase as India was undergoing in the mid-twentieth century. Second, they bring to fore the importance of striking a correct balance between thinking and creativity in activism. The two reasons raise caution against communal forms of nationalism which were spreading like wildfires in India then. Around the same time, Borges too, was confronted with a similar problem of nationalism. The issue of othering based on racial origins had started to surface in Argentina. It was directed against the immigrants who were perceived as being the "dangerous other" (Geist et al., 1999, p. 240) because their culture

and beliefs did not correspond with the native Hispanic population. Borges identified in suburbs, the potential to reconcile the markers of otherness.

Beatriz Sarlo in "Borges: Tradition and the Avant-Garde" observes that Borges' affinity towards putting emphasis on reading marginal texts is an approach towards collating ideology and literature. His politically- correct literary techniques made the Argentine identity more inclusive without uprooting it from its earlier cultural signifiers. By reinventing Argentina as an accommodative space (Kefala, 2011, p. 40), Borges also subverted the exclusionary forms of Argentine nationalism. Cityscape is a component that both the authors have made extensive usage of, and common to their usage of it is the difficulty of access to the readers. Most of these city-images are intricately mythologized, often through the aid of eerie, forlorn architecture, or similar abandoned spaces. Muktibodh's "Brahmarakshas" makes use of this technique as is evident here,

शहर के उस ओर खंडहर की तरफ

परित्यक्त सूनी बावड़ी

के भीतरी

ठंडे अँधेरे में

बसी गहराइयाँ जल की...

सीढ़ियाँ डूबी अनेकों

उस पुराने घिरे पानी में...

समझ में आ न सकता हो

कि जैसे बात का आधार

लेकिन बात गहरी हो।

Beyond the city lights, towards the ruins

The abandoned empty *baoli*

And its heart's

Dark frost

Occupied by the labyrinths of water...

Neath it, numerous buried stairs

Inside the ancient water...

Like, those obscurities

We could never touch

But know, are buried deep within.

These lines simultaneously invoke nostalgia of the past and caution towards future, a paradox that captures the uncertainty of the mid-twentieth century India. Similar is the sentiment documented in Borges' poem "Nineteen- Hundred- Twenty- Something" where he records,

We had no idea the future contained the lightning bolt,
 We had no foreboding about shame, fire, the monstrous night of the Alliance;
 Nothing told us that Argentine history would talk the streets,
 History, indignation, love,
 The masses like the sea, the name of Córdoba,
 The taste of the real and the incredible, the horror and the glory.

These sentences resound those of Muktibodh, cited above. Additionally, the poem if analysed as a whole is also suggestive of the "stodginess and cultural barrenness of Buenos Aires" (Borges, 2010, p. ix) which compelled Borges to take refuge in mythology. The two authors did not restrict their writing to merely thematically register resistance but also documented it at the level of literary composition. Accordingly, they tailored the forms and structures of their works such that it captured the changing mood of their times. The initial literary years of both authors were marked by their involvement in literary magazines and newspapers. The print media was also a product of the transitioning period and played a significant role in documenting social and cultural changes through experimental literary forms. These magazines cemented together literary creativity with political consciousness, and paved the way for literary movements such as Ultraism, Vanguardia, Pragativad, and Prayogvad, which would lead toward a fuller realization of Modernism.

Writing for magazines was a choice both authors preferred due to a range of considerations. For Muktibodh, the shorter forms like poetry gave him the independence to explore the truth of reality over narrative unity and linearity. Goulding in his thesis, *The Cold War Poetics of Muktibodh* analyzes that writing prose was never the first choice for the author. His weak financial situation combined with the politics of publication in post-independent India (Goulding, 2015, p. 142) often led him to write a few frequently. As for Borges, in a shorter form such as a short- story it was, "possible for everything to be essential" (Sorrentino, 1982, p. 120). These forms allowed the two authors to experiment with innovative forms of narrative composition— long poems in the case of Muktibodh, and short fiction in the case of Borges. Little magazines like *Prisma*, *Proa*, *Martin Fierro*, *El Hogar*, *Sur* in Argentina, and *Taar Saptak*, *Kriti*, *Kalpna*, *Vasudha*, *Sarathi* in India gave writers, especially ideological minorities like Borges and Muktibodh, a platform to voice their critical opinion and participate in the task of nation- building.

For an instance, Borges repeatedly registered his disagreement with Argentina lending support to Axis power during the second world war. "The Definition of a Germanophile" (1940) published in *El Hogar* is one of the prominent works of caution against fascist tendencies in Argentina. "Our Poor Individualism" (1946) published in *Sur* analyzed how the flawed Argentine nationalism had resulted in a State constantly interfering with the personal rights of individuals. Against this autocratic tendency of the Argentine government under Peron's regime, Muktibodh wrote a piece in *Sarathi* in 1956. The article "अर्जेटीना के विद्रोह की तस्वीर" ("A Look into Argentina's Uprising") criticized the censorship of press that was brought into effect by Juan Perón who banned *La Prensa*

(Easum, 1951). The article also discussed the importance of organizing a critically aware mass of workers against authoritarian strategies.

