LITERATURE, GENDER, AND THE TRAUMA OF PARTITION

The Paradox of Independence

Debali Mookerjea-Leonard

ROUTLEDGE

Literature, Gender, and the Trauma of Partition

Partition occurring simultaneously with British decolonization of the Indian subcontinent led to the formation of independent India and Pakistan. While the political and communal aspects of the Partition have received some attention, its enormous personal and psychological costs have been mostly glossed over, particularly when it comes to the splitting of Bengal. The memory of this historical ordeal has been preserved in literary archives, and these archives are still being excavated.

This book examines neglected narratives of the Partition of India in 1947 to study the traces left by this foundational trauma on the national- and regional-cultural imaginaries in India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh. To arrive at a more complex understanding of how Partition experiences of violence, migration, and displacement shaped postcolonial societies and subjectivities in South Asia, the author analyses, through novels and short stories, multiple cartographies of disorientation and anxiety in the post-Partition period. The book illuminates how contingencies of political geography cut across personal and collective histories, and how these intersections are variously marked and mediated by literature. Examining works composed in Bengali and other South Asian languages, this book seeks to broaden and complicate existing conceptions of what constitutes the Partition literary archive.

A valuable addition to the growing field of Partition studies, this book will be of interest to scholars of South Asian history, gender studies, and literature.

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To Baba and Spencer, with love

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Preface

Calcutta, August 1946: My great aunt Rebecca Mukherjee's wedding reception was set for the evening of Thursday, August 15, 1946. It was held at the groom's family home in the Badurbagan area of Calcutta, on the western side of Rajabazar. My grandparents attended the reception. More than fifty years later, they could still recollect vividly the eerie quietness of that night, the strange absence of pedestrians, rickshaws, and automobiles on Upper and Lower Circular Roads as they drove past Rajabazar, and through Sealdah, Moulali, and Park Circus on their way home to Ballygunge Place, a little before midnight. A few hours later, violence shattered the stillness of those deserted streets and surrounding areas in response to the All-India Muslim League's call for "Direct Action" to step up the demand for Pakistan. Infamous as the Great Calcutta Killing, the inter-community violence that started in the early hours of Friday, August 16, 1946, raged for four days and continued with diminished fury for the rest of the month. Violence in Calcutta set off "retaliatory" attacks in eastern Bengal in the autumn, which were followed by communal riots in Bihar, and then, in Punjab and the North-West Frontier Province. A year later, the subcontinent was partitioned.

I grew up listening to my family's stories about the communal turmoil in Calcutta in the mid-1940s, stories about violence, curfews, police check-points, narrow escapes, and of kindnesses given and received. One of these anecdotes centered around my grandfather: Sometime in September 1946, when my grandfather arrived at Howrah Station after a tour of work-sites, he found that public transportation services to and from the station had been suspended on account of a recent spate of sectarian violence in the locality. Thereupon, he and another stranded co-passenger requested a ride from a Muslim family who had travelled with them on the train and whose private car was waiting. The family was headed to the Park Circus-Beckbagan area and agreed to take both men to Beckbagan. But the car was full, so my grandfather and the other gentleman climbed onto the footboards on either side of the doors. For their safety, the two Hindu men were given flags of the All-India Muslim League and instructed to wave them and raise the slogan "Pakistan *Zindabad*" ("Long live Pakistan") when passing through Muslim-majority neighborhoods. They did. They arrived safely at Beckbagan from where it was a short walk home for my grandfather.

During the course of working on this project, I have been frequently asked if my family was displaced by Partition, if my interest in the subject stems from some family tragedy. The answer is no. My paternal and maternal families are from the western districts of Bengal. And as my grandparents and great grandparents were living in and around Calcutta during 1946–47, they were not subject to Partition's displacement. This project is not about who I am; instead, it is about my interests, about missing for a long time the Bengal-story in academic writings and conferences on the Partition. In this seventieth year of decolonization and Partition, this is my tribute to my city, Calcutta, a metropolis reconfigured by the violence and displacements surrounding the Partition.

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Introduction

In August 1946, the poet Jibanananda Das, a native of Barisal in eastern Bengal, was visiting his brother in Calcutta when sectarian violence erupted in response to the All-India Muslim League's call for "direct action" to advance the demand for Pakistan. The bloodbath in Calcutta kindled violence in parts of eastern Bengal in the autumn, and delayed Das' return home. His prose poem "1946–47,"[1] composed in 1948, captures that moment. Opening with the auctioning off of a house – suggestive not only of corrupt real estate dealings but also of the dispossession and homelessness ushered in by Partition – and peppered with words such as "darkness," "death," and "blood," the poem evokes an atmosphere of communal-fratricidal hostility. Building on the contrast and tension between pastoral and urban life, past and present, and alluding to the famine of 1943 and the riots of 1946, the poem conjures up the shattered urban and rural landscapes of mid-twentieth century Bengal.

> There in the fields on moonlit nights the peasants would dance,
> After drinking the heady liquor of rice,
> A little before or after marrying the divine daughter
> Of the boatman or fisherman,
> Before the birth of children.
> Those children are as good as dead today,
> Stifled amidst tired, insensate communities
> Of the evil [nations][2] of our time; and after a life
> Of ease and love, the tribe of great-grandfathers
> Of such rural progeny has gone to sleep,
> Having spun out in darkness on time's wheel
> The Permanent Settlement of the zamindars.
> Not that they were well off; but yet
> Inhabitants of a different, distinct world, set apart
> From today's rustic creatures, tattered and blinded
> By famine, riot, misery, illiteracy.[3]

The first few lines of the excerpt present a vanished pastoral idyll of village weddings and peasants merrymaking in the moonlight, of "a life / Of ease

and love."[4] The gradual impoverishment of Bengal's peasantry and the subsequent migrations of many to cities, precipitated, among other things, by colonial agricultural policies (alluded to in the reference to Cornwallis' 1793 "Permanent Settlement"),[5] forced this "different, distinct world" into decline, and the circumstances of "today's rustic creatures, tattered and blinded" is, the poem suggests, much diminished. The preconscious, pre-political condition presented in the opening lines of the excerpt yields to the oppression of "our time," in which the lulling sleep of the past has been replaced by the realization and reality of death's ubiquity. The serenity and bucolic splendor of Bengal enshrined in Das' collection *Ruposhi Bangla* (*Beautiful Bengal*) has been ruptured by "famine, riot, misery, illiteracy." While rural Bengal lies shattered, the urban geography is no less grim.

> I've killed a man – my body is full of his blood;
> … I am this slain man's brother
> He knew me for his younger brother, yet
> Hardened in heart, he killed me, and I sleep on
> By the rushing river of blood, having killed
> [This ignorant man who was my elder brother].[6]
> …
> Asleep.
> If I call, he will surge forth from the river of blood,
> Come near and say, 'I'm Yaseen,
> Haneef, Muhammad, Maqbul, Kareem, Azeez – and you?'
> Putting his hand on my heart he will ask,
> Eyes raised from the face of a corpse –
> The swollen river of blood will say, 'Gagan, Bipin, Sasi
> Of Pathuriaghata, Maniktala, Syambazar, Galiff Street, Entali –'
> Who knows where they're from? Men, after all,
> From the baser ranks of life, in worn-out shoes.[7]

Sectarian divides have ripped apart the Calcutta cityscape. The neighborhoods mentioned in the poem – "Pathuriaghata, Maniktala, Syambazar, Galiff Street, Entali" – were some of the worst affected by violence in 1946. The city is strewn with corpses and bordered by rivers of blood, caused by rivalries between "Yaseen, Haneef, Muhammad, Maqbul, Kareem, Azeez," on the one hand, and "Gagan, Bipin, Sasi," on the other. The common man, the underclass man, is caught up in the current because communities previously described as "insensate" have grown fatally hostile. The collapse of inter-communal fraternity is indicated by the mangling and mingling of bodies in "I've killed a man – my body is full of his blood / … I am this slain man's brother / Hardened in heart, he killed me and I sleep on / By the rushing river of blood." This ties back to the earlier mention of "evil nations" (*kurashtra* in the original)[8] as the poem stands aghast in the face of such attempts to redefine nationhood and community through violent means.

The past/present binary continues in the poem's representations of the feminine, which appears as nature: "The nights of countless Bengali villages"[9] once comparable to "Smiling, large-eyed women"[10] have been replaced in the present by "long-haired darkness comes after sunset / To have her tresses tied in a knot – but by whose hands? / Her hair flowing loose, she looks out – but for whom? / There are no hands – no human beings anywhere."[11] In other words, the tranquil nights of the past have been shattered by an unruly (perhaps, disorderly) darkness in the present. Although the riotous and feminine night seeks to be arranged, if not domesticated, capable hands are nowhere to be found. The mention of "hair flowing loose" suggests the long, unbraided hair of the goddess Kali and, thus wild and dynamic destruction. This followed by "no human beings anywhere," implies a bleak, even apocalyptic, landscape, abruptly concluding in the laconic "All snuffed out."[12]

Together with its representations of some abstract feminine, the poem also includes the very real suffering of women, when, in connection with loss of home and other dispossessions, it speaks of "Everything, even woman, is taken away" hinting at the abduction of women during the riots. No less suggestive is the phallic image of the "swollen river of blood" which links violence with masculinity, evoking all that this nexus entails for women.

When the political fight over competing definitions of nationhood ended in August 1947 with the Partition of British India, Barisal, the poet's hometown, became part of Pakistan. And although Das was a Brahmo Samajist and not a traditional Hindu, the prevailing communal situation took no cognizance of such niceties, forcing him and his family to relocate to Calcutta.[13]

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The long history of inter-community tensions in the Indian subcontinent reached a fever pitch in the mid-1940s when hostilities between Hindus and Sikhs, on the one hand, and Muslims, on the other, escalated rapidly to a horrific climax in the Partition of August 1947. Decolonization of British India was achieved at the cost of the partitioning of the colony into India and Pakistan as sovereign nation-states. Provinces were allocated to independent India or Pakistan according to a census-logic of ethno-religious majoritarianism, with two provinces – Punjab in the northwest and Bengal in the east – being divided between the two countries. The process of Partition with its seemingly unassailable demographic logic was, nevertheless, marked by unprecedented violence in which about one million people died, while an estimated twelve to fifteen million left the place of their birth and crossed the new international border to join their co-religionists on the other side. It was the largest migration in modern history. In the course of the upheaval, some 75,000 women were abducted and/or violated by men from rival religious communities. In the Indian subcontinent the Partition constitutes what Dominick LaCapra describes as the "founding trauma" that is "the trauma that paradoxically becomes the basis for collective and/or personal identity."[14]

