

## IN THE FORMATION OF NATIONAL JOURNEY TO ITHACA

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### Abstract

R. K. Narayan's *The Guide* (1958) and Anita Desai's *Journey to Ithaca* (1995) can be regarded as realist texts that reify and affirm the connection between Indian nationalist discourse and the Anglo-Indian realist novel in decolonizing India. The depiction of classical Indian dancing in these texts appears to be framed within the nationalist ideology and its quest for 'authentic' cultural practices that signify the 'spiritual' identity of the nation. Both texts seem to reify the nationalist imaginings of a homogenous 'national culture' that is predominantly encoded in the texts as the Hindu culture. Further, in the representation of cultural identities of the practitioners, both *The Guide* and *Journey to Ithaca* appear to construe an essentialist version of identity in conformity with the nationalist discourse. Whilst the character of Rosie, a devadasi, in *The Guide* is ambivalently constituted within the exigencies of narrating the nation, Laila in *Journey to Ithaca*, by becoming a vessel of 'spirituality' in India and, thus, embodying what is regarded as an 'authentic' Indian identity, reifies the monolithic and essentialist constructions of identities in nationalist discourse. Nevertheless, both texts also profess a degree of critical distance from the nationalist ideology by registering the tensions, instabilities and ambivalences that underlie the formation of a 'national culture'.

"Nations...are imaginary constructs that depend for their existence on an apparatus of cultural fictions in which imaginative literature plays a great role."

Brennan, 1990