Likewise, writing columns in newspapers also gave impetus to their voices. Some of the most important works of their lives were initially published in newspapers. This includes Borges' short-stories from *A Universal History of Infamy* published in *Critica*, and Muktibodh's *Ek Sahityik Ki Diary* published initially in *Naya Khoon*. The fact that a major portion of their writings was initially published in mass media such as newspapers and magazines, illustrates two important and interconnected factors. First, the relevance of resistance literature in mid-twentieth century nation-building, and second, the creation of discourse on self-critical nation-building. Writings by the two authors on linguistic and cultural diversity visibly brought forth the presence of these two factors.

Muktibodh wrote an article "संन 1965 तक हिंदी केंद्रीय राजभाषा बन सकती है" ("Hindi Might Be Declared the Only Official language by 1965") for *Naya Khoon* in 1958 on the possible declaration of Hindi as the only official language of India by 1965. This would have meant a complete phase-out of the English language from official usage. Here, the author discussed the perils of such a sweeping move, especially when the Southern states of India had been dismissive of Hindi language's hegemony. The imposition of language and culture occupies a central role in such nationalistic unificatory processes. The interplay between the two factors is equally evident in "The Complaint of All Criollos" where Borges talks about two images of any nation— apparent and essential (Borges, 2010, p. 25). The contradiction between the two images that he proposes may be better elucidated using Bhabha's analysis of how a nation's narration is always split between the pedagogical and the performative (Bhabha, 1990, p. 297).

The writings of Borges and Muktibodh show their rejection of a unified national identity. Their method of nation-building has at its very foundation, the identification of their respective nations' shortcomings. A recurring literary technique in Muktibodh's free-verse is his usage of a brusque lexicon which is often dismissed as unscholarly. This curtness is deliberate to evade the smooth, comforting rhythm of the poems. Therefore, he picks up the most mundane terms and installs them in the most de-realized, often mythic situations, making the poem dry, hitting, and discomfoting. A few lines from his poem "चाँद का मुँह टेढ़ा है" (The Moon's Face is Crooked) substantiate this,

गंजे-सिर चांद की सँवलायी किरनों के जासूस

साम-सूम नगर में धीरे-धीरे घूम-घाम

नगर के कोनों के तिकोनों में छिपे है !!

Spies of the bald moon-like silhouette rays

Stroll silently around the dark city

Hide behind the triangles of the city's corners.

This poem was published after Muktibodh's demise and was written at a later point in his life, coinciding with India's newly achieved independent status. However, the description of the city-

space here is gloomy and fear-inspiring, which punctures the bloated sentiment of nationalism. If Muktibodh subverts flawed nationalism through a curt lexicon, Borges debunks grammatical standards in his short- stories to achieve this end. In "Man on Pink Corner" he uses phrases such as "There were two men in black..." (Borges, 1998, p. 45) or "We was big talkers..." (Borges, 1998, p. 49) to impersonate ground realities of low life as observed in the suburban Buenos Aires. Both Muktibodh and Borges acutely depicted the unequal social composition and cultural differences within the society through their works.

Robin Fiddian in *Postcolonial Borges* contrasts Borges' prose 'Buenos Aires' (1921) with his verse 'Benarés'(1923) to observe the relational creation of identity in the two works. Fiddian's analysis of the two cities being "partners in a dialogue about history, lived experience, culture, and identity" (Fiddian, 2017, p. 181) fits true to both authors. Like Borges' understanding of Argentina, Muktibodh's understanding of India too comes from the knowledge of changes taking place in other countries, especially the post-colonial countries. His articles are not merely restricted to the criticism of authoritarian regimes, class politics, and alienation in India, but are also as much true to the countries and people being faced with a similar kind of turmoil and disturbance. His poems "Chand Ka Muh Tedha Hai", "Andhere Mein", "Baechain Cheel", "Raate Chalte Hain Akele Hi Sitaare", "Poonjivaadi Samaj Ke Prati", "Brahmarakshas" or "Shoonya"; to name a few, describe the process of coming to terms with alienation, which would be relatable to a person both within India as well as outside of India.

Conclusion

The shifting political paradigms that marked the mid-twentieth century Argentina and India highly destabilized them. Establishing a unified national identity came across as a viable option to many, also considering the fluctuating global political scenario. However, Borges and Muktibodh were aware of the long-term implications of it and therefore they adopted an approach that was introspective, honest, and well-founded in the ground reality. The inclusive relational approach of the two authors makes their writings relevant and significant to us in the present. Today, when there is an urgent need to register resistance against the different forms of injustices and discrimination, it becomes imperative to identify the real issues plaguing the nations and return to critical writings. The works of Borges and Muktibodh bring forth consciousness of the social realities and cultural diversities. Their literary works promise a future where freedom of thought and speech can prevail.

Despite the numerous austere situations, the two authors were subjected to, they never compromised with their principled take on the inclusive construction of a nation. This makes their writings distinct. Borges and Muktibodh serve as exemplars for other authors whose works future researchers may want to contextualize as writings of resistance. The reconciliation the two writers introduced between their role as an author and a politically aware responsible citizen actively contributes to the genre of literary activism. Their works introduce new avenues to approach responsible authorship in times of political uncertainties. Further, their works also broaden the limited Euro- American framework of modernism which anchors the movement in the formal newness of the narratives. This broadening of the definition of modernism becomes possible through the two authors who base their modernism on the country's social, historical, and political circumstances. Such a study of modernism would be helpful to scholars of alternative postcolonial

modernism. Finally, their writings are intricately entwined with the very question of their existence. The two cannot be decoupled. Writing is a prerequisite for them to exist. As long as they lived, they wrote, and through writing they resisted.*

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