In recent decades, examinations of the Partition have included, together with studies of "high politics" and the geopolitical consequences of the split, critical explorations of the "human dimension" of the unfolding trauma. However, most of these studies on Partition-related suffering, despite the variety of themes and approaches, are all of a piece in their near exclusive focus on the western border, particularly, the splitting of Punjab.[15] What Urvashi Butalia has identified as "a serious gap [caused by] the omission of the experiences in Bengal and East Pakistan (Bangladesh),"[16] Tai Yong Tan and Gyanesh Kudaisya have described as a "historiographic imbalance."[17] Since the "accounts of partition have tended to be Punjab-centred … Bengal has not received the scholarly attention it deserves,"[18] resulting in the proliferation of uninformed claims that either deny or misconstrue the Partition's impact in the east. In the field of literary studies, this neglect has been so acute that some scholars have even been led to deny the very existence of a sizeable body of Bengali literature on the subject. After almost a decade of growing scholarly attention to the Partition, Tapati Chakravarty in an essay published in 2002 could still describe it as "a fleeting presence" in Bengali literature claiming "an almost total absence of the Partition in fiction."[19] Eleven years later, in a 2013 essay, historian Semanti Ghosh could likewise contend that, "in the world of post-1947 Bengali literature we are faced with a curious indifference towards this watershed event."[20] At minimum, this book seeks to challenge such claims by indicating just how much research remains to be done on Partition literature from Bengal, research that will significantly broaden present scholarly understandings of this critical event in modern South Asia.[21]

In attempting this serious literary-historical rectification, this book is not without precedent and direct inspiration. Jashodhara Bagchi and Subhoranjan Dasgupta have contested the claim of the paucity of literary work on the Partition of Bengal. They write that although:

> Quite a few scholars and creative writers have claimed that the traumatic division of Bengal in 1947 has not been adequately reflected in contemporary literature, which has emerged from both East and West Bengal … Bengali writers on both sides did not ignore Partition.[22]

Bagchi and Dasgupta claim instead that there is an "absence of a dedicated critical engagement,"[23] that it is not literary work which is lacking but rather, that "a complete analytical account of this creativity has not taken place as yet."[24] While by no means "a complete analytical account," it is this absence that this book endeavors, in some measure, to redress. More on this book will come later.

When it comes to the Partition of Bengal, there exists considerable disagreement among scholars regarding a fundamental question: What constitutes Partition literature? This uncertainty in definition has contributed to doubts regarding the size of the archive through a refusal on the part of literary critics to acknowledge certain works from the Bengal region as Partition literature. It has led to an almost conscious pruning by critics of the thematic range

of this body of work. The reluctance to identify some writings as Partition literature arises from a failure to recognize the distinctiveness, particularly, the regionally specific character of the literature produced by the different experiences of the Partition in Bengal and Punjab. For instance, while writings on the division in the west typically depict the pathological violence that was commonplace in the Punjab Partition, writings from Bengal focus on the struggles and privations of the displaced.[25] The tone, in the latter, is subdued, melancholic, and the content usually much less dramatic when compared to the brutalities presented in the writings on the Punjab Partition. In short, writings on the Bengal Partition do not conform to the model of literature on the division of Punjab with which most critics are familiar, and which – whether for reasons of their dramatic content, or for the fact of the sheer volume of writings (in English, Hindi, Punjabi, and Urdu), the availability of vernacular work in English translation, or the existence of a sizeable body of Anglophone writings – has come to define Partition literature.[26]

A case in point is Sudha Sundaram's 1993 study entitled "Partition in Historical Fiction." In this essay, Sundaram examines novelistic representations of Partition and notes that "In the history of Indian Independence, two provinces were partitioned; Punjab and Bengal. Novels on Partition concentrate on the former and ignore the latter."[27] With the single exception of Bhisham Sahni's *Tamas*, Sundaram's study focuses on a specific segment of Partition's historical fiction – Anglophone writings. The novels she examines are Khushwant Singh's *Train to Pakistan*, Manohar Malgonkar's *A Bend in the Ganges*, Chaman Nahal's *Azadi*, Bapsi Sidhwa's *Ice-Candy-Man*, Gurcharan Das' *A Fine Family*, and Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*. There are, of course, Partition novels in vernacular languages of the subcontinent that have not been covered in her study, and *Tamas* has been included because it is available in English translation. (This is borne out by Sundaram listing 1988 as the publication date for *Tamas* though, in fact, this is the date of publication of the English translation, the Hindi original was published in 1974.) But be that as it may, insofar as English language writing is concerned, Sundaram is correct to point out the asymmetry in literary focus on the two partitioned provinces. Indeed, little Anglophone work apart from the writings of Amitav Ghosh has been produced on the Bengal Partition.[28] Sundaram's essay is, in short, illustrative of two prevailing inclinations in the study of Partition literature: first, the dominance of Anglophone writings; and second, the centrality of the division of Punjab. Her essay is symptomatic of the disparate treatments the partitions of Punjab and Bengal have received in literary-critical scholarship.

If Sudha Sundaram attends to the Anglophone tradition, Tapati Chakravarty examines Bengali writings on Partition and arrives at a similar conclusion regarding the scarcity of novels and short stories on the Bengal Partition. In her study on Partition writings by Bengali Indian authors entitled "The Paradox of a Fleeting Presence: Partition and Bengali Literature," Chakravarty speaks of the existence of an "almost all-pervasive, uneasy silence."[29] She accounts for this "silence" as an expression of Bengali writers' failure to

comprehend, or at least to confront, their own history.[30] This insufficient understanding of history, she claims, led writers to consider the Partition "a result of the people's momentary lapse into madness and the betrayal at the level of high politics."[31] She goes on to argue that:

> the inability to break away from the "normal" on the part of even the most sensitive litterateurs was a result of the unavailability of an adequate "language" for literary representation, a language which could comprehend and represent the disjunctive role of the Partition in the lived history of Bengal.[32]

In her review of Chakravarty's essay, Partition scholar Ritu Menon, anticipating Bagchi and Dasgupta, points to certain critical omissions. She notes that Chakravarty "recognises only three novels as being 'about' Partition – [Jibanananda] Das' *Jalpaihati*, Sabitri Roy's *Swaralipi* and Pratibha Basu's *Samudra Hriday*. What about Jyotirmoyee Devi's *Epar Ganga, Opar Ganga*?"[33] Menon's highlighting of the word "about" with quotes is telling because it indicates Chakravarty's inadequate definition of the Partition novel. Also, questions similar to the one Menon asks about Jyotirmoyee Devi's work could be raised about many other novels. While Chakravarty finds very few novels on the Partition of Bengal, the bibliography in the first volume of Bagchi and Dasgupta's *The Trauma and the Triumph*[34] lists over twenty Partition novels in the section "Literature: Novels (West Bengal)" in addition to four collections of Bengali short stories and an anthology of selected Bengali stories in English translation under "Short Stories: Anthologies (West Bengal)." The archive of fiction has grown longer since then.

Clearly, there is an inconsistency between Chakravarty's estimation of the breadth of the literary archive, and Bagchi and Dasgupta's. Following Menon, Bagchi and Dasgupta, I suggest that Chakravarty's claim regarding the deficiency of Bengali fiction on Partition is based on a truncated definition of Partition literature, and that, describing it in such a narrow manner, she overlooks a substantial body of work. According to her, "'Partition literature' in the strict sense of the term"[35] focuses on disjuncture, thus she defines the Partition as a conclusive breakdown of the everyday. She acknowledges that "there are, at least, 15 novels and novelettes which deal with the Partition,"[36] but claims that only *Jalpaihati, Swaralipi* (*Musical Notations*), *Samudra Hriday* (*Ocean Heart*), and the segment "*Majhi*" ("Boatman") in Dipen Bandyopadhyaya's novel *Aagami* (*Future*) "can qualify as Partition novels."[37] In the rest:

> the Partition appears as just another event, indistinguishable from other important events in the history of Bengal, such as the famine, the riots, the war, etc. It is known only through its effects: refugee problems, real estate frauds, inflation, hoarding, unemployment, etc. More importantly, fiction has treated these as effects of a continuous process in history, wherein the "disjunctive" character of the Partition finds no place.[38]

Elsewhere in the essay, reinforcing the same point, Chakravarty writes, "Other novels … deal with the Partition, directly or indirectly. Yet, … the Partition appears not so much as a decisive moment in the history of Bengal, but rather as just another event."[39] But what about the disjuncture in the lives of those Partition displaced – those whose settled lives were interrupted by this political decision, who had to leave, often at short notice, for new environs, and were sometimes rendered homeless in the process? Viewing refugees only as "effects" of Partition, she sidesteps their experience of disconnection – "the disjunction that refugees face between their familiar way-of-being and a new reality" which "compels them to resolve the problem of meaning and interpret their experience continuously."[40]

Bengali Partition fiction from India examines the predicament of the people, the continuous population flows into West Bengal, refugees surviving on the platforms of railway stations, life in squatters colonies, the intense competition for economic opportunities, women's victimization both sexual and psychological, middle-class Bengali Hindu women's emergence as wage laborers, and the memories of loss. Chakravarty's definition of Partition literature limits the scope of the archive both in terms of its temporal range and the diversity of subject matter, demanding to view Partition as a "decisive moment." But in doing so, she misconstrues the dynamics of the Bengal Partition which lacked a decisive character owing to the political, social, and communal situation prevailing in the region, the porousness of the border on the eastern side, and resultant patterns of migration.

After the Great Calcutta Killing of August 1946 and the retaliatory violence in eastern Bengal in the autumn, there was, as historian Sumit Sarkar writes, "a second round of riots in Calcutta between 26 March and 1 April 1947, followed by chronic stabbing incidents till the very eve of independence."[41] But, unlike Punjab, there were no massive eruptions of violence in the months leading up to Partition or immediately afterwards that compelled populations to flee. Rather, in 1950, and again in 1964, communal violence flared up in East Bengal, Pakistan and spilled over to West Bengal, India; both occasions led to large-scale migrations of Bengali Hindus from East Pakistan to India. The Bangladesh Liberation War in 1971 also caused an estimated ten million people, mostly Hindus, to migrate into India. As Bagchi and Dasgupta illuminate in their study, while in Punjab there was a one-time displacement of people:

> restricted primarily to three years (1947–50), the Partition of Bengal has turned out to be a continuing process. Displacement and migration from East to West, that is, from former East Pakistan and Bangladesh to West Bengal, is still an inescapable part of our reality.[42]

Comparing the partitions in the west and the east, Bagchi and Dasgupta note that "the 'one fell swoop' in Punjab was much more bloody and destructive. In contrast, the Partition of Bengal has produced slow and agonizing terror and trauma accelerated by intermittent outbursts of violence."[43] "Neither

spectacular nor instantaneous … [instead] unfolding over years, decades,"[44] the violence in Bengal is of "delayed destruction that is dispersed across time and space, an attritional violence that is typically not viewed as violence at all."[45]

The Partition of Bengal also severed the strong economic links and complementarities existing between the city (Calcutta) and its hinterland, precipitating a full-scale social and economic upheaval for both migrants and hosts. (The jute industry suffered as a result of this political division, as did Bengal's paper and leather industries.)[46] To this was added the problem of official indifference towards Bengali refugees from the east. Deriving from these factors, and from those arising from the region's specific geographic and demographic "ground realities," the social and psychological dynamics of the Bengal Partition were crucially different from those existing in Punjab. Whether in terms of river flows and the distribution of natural resources, cultural identities, or labor markets and economic ties, Bengal proved to be more refractory to Chakravarty's clean demarcations. Also, the announcement of boundaries on August 17, 1947 did not in itself constitute a "decisive moment" because the flow of refugees from East Pakistan and Bangladesh into the Indian part of Bengal was spread over many years. Moreover, insofar as West Bengal is concerned, discussions of Partition cannot be dissociated from the story of refugee-resettlement and their subsequent displacements, and, arguably, the gradual economic impoverishment of the region. Accordingly, fiction on the Bengal Partition is preoccupied with these perhaps less dramatically narratable *longue durée* processes.

The writings from the two partitioned provinces are shaped by dissimilar social, political, and historical conditions, and, therefore, differ significantly. And here, the writings on the Punjab Partition seem to have set the paradigm: horrific violence, it appears, is the stuff Partition literature is made of. But, as Bashabi Fraser points out, in Bengal "[t]he 'violence' is of a different kind."[47] There is "a protracted struggle to survive, of a denuded population from one section of the sub-continent – that keeps coming in a relentless stream – to the other,"[48] and this, she claims, accounts for the "unending and different" character of Partition stories from West Bengal. Chakravarty's conception, in short, is shaped by writings on the Punjab Partition, characteristic of which are the immediate fact of violence and the "evently-ness" of Partition. The bulk of literary works from Bengal focus on the melancholy surrounding Independence and the long afterlife of Partition. While the fact of Partition haunts the narratives, the split itself is frequently present in a diffuse, atmospheric sense. Distinguished critic Sisir Kumar Das notes that "The bestiality that erupted during the communal hostilities has not been documented very vividly in Bengali literature. In fact, there is a tendency to undermine it. Much of the writings of partition is expressly sentimental."[49] Summarizing this body of literature, Das writes:

> The most pervading emotion in the writing on partition is nostalgia, the memories of home and the acute agony of losing it for ever. … [The] two

> words – "udbastu" and "refugee" contain the whole history of Bengali suffering and humiliation, agonies of insecurity and horrors of leaving the ancestral home – in a capsulated form. The play *Natun Ihudi* [1950, *The New Jews*] by Salil Sen created a new metaphor of Bengali cultural life. Almost suddenly, and yet so inevitably, Bengali narratives and poetry found a new interest in the landscape – the rivers and the fields, the trees and the roads, the huts and the houses. Unlike the locations in the "regional" novels this was not an exploration into the unknown, but an exploration into a space, known and familiar, that recedes from one's immediate existence and tends to merge into the time-past. The "East Bengal" ceases to be a tangible geographical space any more for hundreds and thousands of people and it became a part of the past – a space in memory.[50]

By eschewing horrific representations of violence, for the most part, and focusing on issues of forced migration, displacement-related hardship, and the corrosion of civil life by sectarianism, writings on the Bengal Partition commonly reframe what is generally understood as the event of trauma.

In separate studies, literary scholars Debjani Sengupta and Niaz Zaman compare writings on Punjab and Bengal partitions and draw similar conclusions. Examining short fiction Sengupta observes that:

> the carnage and genocide of the Partition in Punjab makes many of the stories from this region conflictual in nature. Partition is seen as a moment of pain, madness, a physical sundering, and most of the narratives from this region foreground the body, the body becoming a metaphor for the divided land. The body is mutilated, violated, torn apart – the experience of the Partition in the West is a violently pathological one.[51]

Whereas, "in Bengali literature, Partition is often seen in metaphysical terms – the hurt is not in the body but in the mind, the soul."[52] In this literature, Sengupta writes:

> Instead of a pathological experience, Partition is seen as a cosmological occurrence a loss of a world … Hence Partition narratives from the two Bengals are less violent, less pathological than the narratives from the West … For the people of the two Bengals, Partition did not end at 1947 and the terrible cost of the Partition is to be seen now.[53]

In her study of Partition novels from India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh, Niaz Zaman similarly notes that:

> Representative Bengali writing does not deal with riots and murders. Instead, in both Bengals, East and West, the fiction is concerned with displacement rather than with violence and death. Despite the riots that occurred in Calcutta and Noakhali, the stories that emerged from Bengal

> have not been about looting and killing as about leaving and loss or, in the writing of East Bengali writers, either the hope of a new dawn or the search for a new identity. … [L]ooking at fiction of the fifties, one can see a distinct pattern emerging: in the west and north, Partition is attended by violence, by rape, by massacre and mutilation. In the east it is attended by displacement.[54]

Others have also made similar observations.[55]

Niaz Zaman's pioneering work *A Divided Legacy: The Partition in Selected Novels of India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh* (1999) breaks with the traditional focus on the Punjabi experience of Partition and brings it into dialogue with the Bengali archive. Together with crossing territorial borders, Zaman's work also resists linguistic partitions, combining the analysis of Anglophone writings with those in vernacular languages from the subcontinent, chiefly Urdu and Bengali, and, to a lesser extent, Hindi and Punjabi. While for Urdu, Hindi, and Punjabi novels she is able to use existing English translations, for most of the Bengali novels she is required to translate excerpts herself. I mention this because she views the lack of scholarly focus on Bengali work, to some extent, as a language issue: the unavailability of Bengali writings in English translation and the absence of a body of critical literature on this work in English. This underwrites her optimism regarding increased literary expressions of the Bengal Partition in Anglophone writings:

> The omission of Bengali writing in general appears to have been partly because Bengali writing seems to have elided the issue of Partition, [and] partly because Bengali novels have not been translated into English. … However, with the establishment of Penguin India, and with the growth of the translation industry which demands more and more material to feed it, it is likely that Bengali novels will also be translated, in which case discussion in future will include these novels as well. Or, as is likely, more writers who choose to write in English will also be forthcoming. Amitav Ghosh will be joined by others, who will, by choice or by necessity, write in English. The voices from Bengal will join the voices from other parts of the Indian subcontinent.[56]

To encourage a broader reach for Partition writings from East Pakistan/Bangladesh, Zaman herself has edited a collection of English translations of a dozen Bengali short stories entitled *The Escape and Other Stories of 1947* (2000).[57] In recent years other translations have also expanded the accessibility of Bengali Partition writings in the subcontinent and beyond: the translations of Sunil Gangopadhyay's novels *Arjun* (trans. 1989) and *Purba-Paschim* (*East-West* trans. 2000) by Chitrita Banerji Abdullah and Enakshi Chatterjee respectively; the two volumes of *The Trauma and the Triumph: Gender and Partition in Eastern India* (2003, 2009), edited by Bagchi and Dasgupta,

which include poems, short stories, and excerpts from plays and film scripts from both India and East Pakistan/Bangladesh; *Mapmaking: Partition Stories from Two Bengals* (2003) edited by Debjani Sengupta is another cross-border collection and includes a total of ten translated short stories; and *Bengal Partition Stories* (2008) edited by Bashabi Fraser, offers a large selection of short fiction from both sides of the border (and poems composed by Fraser herself). Amitav Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide* (2005), in addition to *The Shadow Lines* (1988), and a few of Jhumpa Lahiri's short stories in *Interpreter of Maladies* (1999) have added to the English-language archive.

In her introduction to the collection *The Escape and Other Stories of 1947*, Zaman comments on the fairly small body of Partition writings from East Pakistan/Bangladesh:

> The partition of 1947 continues to form an important resource for writers in India and Pakistan. This has not been the case in Bangladesh where first the Language Movement of 1952 and then the Liberation War of 1971 formed the myths and resources that bound a people or that were mined and quarried by writers and artists.[58]

The critical archive is smaller still. Noting that "Most [literary scholars] have looked at Partition fiction by Indians or Pakistanis,"[59] Zaman's book *A Divided Legacy* introduces to an English-speaking readership Bengali Partition fiction from East Pakistan/Bangladesh by Alauddin Al Azad, Abul Fazl, Sardar Jaynuddin, Shaheedullah Kaiser, and Abu Rushd. Also included in the discussion are writings by Syed Walliullah and Taslima Nasreen who have enjoyed a wider readership through English renditions of their work. Given that many of the non-Bengali language texts included in Zaman's study have already received some critical consideration elsewhere, her insertion of East Pakistani/Bangladeshi writers (and their work) into the Partition literary discourse is among *A Divided Legacy*'s most significant contributions.[60]

However, while the subcontinental scope of Zaman's work is ambitious, her inclusive gesture is compromised by her limitation of the Bengali-language archive to writings from East Pakistan/Bangladesh, with a near-total exclusion of those from India. The single exception to this is *Purba-Paschim* (*East-West*, 1988–89) by Sunil Gangopadhyay. Zaman's choice of *Purba-Paschim* confines the discussion of West Bengali work mostly to leitmotifs of displacement and nostalgia. Her selection thus constrains the range of thematic variations offered by Indian-Bengali Partition writings, which are quite distinct from the writings from East Pakistan/Bangladesh. Given that there exists a sizeable body of work by West Bengali writers (an archive that, so far, appears larger than that from East Pakistan/Bangladesh), Zaman's claim above that "The omission of Bengali writing in general appears to have been partly because Bengali writing seems to have elided the issue of Partition" is a little misleading. While *A Divided Legacy* makes no claim to being exhaustive, as is clear from the use of "selected novels" in the book's subtitle, an acknowledgement of the

existence of a larger body of Bengali work would, perhaps, have given some much-deserved recognition to this archive.

The multi-part anthology *The Trauma and the Triumph: Gender and Partition in Eastern India* (2003, 2009), edited by Jashodhara Bagchi and Subhoranjan Dasgupta, offers a social and cultural complement to historical studies of politics in late colonialism, communalism, violence, and migration. The two volumes published so far endeavor to remedy the deficiencies in the scholarly records on the gendered experience of Partition in predominantly Bengali-speaking regions – the Indian states of West Bengal and Tripura, and East Pakistan/Bangladesh. Interdisciplinary in its approach, the anthology includes literary criticism, historical explorations, social and economic analyses together with interviews with survivors, testimonials, historical documents, and samples of creative work (translations of poems, short stories, selected scenes from Bengali plays, and film scripts). Of particular relevance here is that Bagchi and Dasgupta acknowledge the existence of a Partition literary archive spread across both sides of the border and, importantly, they remind literary critics and scholars of their responsibility towards the body of Partition writings. To complaints from critics on the "inadequacy" of the existing archive, the editors respond with:

> When one delves deep into the literary production sparked off by Partition, one is tempted to question the basic critique, which claims that no "adequate" reflection is perceived in the texts, on two counts. Firstly, is it at all possible for a critic to specify that space and hour where and when the reflection becomes satisfactorily "adequate" and secondly, is it humanly possible to give an "adequate" reflection of the holocaust that rages in the subcontinent?[61]

I believe that the existing body of Partition writings will be served well through scholarly attention, as will be those in this "in progress," or growing, archive.

Like Bagchi and Dasgupta, Tarak Sarkar, in *Bangla Upanyase Deshbhag o Deshtyag*[62] (*Partition and Displacement in the Bengali Novel*, 2009), also refutes the claim of scarcity:

> Numerous short stories have been composed on the subject of Partition, migration, and the post-division crises in both Bengals. … It is a common complaint that, no major novels in the Bengali language have been written on a tragic event like Partition. The allegation is not entirely true. Tarashanker [Bandyopadhyay], Bibhutibhshan [Bandyopadhyay] did not write on it, but … *a number of novels have been written about it on both sides of Bengal. Novels are being written even now.* Manik Bandyopadhyay, Rameshchandra Sen, Amarendranath Ghosh, Abul Fazl, Shahidullah Kaiser, etc. have composed novels on the tragic split. … Almost every

> major Bengali author has written on the subject. Novels rich in experience and artistic qualities have been composed on the subject in both Bengals.[63] [emphasis mine]

Sarkar's study offers a survey of novelistic representations of Partition and migration from both sides of the border accompanied by a concise historical overview of Hindu–Muslim relations in Bengal in the period between the first and second partitions of Bengal (1905–1947) and an exploration of population movements in the region caused by Partition. He provides plot synopses for a long (although according to the author, not exhaustive) list of Bengali Partition novels; in doing so, his book introduces the reader to the archive and gives a sense of its breadth.[64] *Bangla Upanyashe Deshbhag o Deshtyag* presents a general overview of the range of themes in this body of work and occasionally includes some brief critical commentary on the writings.[65]

Debjani Sengupta's recent book, *The Partition of Bengal: Fragile Borders and New Identities* (2016) which studies "the enormously rich and varied literature that partition has produced amongst the Bangla speaking people of West Bengal, the Northeast and Bangladesh"[66] also corroborates scholars' claims above regarding the existence of a substantial body of Bengali writings.

***

In the Bengal region the story of the Partition did not end in 1947. Re-manifesting itself through periodic eruptions of sectarian violence and subsequent migrations over decades, the Partition refused to be laid to rest. Also, developments in the political, economic, and social history of East Pakistan, challenged Mohammad Ali Jinnah's "two-nation theory"[67] that had been put forward as the founding logic for the creation of Pakistan as a homeland for South Asian Muslims. What started in East Pakistan, in March 1948, with protests against the imposition of Urdu on a largely Bengali-speaking population, expanded into the Language Movement in 1952 which demanded the recognition of Bengali as a national language, and later, with resistance to discriminatory governmental policies foisted on the eastern wing, ended with East Pakistan's victorious nine-month long Liberation War in 1971 and its emergence as Bangladesh. East Pakistan's secession from Pakistan challenged the claim that the commonality of religion alone was a sufficient basis for nation-formation.

In Bengal, the story of partitions did not begin in 1946–47 either. The political map of the Bengal presidency was first revised in 1905 by the British Viceroy, George Nathaniel Curzon. This first partition of Bengal, *Banga Bhanga* (Bengal Broken), was to divide the province into "a predominantly Hindu western fragment and a largely Muslim eastern one."[68] Although Curzon cited administrative efficiency as the reason for the split, the Home

Secretary to the Government of India, Herbert H. Risley, in private correspondence, underscored its advantage to colonial rule through the crippling of the growing nationalist movement led by the Indian National Congress: "Bengal united, is a power. Bengal divided, will pull several different ways. … [O]ne of our main objects is to spilt up and thereby weaken a solid body of opponents to our rule."[69] Bengal's foremost poet Rabindranath Tagore composed poems/songs to protest the partition. His "*Banglar Mati, Banglar Jal*" ("The Earth of Bengal, the Waters of Bengal") written for the occasion enshrined Bengal's physical and the social geography and implored the divine for harmony among its people: "*Bangalir pran, Bangalir mon, Banglair ghare joto bhaibon – / Ek houk, ek houk, ek houk, he Bhagoban*" ("Bengali hearts, Bengali minds, brothers and sisters in Bengali homes – / May they unite, may they unite, may they unite, my lord").[70] While the Congress opposed the partition, the measure received support from the newly formed All-India Muslim League. The first partition was eventually revoked in 1911, at which time the boundaries of the province were redrawn once again, this time along linguistic rather than religious lines, and the capital of Britain's Indian empire was moved from Calcutta to Delhi.

Taslima Nasreen's short prose poem "*Asvikar*" ("Refusal," 1994)[71] brings together these multiple cartographic revisions. Alluding in passing to the first partition in 1905, the poem connects the Partition of 1947 and the liberation struggle in Bangladesh in 1971.

> India was no scrap paper that it had to be torn to bits.
> I want to wipe out the word forty-seven with an eraser.
> I want to wash away the blotch of forty-seven, with soap and water.
> A fishbone called forty-seven is stuck in my throat, I don't want to swallow it,
>
> I want to vomit it out
> I want to recover the unbroken land of my forefathers.
>
> I want the Brahmaputra, just as I want the Subarnarekha
> I want the Sitakunda Hills, and I want Kanchenjunga.
> I want Srimangal, and also Jalpaiguri.
> I want Salban Vihara, as well as Ellora Ajanta.
> If Curzon Hall is mine, then Fort William too is mine.
>
> That man who fights in seventy-one,
> And wins,
> Whose thrashing expels the two-nation theory
> That man is never by defeated by forty-seven.

The poem presents a rejection of the Partition through a list of "I want" and "I don't want." The persuasiveness of the content is heightened by the simplicity of Nasreen's poetic diction. The unhealed wound of Partition is invoked

through the image of a fishbone caught in the throat. The "unbroken land" mentioned at the end of the second stanza, is developed in the subsequent stanza which builds on the idea of the continuity and contiguity of space and time by pairing every reference to the landscape/town/archeological site/architectural landmark from Bangladesh with a corresponding one from India. I say India, rather than West Bengal, because while the river Subarnarekha, Jalpaiguri, and Fort William are in West Bengal, there are also two exceptions: the Kanchenjunga Mountain situated on the India–Nepal border (that is, outside of West Bengal) and the Ajanta and Ellora caves located in the western Indian state of Maharashtra; also, the first line mentions the breaking of India, not Bengal! The narrator embraces the subcontinent's geography – the rivers (Brahmaputra and Subarnarekha), the mountains (Sitakunda Hills and Kanchenjunga), and towns (Srimangal and Jalpaiguri); as well as its history – from its pre-modern past (the Buddhist viharas in Moinamati, and the caves at Ajanta and Ellora), through to the British colonial period (Curzon Hall and Fort William). The final stanza of the poem illuminates the hollowness of the "two-nation" rhetoric that freed East Pakistan from West Pakistan's sub-colonial domination. But, the war, even while it challenged the two-nation theory, did not seek to undo Partition by reuniting East Pakistan with India.

However, although the narrator aspires to an undivided India, it is intriguing to find no references to anything Pakistani among the desiderata listed in the third stanza of the poem. This exclusion of Pakistan reduplicates the Partition within the poem and, thereby, weakens the rhetoric of re-unification. Also, it is not Pakistan alone, to be fair, much of the subcontinent's history and geography have been excluded. In fact, with the exception of the caves at Ajanta and Ellora, all of the topographical or architectural references are concentrated in the eastern part of the subcontinent. So, although the narrator speaks of the Partition of India in the first line, the references are less about undivided India, than they are about the Bengal region. And further, the poem creates a tension through its desire for two contradictory objects: on the one hand, the narrator wants the "unbroken land," and on the other, wants the subcontinent's colonial past (symbolized by the colonial edifices: Fort William and Curzon Hall) even though colonial policies were, in large measure, responsible for breaking the land. For instance, Curzon Hall in Dhaka was built to honor Viceroy Curzon who orchestrated the first partition of Bengal. (In fact, the borders and demographic divisions of Curzon's scheme were, by and large, replicated in the Partition of 1947.) The mention of Curzon thus gestures to the first partition of Bengal and, in doing so, includes it with the other two political re-mappings of the Bengal region, indicated by "forty-seven" and "seventy-one." Fort William (built to house the army in Calcutta) and Curzon Hall (to serve as a town hall in Dhaka) are both symbols of colonial control – military and civil. Their inclusion in the list of things to be desired absolves the colonial administration from blame for its role in the partitions of Bengal in 1905 and in 1947.

Nasreen's poem captures the many re-drawings of Bengal's borders and insisting upon the region's cultural cohesiveness, it embraces the hope of a united Bengal.

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This book, *Literature, Gender, and the Trauma of Partition: The Paradox of Independence*, examines the neglected shelves of Bengali fiction literature related to the Partition of Bengal. It does so in order to identify the traces this "founding trauma" has left on the national and regional cultural imaginaries in India and what was once East Pakistan, now Bangladesh. To arrive at a richer understanding of how Partition experiences of violence, dispossession, migration, and cultural disorientation shaped postcolonial South Asian societies and subjectivities, this book maps the reconfigurations of identity that took place in, around, and because of the Partition in terms of community belonging and individual consciousness, particularly as these are inflected by categories of gender. It illuminates how contingencies of political geography cut across personal and collective histories by exploring how Partition dislocation is variously marked and mediated by literature. This book limns how for many in the Indian subcontinent, Independence was attended not only by forcible eviction from their homes but also by the dispossession of control over their own bodies.

In critically scrutinizing the largely unexplored Bengali literary archive on the Partition, this book complements recent scholarship by bringing to it questions of regional specificity. At the same time, it seeks to deepen our understanding of the intersections between historical trauma, collective memory, and cultural transformation that, so far, has been limited in its scope and potential by a near-exclusive focus on Anglophone writings. Through a sustained (though not exclusive) engagement with Bengali fiction, this study endeavors to develop a critical practice adequate to that archive even as it seeks to contribute to the larger study of the subjective dimensions of modern territoriality and border-marking, and of a twentieth century world literature molded by historical catastrophe. Finally, employing an interdisciplinary and comparative approach informed by feminism, the book illuminates the expressions of, confrontations with, and workings through of the Partition attempted in a discrete body of literature.

This book, while attentive to local particularities, takes a transnational and trans-regional literary-critical approach towards analyzing Partition writings. In other words, refusing the confines of international borders, it examines fiction from both sides of divided Bengal even as it brings this literature into dialogue with writings on the impact of the Partition in the western part of the Indian subcontinent. It is a work of comparative literature that examines vernacular compositions, mostly in Bengali, as well as those written in other languages of the subcontinent (Hindi, Malayalam, Urdu, and English).

The book comprises of interlocking studies of novels and short stories on the impact of the Partition on the everyday lives of those most deeply affected

by it, insofar as literature allows for this. It is within Partition literature that the chronicle of the pain suffered by the people of the subcontinent has been most richly preserved. While official histories of Partition have focused on colonial and nationalist politics, and the symbiosis between politics and communalism,[72] these have overlooked the impact of Partition on the everyday lives of those most deeply affected by it.[73] But not literature. Fiction and poetry have maintained a critical sensitivity to the experiences of the victims. In the words of the American novelist, E.L. Doctorow, "the historian will tell you what happened. The novelist will tell you what it felt like."[74] Writers on the Partition vividly captured the predicament of the human subject, the sudden upending of their world, a subject often side-stepped by the journalists and intellectuals of the time.

But, Partition literature has done more than simply preserve the texture of feeling. Fiction has also played a critical role in documenting social and historical processes. Given the paucity of other forms of contemporaneous testimony, literature has served as a kind of parallel historical archive. For instance, forced evacuation from East Pakistan, economic impoverishment arising from the forfeiture of land and other properties, and all too often, the loss of male breadwinners in sectarian violence, led to large-scale participation of formerly homebound middle-class Hindu women in wage-labor, in an effort to forestall the family's fiscal collapse. This influenced women's decisions regarding education and marriage and contributed not only to a modification of gender-roles prevailing in the family, but also to a reorganization of the family-form itself. Yet only fairly recently have oral historians and ethnographers gathered Bengali refugee women's testimonies on their experiences as salaried workers, to study this significant social development[75] to which literature from the late-1940s and beyond gives eloquent and contemporaneous testimony. Novels and short stories narrate the quiet courage of these women who, without knowing, or intending to, embarked upon a society-wide transformation that made women's employment outside the home not only socially acceptable, but also respectable. Partition literature thus drew upon its own resources to articulate what was often left unsaid. Summing up the status of literature within the historical discourse, Bill Brown notes that "literature has the capacity to preserve (however marginally) residues of phenomena that remain in some sense unrecognizable (if not unrepresentable) in our existing historiographic genres. Within literature the detritus of history lingers, lying in wait."[76] By preserving the "locally contingent," the "capricious and anecdotal," the "contradictory and mythically given,"[77] in other words, the *small things*, literature displays a willingness to confront the trauma of the Partition, in a way that simultaneously complements and stands apart from history writing.

The book is divided into seven chapters which delve into issues of placelessness and national belonging, displacement and women's labor, home and nostalgia, the remodeling of masculinity, and the communalization of children. Chapter One tracks the predicament of women victim-survivors of Partition's violence. While these women's ordeal began with intimate terror, it assumed,

thereafter, a new form upon their restoration to their families where their agony was compounded by rejection. Using the work of Jyotirmoyee Devi and Rajinder Singh Bedi, this chapter analyzes the consequences of the "touch" that rendered women "untouchable," and traces the cost for women's bodies of the discursive transformation of their chastity into a pre-requisite for the new national belonging. Membership in the national community, and middle-class domesticity, demanded that women not only live in the *right* country and follow the *right* religion, but also possess the *right* body. Chapter Two continues the discussion of belonging with the addition of a new factor, the child. On the one hand, the child born of intimate violence is a source of shame; on the other, the child born to the migrant couple is its parents' "anchor" in the adopted land. The chapter explores how the corpus of Partition writings is itself partitioned along gender lines and in accordance with national borders. Thus the writings from India and the Indian diaspora by Ramapada Chaudhuri, Lalithambika Antherjanam, Jyotirmoyee Devi, Narendranath Mitra, and Shauna Singh Baldwin focus on the dilemmas of the abducted Hindu/Sikh mother and her "wrong" child, while the writings from East Pakistan and Bangladesh by Ashraf Siddiqui, Selina Hossain, and Abu Rushd trace the quelling of the migrant Muslim father's fears of non-belonging through the birth of a citizen son.

Forced relocation and the impoverishment attending Partition, agonizing as they were for the victim-survivors, occasioned, as already noted, large contingents of migrant, middle-class, Hindu Bengali women to seek paid-work in order to economically sustain their families. Chapter Three examines, using the work of Samaresh Basu, Dibyendu Palit, and Narendranath Mitra, the difficult circumstances under which women struggled to find their "place" in the home and the world. Through representations of the predicament of the working woman, the chapter illuminates how middle-class women's wage labor impacted the prevailing gender roles and reconfigured vectors of power within the middle-class family. Chapter Four similarly tracks the social and economic transformations of the time by examining Sunil Gangopadhyay's novel *Arjun*. Viewing the unfolding of Indian modernity through the lens of the *Mahabharata*, the novel draws upon the epic past to narrate Partition's aftermath, insisting that the new is both modern and yet dominated by an unmastered past. Taking up the struggles of the novel's eponymous hero, the chapter addresses the tale of a Hindu migrant who, uprooted from East Pakistan finds a foothold for himself in the city in which he has come to live. The novel counters the nostalgia prominent in the writings about displaced Hindus from East Pakistan, nostalgia for a place to which it is no longer possible to return. Instead, the forced evacuation from an obscure village in East Pakistan to the city of Calcutta here offers a chance at a new, harder, but potentially more fulfilling life, both because, and in spite of, Partition's brutality.

Chapter Five examines, in part, the texture of nostalgia that the hero of *Arjun* overcomes, the agony of being uprooted from home and forced to live elsewhere. Drawing upon the writings chiefly of Taslima Nasreen and Hasan

Azizul Huq, among others, it explores literary considerations of home/homeland and memory, especially, the role of memory in crafting a feeling of cultural and social embeddedness within the home, community, and homeland. But what happens when memory exceeds history? Are the "recollections" then memory or, fantasy? The chapter tracks the home as a prisonhouse of memory, one that ultimately constricts the prospect of claiming a new homeland.

While the discussion in the first five chapters focuses on migrants' attempts to rebuild their lives on the "other side," Chapter Six examines one aspect of the impact of the Partition on the lives of the non-displaced in West Bengal. Using Narayan Sanyal's early novel *Bokultala PL Camp*, a novel set in a refugee camp, this chapter studies the discursive compilation of traits desirable in the new national masculinity – the protective citizen-patriot. It tracks how the crises set off by the Partition and the work around refugee-welfare opened up opportunities for young men from the middle-classes to shape a new heroic mode of national belonging. The "new" man, educated and thoughtful, and imbued with patriotism, and laboring for his country, is a response both to unflattering colonial representations of the "unmanly" Bengali man, as well as the violent masculinity associated with the Partition and certain strands of religious nationalism.

The children discussed in Chapter Two are mostly infants and, therefore, silent for the most part. But what about older children? How were the citizens of the future affected by the Partition? Reading short stories by Bhisham Sahni and Manik Bandyopadhyay, Chapter Seven studies the process of children's indoctrination or recruitment to the communal point of view, that is, it examines the reproduction under new circumstances of the very ideology that produced the Partition in the first place. Communalism is presented in the works examined not just as the manipulation of the masses by an elite leadership, or as the result of the colonial government's policy of "divide and rule," but instead, as a constitutive element of a society in crisis.

This book is an intervention in a conversation that has begun fairly recently. It is by no means an exhaustive study of Partition writings from the Bengal region, composed mostly, if not exclusively, in Bengali. The book's thematic focus has determined the selection of texts. Much remains to be excavated and it is my hope that this book will lead to further research and scholarly writing in this area.

Throughout the book I have used Dhaka instead of Dacca, and Calcutta instead of Kolkata. Unless otherwise noted, all translations are my own. Titles of novels and short stories, and Bengali words used in the text have been transliterated phonetically.

Notes

1 Jibanananda Das, "1946–47," in *Sreshtha Kabita* (*Best Poems*) (Calcutta: Navana, 1956; first published 1954), 130–34. I have used Shirshendu Chakrabarti's translation of the poem included in *A Certain Sense*, ed. Sukanta Chaudhuri (New Delhi: Sahitya Akademi, 1998), 70–73.

2 Amended translation. The English translation used "polities." The poet uses "*kurashtra*" in the original Bengali poem. In light of the debates around Mohammad Ali Jinnah's "Two-Nation Theory," I find "nation" a better equivalent for the word "*rashtra*," and "*kurashtra*" as "evil nations."
3 Das, "1946–47," 71.
4 Ibid.
5 The Permanent Settlement Act of Bengal, implemented by the colonial government in 1793, focused on agricultural-revenue restructuring. Among other things, it created an oppressive zamindar (landlord) class, and led to the gradual impoverishment of Bengali peasantry.
6 Amended translation. Original translation: "This ignorant, blind man, like my elder brother," 72. The Bengali original uses "*bimurha*," which means ignorant or stupid, not blind.
7 Das, "1946–47," 71–72.
8 Das, "1946–47," *Sreshtha Kabita*, 131.
9 Das, "1946–47," *A Certain Sense*, 71.
10 Ibid.
11 Ibid.
12 Ibid.
13 The Brahmo Samaj was a reform movement within Hinduism that was started in Bengal in the nineteenth century. Followers frequently viewed themselves as a sect separate from Hindus.
14 Dominick LaCapra, "Trauma, Absence, Loss," *Critical Inquiry* 25:4 (Summer, 1999), 724.
15 Urvashi Butalia, "Community, State and Gender: On Women's Agency during Partition,"*Economic and Political Weekly* 28:17 (1993), WS 12–WS 24; "The Problem," *Seminar* 420 (August, 1994); "Muslims and Hindus, Men and Women," in *Women and the Hindu Right: A Collection of Essays*, eds. Tanika Sarkar and Urvashi Butalia (New Delhi: Kali for Women, 1995); *The Other Side of Silence: Voices from the Partition of India* (Delhi: Viking, 1998). Veena Das, *Critical Events* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1995); "The Act of Witnessing: Violence, Poisonous Knowledge and Subjectivity," in *Violence and Subjectivity*, eds. Veena Das et al. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000). Ritu Menon and Kamla Bhasin, *Borders and Boundaries: Women in India's Partition* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1998). Gyanendra Pandey, *Remembering Partition: Violence, Nationalism and History in India* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).
16 Butalia, "The Problem," 14.
17 Tai Yong Tan and Gyanesh Kudaisya, eds. *The Aftermath of Partition in South Asia* (London: Routledge, 2002), 141.
18 Ibid.
19 Tapati Chakravarty, "The Paradox of a Fleeting Presence," in *Pangs of Partition* v. 2, eds. S. Settar and Indira B. Gupta (New Delhi: Manohar, 2002), 261.
20 Semanti Ghosh, "Silence: A Deliberate Choice?" in *Seminar* 645 (May 2013), http://www.india-seminar.com/2013/645/645_semanti_ghosh.htm.

Chakravarty and Ghosh are not alone. Sandip Bandyopadhyay also finds that, "a catastrophe like Partition did not leave much of an impress on the art and literature of Bengal." Sandip Bandyopadhyay, *Deshbhag-Deshtyag* (*Partition-Displacement*) (Calcutta: Anushtup, 1994), 7.
21 For an excellent discussion of Partition literature from Ireland, Israel, and Palestine see Joe Cleary, *Literature, Partition and the Nation-State: Culture and Conflict in Ireland, Israel and Palestine* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).
22 Bagchi and Dasgupta, "Introduction," in*The Trauma and the Triumph: Gender and Partition in Eastern India* v. 2, eds. Jashodhara Bagchi, Subhoranjan Dasgupta, and Subhasri Ghosh (Calcutta: Stree, 2009), x–xi.

23 Ibid., xi.
24 Ibid. See also, Ranabir Samaddar, ed., *Reflections on the Partition in the East* (Calcutta: Vikas Publishing House, 1997).
25 See Debjani Sengupta, ed., *Mapmaking: Partition Stories from Two Bengals* (New Delhi: Srishti Publishers & Distributors, 2003).
26 Sandip Bandyopadhyay, for instance, writes that, "What we get in the literature on Punjab, has not been captured in Bengal except in the cinema of Ritwik Ghatak and a few novels. Even today Bengali literature is waiting for a Krishan Chander, Bhisham Sahni or Saadat Hasan Manto." *Deshbhag-Deshtyag*, 7–8.
27 Sudha Sundaram. "Partition in Historical Fiction," *The Literary Criterion* 28:3 (1993), 37.
28 The absence of any mention of Amitav Ghosh's 1988 novel *The Shadow Lines* is surprising since the 1947 Partition of Bengal and its continuing after-shocks are fundamental to the narrative. Ghosh's earlier novel *The Circle of Reason*, published in 1986, also opens in the midst of refugee settlements in West Bengal resulting from Partition.
29 Chakravarty, "The Paradox of a Fleeting Presence," 263.
30 She maintains that writers across the political spectrum, those steeped in nationalism (of the Indian National Congress kind) as well as those with a modern-rationalist Leftist approach, "failed to have an understanding of communalism" (276), viewing it as an aberration.
31 Ibid., 273.
32 Ibid., 273–74.
33 Ritu Menon, review of *Pangs of Partition* v. 2, *Seminar* 510 (2002), 84.
34 *The Trauma and the Triumph: Gender and Partition in Eastern India* v. 1, eds. Jashodhara Bagchi and Subhoranjan Dasgupta (Calcutta: Stree, 2003).
35 Chakravarty, "The Paradox of a Fleeting Presence," 278.
36 Ibid., 269.
37 Ibid., 275.
38 Ibid., 269.
39 Ibid., 273.
40 Pradip K. Bose, *Refugees in West Bengal* (Calcutta: Calcutta Research Group, 2000), 2. See also, Prafulla K. Chakrabarti, *The Marginal Men: The Refugees and the Left Political Syndrome in West Bengal* (Kalyani: Lumiere Books, 1990).
41 Sumit Sarkar, *Modern India 1885–1947* (Delhi: Macmillan, 1983), 433.
42 Bagchi and Dasgupta, *The Trauma and the Triumph* v. 1, 2.
43 Ibid. Historian Tanika Sarkar also corroborates Bagchi and Dasgupta's claim noting that:

> Unlike Punjab, Bengal did not experience a single, compressed moment of massive violence, followed by a virtual exchange of population between the two nation states. Partition here was a very long term process, violence was sporadic and migration happened in a long, persistent trickle rather than a single torrential movement. It is in fact, difficult to put a definite closure on the process which [Joya] Chatterji argues, began and did not end with 1947.
> (Tanika Sarkar, "Foreword" to Gargi Chakravartty's *Coming out of Partition: Refugee Women of Bengal*. New Delhi: Bluejay Books, 2005, vii)

44 Rob Nixon, *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011), 2–3.
45 Ibid., 2.
46 While most of the jute was cultivated in East Bengal, the mills for processing the jute were located in and around Calcutta in West Bengal, India, thus, the separation acutely affected the jute industry. Similarly, raw materials like bamboo and

leather from East Bengal could not be sent for processing to paper mills and tanneries in Calcutta.

47 Bashabi Fraser, "Introduction," *Bengal Partition Stories*, ed. Bashabi Fraser (London: Anthem, 2007), 5.
48 Ibid.
49 Sisir Kumar Das, *History of Indian Literature, 1911–1956, Struggle for Freedom* (Delhi: Sahitya Akademi, 2006; first published in 1995), 377.
50 Ibid., 379.
51 Sengupta, *Mapmaking*, 188.
52 Ibid., 189.
53 Ibid., 189–90.
54 Niaz Zaman, *A Divided Legacy: The Partition in Selected Novels of India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh* (Dhaka: University Press, 1999), 21–22.
55 In his study on the impact of Partition in the east, Bidyut Chakrabarty writes that:

> Violence seems to be one of the important dimensions of stories from Punjab, while in Bengali creative writings [violence] has generally been underplayed, presumably to highlight the mutually inclusive existence of Hindus and Muslims over generations … Partition marks the breakdown of that community that had defined the individual and his or her identity. This is the common theme running through most of the east Pakistani creative writings seeking to articulate the voice of the people. There is, however, a significant difference: while in most of the short stories in the context of partition riots in Punjab, violence seems to be an important (if not overarching), dimension of the human experiences, Bengali stories are relatively free from violence in its most crude form. Since violence is peripheral to most of these Bengali stories, killings are usually shown as "isolated" events with a distant backdrop of partition riots.
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> (Bidyut Chakrabarty, *The Partition of Bengal and Assam, 1932–1947: The Contour of Freedom*. London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2004, 226–31)

56 Zaman, *A Divided Legacy*, 331.
57 Niaz Zaman, ed., *The Escape and Other Stories of 1947* (Dhaka: University Press, 2000).
58 Zaman, "Introduction," *The Escape and Other Stories of 1947*, 1. In her essay "Feminist Interruptions," Shelley Feldman notes that, "Silence about Partition among Bangladeshi scholars may reflect the view that 1947 is not worthy of comment given the more important 1971 struggles between East and West Pakistan. In this context, interest in the language movement that helped to realize Independence is evident, while a focus on Partition, which might expose what some experienced as the contradiction of supporting Pakistan and subsequently struggling for an independent Bangladesh, is avoided." Shelley Feldman, "Feminist Interruptions: The Silence of East Bengal in the Story of Partition," *Interventions* 1:2 (1999), 170.
59 Zaman, "Introduction," 331.
60 The critical archive on Bangladeshi writings on the Partition is also growing. See essays by Kaiser Haq and Md. Rezaul Haque in *Revisiting India's Partition: New Essays on Memory, Culture, and Politics*, eds. Amritjit Singh et al. (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2016). See also Sanjida Akhtar's study of Partition-related Bengali short stories in *Bangla Chhoto Galpe Deshbibhag* (*Partition in Bengali Short Stories*) (Dhaka: Bangla Academy, 2002).
61 Bagchi and Dasgupta, "Introduction," *The Trauma and the Triumph* v. 2, xii.
62 Tarak Sarkar, *Bangla Upanyase Deshbhag o Deshtyag* (Calcutta: Karuna Prakashani, 2009).
63 Ibid., 31–54.

64 As Sarkar indicates, novels and short story collections are regularly published both in India and in Bangladesh. See Salam Azad, *Deshbhager Galpa* (Calcutta: Mitra and Ghosh, 1998), Imdad-ul Haque Milan, *Deshbhager Par* (Calcutta: Ananda, 1998), Hasan Azizul Huq, *Agunpakhi* (Calcutta: Dey's Publishing, 2008, originally published in 2006).

65 In addition to longer critical studies, there are also a handful of essays discussing individual works: "Partition Relived in Literature" by Anindita Mukhopadhyay offers a study of Saradindu Bandyopadhyay's stories where communalism unmasks the dark side of humanity; and "Representing the Holocaust: The Partition in Two Bengali Plays" by Jayanti Chattopadhyay examines Salil Sen's *Notun Ihudi* (*The New Jews*; 1950) and Tulsidas Lahiri's *Banglar Mati* (*The Soil of Bengal*; 1953) in Settar and Gupta, eds., *Pangs of Partition* v. 2.

66 Debjani Sengupta, *The Partition of Bengal: Fragile Borders and New Identities* (Delhi: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 1–2.

67 Overriding commonalities of language or syncretic social and cultural practices between Muslims and Hindus, the two-nation theory held religion as the prime location of identity. And on that basis, it contended that Muslims comprise a nation separate from the Hindus and, as a separate nation, they deserve a separate homeland.

68 Madhusree Mukherjee, *Churchill's Secret War: The British Empire and the Ravaging of India During World War II* (Basic Books: New York, 2010), xxvi.

69 Cited in Mukherjee, *Churchill's Secret War*, xxvi.

70 Another song composed by Tagore during this time "*Amar Sonar Bangla*" ("My Golden Bengal"), was adopted in 1972 as Bangladesh's national anthem.

71 Taslima Nasreen, *Aay koshto jhenpe, Jiban debo mepe* (Dhaka: Gyankosh Prakashani, 1994), 27.

72 The word "communalism" in South Asia is synonymous with "sectarianism." The "community" in communalism refers usually to one's religious community. In this intense identification with the religious community, rival religious communities are viewed as antagonistic. In the context of the Partition, communal violence refers to Hindu–Muslim or Sikh–Muslim conflicts.

73 Historian Gyan Pandey notes that:

> The historians' history of Partition has, in India, been a history of crisis for the Indian nation and the nationalist leadership. It has been a history of the machinations which lay behind this event, and the lessons to be drawn by the nation for the future. This is not a history of the lives and experiences of the people who lived through that time, of the way in which the events of the 1940s were constructed in their minds, of the identities or uncertainties that Partition created or reinforced.
>
> (Gyanendra Pandey, "The Prose of Otherness," *Subaltern Studies VIII: Essays in Honour of Ranajit Guha*, eds. David Arnold and David Hardiman. Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1994, 194)

74 E.L. Doctorow, "10 Questions for E.L. Doctorow," interview with Lev Grossman. *Time Magazine* 167:10 (March 6, 2006): 6.

75 See Bagchi and Dasgupta, *Trauma and the Triumph* v. 1 and 2; Gargi Chakravartty, *Coming out of Partition: Refugee Women of Bengal* (Delhi: Blue Jay Books, 2005); and Joya Chatterji, *The Spoils of Partition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

76 Bill Brown, *The Material Unconscious: American Amusement, Stephen Crane and the Economies of Play* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996), 4.

77 Alok Bhalla, "Memory, History and Fictional Representations of the Partition," *Economic and Political Weekly* 34:44 (October 30–November 5, 1999), 3119–3128.

1 Tainted liberty
Women and the Partition

During the sectarian brutalities in Noakhali in the autumn of 1946, Mahatma Gandhi advised women facing the threat of intimate violence to commit suicide in order to preserve their chastity. He suggested that women "commit suicide by poison or some other means to avoid dishonor … suffocate themselves or … bite their tongues to end their lives."[1] Gandhi insisted that "women must learn how to die before a hair of their head could be injured."[2] Speaking a year later, just over a month after Independence and Partition, he valorized pre-emptive suicide, even murder, as a sign of strength, lauding the deaths of Hindu and Sikh women:

> I have heard that many women who did not want to lose their honor chose to die. Many men killed their own wives. I think that is really great, because I know that such things make India brave. After all, life and death is a transitory game. Whoever might have died are dead and gone; but at least they have gone with courage. They have not sold away their honor. Not that their life was not dear to them, but they felt it was better to die than to be forcibly converted to Islam by the Muslims and allow them to assault their bodies. And so those women died. They were not just a handful, but quite a few. When I hear all these things I dance with joy that there are such brave women in India.[3]

In this passage, national honor, patriarchal values, and communalized identities converge with a brutal nationalism that extols the annihilation of the individual. A proponent of non-violence, Gandhi here sanctions suicide or murder by a kinsman as patriotism. He interprets women's chastity as a reservoir of national honor, and their death as the articulation of their *free* choice. Although he was not alone in his insistence on the preservation of chastity, Gandhi's was an important voice, and his speeches had actual consequences for women's lives.[4]

In contrast to Gandhi's laudatory rhetoric around pre-emptive suicides, Bengali author Jyotirmoyee Devi's[5] short story "*Epar Ganga Opar Ganga*"[6] ("The Search," 1968) evokes the sheer terror and loneliness of a beautiful young woman contemplating suicide as a way to escape her circumstances and her husband's intense grief when he learns of her death. When Sudam

and Durga, husband and wife of the cobbler caste, attempt to cross over to India from East Pakistan, they are stopped at the border by Pakistani officials who demand money in order to let them pass. Since the couple is penniless, the officers at the train station, eyeing the beautiful Durga, suggest that she remain in the town as security while Sudam procures the money from his Calcutta-relatives. Having no alternative, Sudam reluctantly leaves Durga in the care of the elderly Muslim stationmaster's family, promising to return in three days to get her. When ten days go by with no word from Sudam, men from the locality approach the stationmaster's wife urging her to hand Durga over to them. Although the elderly woman pays no heed, Durga is petrified, "should she run away? But where would she go, they were everywhere. Maybe hang herself? Perhaps drown?"[7] Sudam returns after three weeks, and upon learning of his wife's suicide by drowning, he is devastated.

Durga's decision to end her life stems from her dread at the very real possibility of violation. But it is not a cause for approbation, much less dancing with joy. Instead, it bespeaks Durga's utter vulnerability. It is her choice, but that, unfortunately, is the limit of her freedom: she is only free to die. Metaphorically, her death is the failure of god. In Hindu mythology, Durga is a manifestation of Parvati, the consort of Shiva, and the worship offered to her in Bengal (Durga Puja), is storied around the married daughter's visit to her parents (in this story, Durga's stay with the elderly Muslim couple), and the annual religious ceremony ends with the immersion of the clay sculpture in a river or pond (in the story, Durga's death by drowning). But whereas the divine Durga slays the demon Mahishasura, in "*Epar Ganga Opar Ganga*," Durga is defenseless against the human-demons around her and destroys herself instead. Given that the rhetoric around communal riots views the orgies of violence as expressions of deep-rooted religious feelings acted out publicly in the name of God, this metaphorical death of god adds an ironic twist.

The narrative also captures Sudam's pain at the loss of his wife. The unraveling of his life is steeped in pathos:

> They are all lying to him. They just want more money, and then they'll let her go. She's alive. She's here, somewhere. … [Sudam] looks for Durga in the wooded areas around town. Is that her? … Maybe not, suddenly something occurs to him. He turns around and returns to the stationmaster's house. … "*Sahib*, you know where she is, please tell me. I'll take her to Calcutta for a dip in the Ganges and purification. I'll bring her back to the faith. She cried so much the day I left." … He is back the next day again Ma-*jaan*, I'll become Muslim. Then they'll return her to me. Please go tell them that. A Muslim won't keep another Muslim's wife in his home. They'll return her. Ma-*jaan*, you're my mother. Please explain this to the *sahib*. She isn't dead. She pleaded with me to return soon." … Sudam leaves. He searches for her everywhere, day and night. Maybe she's gone in the direction he just came from. The men took her there. He turns around and retraces his steps. There are so many people arriving at

> the border every day. So many people. So many women. There, that slender young woman. Fair-skinned. Feet lined with *alta, sindoor* in the parting, chewing *paan*. Yes, that one's Durga. He yells, "Durga, hey Dugga." He steps forward. No. Not her. Late in the night he lies down at the train station, fatigued. But before dawn, he wakes up with a start. He gets up in the dark. Perhaps today's the day he'll find Durga.[8]

Sudam is traumatized, a man who is slowly becoming unhinged by the loss of his wife. Because of Partition, Sudam has lost his *desh* (native land), and while relocating, his wife, and most recently, is losing his sanity. In other words, he has been divested of his homeland, his family, and the self (and of god). Both he and Gandhi are responding to similar situations: women's pre-emptive suicide to avert violation, and yet, their reactions could not be more different. Unlike Gandhi, Sudam expresses no joy in Durga's preservation of her purity. For him, there is no solace in abstractions such as honor, heroism, or patriotism. Gandhi's somewhat indifferent attitude towards the fact of the deaths ("Whoever might have died are dead and gone") is replaced here with Sudam's profound sadness. His is a much more compassionate response.

My purpose in this brief examination of Jyotirmoyee Devi's short story "*Epar Ganga Opar Ganga*" is twofold. First, to set it as a literary counterpoint to Gandhi's influential stance. Second, to suggest how the author offers Sudam's acceptance of the possibility of his wife's violation as a model for the community to emulate: His plans to "redeem" Durga through the performance of Hindu expiatory rituals suggests that he has considered the possibility of her violation and conversion, and is prepared to handle it. (He is even prepared to convert to Islam, if that is the only way she will be restored to him.) Sudam's willingness to reinstate her in his life diverges sharply with the experience of many women and girls who were deemed unacceptable by their kin and community because they had been abducted during the Partition riots and had often lived among Muslims until their repatriation.

The experience of the latter group of women – women who were abducted and/or violated and later restored to their families – constitutes the locus of the discussion in this chapter. While in Gandhi's speech and elsewhere,[9] women who committed pre-emptive suicide were celebrated as martyrs, women who survived the assault on their bodies were subject to contempt. Rajinder Singh Bedi's short story "Lajwanti" (1951) presents the reactions of family members of abducted and missing women after some are "rescued" from Pakistan:

> Why did they not die? Why did they not take poison to save their chastity? Why didn't they jump into a well to save their honour? They were cowards who basely and desperately clung to life. Why, thousands of women had killed themselves before they could be forced to yield their honour and chastity? … One of the women, whose husband would not take her back, vacantly mumbled her own name to herself: *Suhagwati*, the married

> one…. Another, seeing her brother in the crowd, cried out: "You do not seem to recognize me Behari, but I have taken you in my lap and [played with you when you were] a child."[10]

Through a reading of Jyotirmoyee Devi's novel *Epar Ganga Opar Ganga*[11] (translated as *The River Churning*, 1968) and Rajinder Singh Bedi's "Lajwanti," this chapter examines the difficult circumstances of survivor-women. But first, the chapter traces how in this moment of intense communal rivalries and anxiety around national honor, the presence of the violated woman is seen as devaluing the national image, necessitating her exclusion from the national community. After contextualizing the desertion of violated women within the social production of a discourse of honor and of women's sexual purity, I analyze *Epar Ganga Opar Ganga* as a representative text of women's experience of social hostility at home and in their communities following their violation and subsequent repatriation. The novel confronts directly the costs of an ideology concerning women's chastity with which members of the community were familiar. The violated woman lost, or was at least threatened with the loss of, her personhood through the violent event and in the social death that followed. Jyotirmoyee Devi's writings measure the costs of that ideology. The chapter then proceeds to examine the condition of women whose post-repatriation experience was seemingly different, women whose family members "accepted" them. Using Rajinder Singh Bedi's "Lajwanti" the discussion uncovers the complicated nature of this acceptance.

Partition's women: "recovered" by the state, rejected in the community

Appeals to families by Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru to rehabilitate victimized members,[12] state-sponsored homes for "unattached women," and studies by feminist historians and ethnographers drawing upon oral histories and official records all testify to the prevalence of the practice of rejecting abducted and/or violated women in the years following Partition.[13] The rejections of abducted and violated women cannot be disengaged from the social production of a discourse of honor and, especially, of women's sexual purity. Imbricated in a program of Hindu cultural nationalism beginning in the nineteenth century, the discourse of women's chastity was deployed to counter issues of foreign domination.[14] (The ideologization of an inviolate, and inviolable, national space anchored in the purity of the "new" woman shielded masculine proto-nationalism from the narration of its failures, and simultaneously, provided proto-nationalists with the project of fashioning a new masculinity.) Confined to the private sphere elite women were considered unsullied by British colonization. Their chastity thus became a critical site of elite symbolic economies, a site of pedagogy and mobilization for an embryonic collective political identity. Here was a highly elaborate process of myth-making whereby feminine sexual purity became the transcendental signifier of national virtue. From this period of early nationalism first emerges the figure of the chaste upper-caste, upper- and

middle-class Hindu woman. And in her role as Wife and Mother, the Hindu woman was destined to function as the supreme emblem of a consolidated Hindu selfhood. This did not simply grow out of some social pathology. Rather, it was embedded in the macrosociological dynamics of colonialism and culture, wherein the central struggle was for control over state apparatuses, property, and the law.

Reformist and revivalist brands of Hindu cultural nationalism did not, of course, invent the concept of chastity. The discursive production of sexual purity as part of a political ideology of gender dates back (in India) at least to the time of the *Manavadharmasastra* (c. 100 CE). The newness was the political privilege – the immense prestige and visibility – chastity acquired in the shift from a principle of governance to a political prerequisite for belonging. Sexual purity became the locus for a discursive contest over manhood, nationhood, and ideal citizenship, the site on which Indian identity itself was poised. It enabled the colonized Indian man, nettled by criticisms of effeteness and effeminacy from the colonizers, to recuperate in some measure his threatened masculinity.[15] It was by extending a pledge of fierce protection and regulation of women's chastity, the logic runs, that they exercised a guardianship that they had failed to perform over the country.

The Partition riots of 1946–47 and the destabilization of inter-community relations that they entailed also treated women's bodies as a site for the performance of communal identity. According to the same patriarchal logic that resulted in the mass rape of women from the rival religious community (Muslim), for Hindu and Sikh women purity became a political prerequisite for belonging in the new nation.[16] And women who "forfeited" it through intimacy with the Other, even when such acts were coerced, were punished through their kins' refusal to reintegrate them within the family-fold, a metonymy for exclusion from the national community. The woman's body thus functioned as a boundary protecting the nation and the community's collaborative interests. Addressing the violence that primed the nexus between the purity-requirement and the nation, Sangeeta Ray notes that:

> The raped female body encompasses the sexual economy of desire that is denied the mythologization of the purity of one's own ethnic, religious, and national gendered subject. The inevitability of rape leaves women with the "choice" of committing suicide so that she can be accommodated within the narrative of the nation as legitimate and pure, albeit dead, citizen. Those who survive rape are refused entry into the domestic space of the new nation. … The purity of the family mirrors the purity of the nation, and the raped woman cannot be the vehicle of the familial metaphor that enables the narration of the nation.[17]

While the violation of women by the rival "other" during ethnic/civil/national conflicts is common, what is unusual in the case of South Asia is the rejection of women by their families and communities. For instance, in the victim-survivor

testimonies Hyunah Yang has collected from Korean military comfort women, one woman says:

> My tribulations remain buried deep in my heart. Now I have reported to the Korean Council and I take part in various activities. But I am anxious in case anyone recognizes me. I have a husband and children, so I cannot bewail my life and be so resentful in public. If, by any chance, my children's spouses and their families discover I was a comfort woman, what would become of them? … Who will be able to guess what inner agonies I suffer with this awful story buried in my heart?[18]

A collective silence, propelled by a feeling of shame, is maintained around public considerations of the Imperial Japanese Army's exploitation of Korean women's sexuality during World War II. Their shame derives from the sexual slavery these women and girls were coerced into. But the excerpt also makes clear that the speaker herself is integrated into the family and community.[19] The abandonment of violated Hindu and Sikh women that occurred in South Asia is not a universal practice. (It occured again after the Bangladesh Liberation War in 1971 when Bengali women, both Hindu and Muslim, were violated *en masse* by the Pakistani army.)

Hindu nationalists viewed Partition as the loss of territory of "*akhand Bharat*"[20] (unbroken or undivided India). They felt that even if "the diseased limb"[21] of this territory had been sacrificed by the Indian National Congress leadership for the independent possession of the erstwhile colonial state apparatus, the women could not be so forfeited. Although for many in the Hindu and Sikh communities abducted women were forever sullied by their experience, newly independent India's "national honor" demanded the reclamation Hindu and Sikh women from Pakistan.

The abductions that accompanied the Partition soon spurred the state to assume responsibility for the restoration of its citizens. To enable this, the Indian state entered into an Inter-Dominion Agreement with Pakistan as early as November 1947. Within a month of signing, the government mounted a recovery mission. While Pakistan's territorial claim was viewed by the Congress as necessary acquiescence, the Pakistani government's demand for the return of the Muslim abductees was considered to be as legitimate as the Congress' own demand for the return of Hindu and Sikh women. The state's violence in executing the recovery mission often led to uprooting women who had settled into life in their new homes. This uprooting was normalized as benevolence, while women's rights to self-determination regarding domicile (and citizenship) were set aside. The process of repatriation objectified the women as bodies marked by religious affiliation and placed these bodies under the protection of the state. The presence of abducted Muslim women in Hindu and Sikh homes challenged the state's claims to legitimacy in the arena of international politics, and it was therefore necessary to "return" them to Pakistan. The women were simply bodies to be recovered or returned to the place where they "belonged,"

a belonging determined by the state and which advanced the state's claims both nationally (recovery of Hindu and Sikh women) and internationally (return of Muslim women).

South Asian gender historians have made detailed studies of the many debates around specific colonial ordinances focusing on Hindu women – legislations around *satidaha* (widow immolation, 1829), widow remarriage (1856), the Brahmo Marriage Act (1872), and the Age of Consent Bill (1891). These are discussions around the preservation of the purity of the woman's body. Nationalist anxiety about colonialism manifested itself in, and intensified, pre-existing gender pathologies. The discursive developments around chastity in the colonial and nationalist era clearly had concrete consequences for women, because their bodies were not simply sites for discourse but were also sites of patriarchal constraint and violence. The repudiation of abducted wives, daughters, mothers, and sisters was a dramatic demonstration of the fact that nationalist discursive constructions of Hindu femininity held abundant scope for violence. Nor is this simply an issue of the past in South Asia. The escalation of Hindu nationalist/culturalist sentiments in India substantially since the 1980s urges a reassessment of this ideology which has managed to reproduce itself despite all the charges brought on it in the post-Independence decades. Reports by feminist groups on the violence in Gujarat in 2002 illustrate the transformation once again of women's bodies and sexuality during ethno-religious conflicts into an important arena for enacting emphatically modern gender pathologies. The murderous attacks on Muslim women, mostly of childbearing age or those who will soon enter their reproductive years, and the murder of children, even fetuses, adumbrates a new and, in some respects, more awful form of ethnic cleansing.

Geographies of exclusion

In a lecture on gender injustice, former Finance Minister of India Madhu Dandavate, mentioned an incident related to him by one who participated in Gandhi's relief work in Noakhali, in 1946, Sucheta Kripalani. I cite the incident not only as an example of the disenfranchisement women encountered, but also because the incident may have been an inspiration for Jyotirmoyee Devi's novel *Epar Ganga Opar Ganga*. Concerning women's experience of the Partition, Dandavate noted that, "in a large number of cases, women were not welcome in their original families," and instantiated it with the following:

> What happened in Noakhali in Bengal during Gandhiji's peace march in that strife-ridden area is an epic to be remembered, narrated to me by the late Sucheta Kripalani, who had accompanied Gandhiji in his peace march to Noakhali, which succeeded in restoring peace there. One night Sucheta Kripalani received news that three young girls in Gandhiji's Peace Brigade were likely to be kidnapped. Along with the three young girls, she approached the Muslim landlord next door and requested him

> to protect the girls as his daughters. The Muslim landlord put his hand on the Koran and took a vow that he would fully protect the three girls. After a few months, peace returned to Noakhali. The members of Gandhiji's Peace Brigade then returned to their respective homes. When the three young girls who were protected by the Muslim landlord returned home, their parents told them. "You have no place in our family, as you had stayed with a Muslim for three months, forgetting that you were Hindus." "What shall we do?" asked the girls. The parents reply was "Go onto the streets and, if need be, become prostitutes, but our doors are closed for you." Disowned by their parents, the girls took shelter in Gandhi's Ashram. They were never married and later on died unsung and unwept. This only reveals the grim story of women who had to suffer only because of the communal prejudices of a tradition-bound society.[22]

The plot of Jyotirmoyee Devi's novel bears traces of this story. And, it is possible that her daughter, Ashoka Gupta, who worked alongside Sucheta Kripalani doing relief work in Noakhali, mentioned the incident to her. But, despite the ending of the original story and anger concerning the treatment of violated women that suffuses *Epar Ganga Opar Ganga*, the novelist's optimism insists upon the possibility of resituating these women back into middle-class domesticity.

The novel *Epar Ganga Opar Ganga* opens with Sutara Datta, Assistant Professor of History in a women's college, pondering over the question of unwritten histories of suffering. She turns to her personal history of pain during the Noakhali riots in the autumn of 1946 and the continuing disgrace over subsequent years. Her story is then presented in flashback. The narrative unfolds in the background of a blaze of communal violence, arson, murder, and rape in the Noakhali and Comilla districts of eastern Bengal subsequent to the Great Calcutta Killing in August 1946.[23] Sutara Datta, then an adolescent, loses her parents in the communal fury in Noakhali: her father is murdered, her mother attempts suicide (and is eventually untraceable), and her older sister Sujata is abducted. Sutara herself loses consciousness in the course of the attack on her. She is rescued by Tamizuddin – a Muslim family friend and neighbor – and his sons. Convalescing in their care for six months, she is eager to be reunited with her surviving family members, her three brothers and sister-in-law, whereupon Tamizuddin and his sons escort her to the "safety" of Calcutta. In Calcutta, she joins her brothers and sister-in-law Bibha at Bibha's parents' home where they have taken refuge to escape the riots. The elderly women of the household, Bibha's mother and aunts, disapprove of Sutara's presence in the family – she is considered "polluted" because she spent six months living among Muslims. They hasten her further displacement. Shunned by her family and community, Sutara is sent to a boarding school for women run by Christian missionaries, where the student-body is primarily constituted by lower-castes or low-caste converts and women in situations similar to hers. She is especially unwanted at social events and Bibha's mother's routine snubs reach a peak on

Bibha's sister Subha's wedding day when Sutara is made to eat separately and hurriedly sent home to protect other guests from her "polluting" presence. (Years later, at her mother's suggestion, Bibha deliberately delays inviting Sutara so as to prevent her from attending Bibha's daughter Reba's wedding.)

Through many years, Sutara's brothers either witness her humiliation in silence or pretend it never happened. Only Bibha's father, her brother Pramode, and her sister Subha occasionally speak up against the ill treatment Sutara silently endures. In the meantime, Sutara completes her studies and finds employment teaching History at a women's college in Delhi. There, she realizes painfully that she will never have a conventional homelife, not only because she has no place in her brothers' affections, but also because her marriage prospects are bleak (she is "polluted"). Her correspondence and occasional meetings with her Muslim neighbors from the village, who continue to cherish her – especially Tamizuddin's wife and his daughter Sakina – come to an abrupt end when Tamizuddin's wife suggests a matrimonial alliance between her older son Aziz and Sutara. In Calcutta, Bibha's brother Pramode expresses his resolve to wed Sutara, infuriating his mother, who has already arranged a match for him. Still, Pramode goes to Delhi and proposes marriage to Sutara. The novel ends with her bewildered acceptance.

Epar Ganga Opar Ganga is dedicated "To dishonored, violated and humiliated women everywhere, and of all times."[24] It does not question why women's bodies are subjected to a gendered form of communal hostility. Instead, it analyzes *how* women's bodies are made the preferred sites for the hieroglyphics of power diffused throughout everyday domestic life. It critiques the preoccupation with chastity and the tabooed social contacts among Hindus that led to their abandoning the women abducted and/or violated during the communal riots. In doing so, the novel breaks the silence surrounding sexually victimized women that has operated as an effective denial of their citizenship.[25] *Epar Ganga Opar Ganga* focuses on the society-wide repression of memory of the contest over national borders, both geographical and mental, performed on the bodies of women. It calls attention to the ellipses of history, and especially to women's histories, generated by the workings of nation-formation but which have been, until fairly recently, only a few glosses in the margins, if not wholly omitted. Jyotirmoyee Devi critiques the political process that encouraged this forgetting and "restore[s] women to history."[26] After the feminist scholarship of the last several decades, the critique of the absence of gendered national histories might not seem cutting edge, but in the 1960s, at the time the novel was published, it was radical. More radical was the embedding of these histories in the context of the national struggle at a time when the euphoria over Independence had not faded.

Jyotirmoyee Devi's writings on the Partition – the novel *Epar Ganga Opar Ganga*, her short story with the same name, and another story "*Shei Chheleta*"[27] ("That Little Boy") discussed in the next chapter – suggest that the discursive developments around "ideal" womanhood in Hindu cultural nationalism, the responsibility on "the gendered and sexed female body … to bear the burden

of excessive symbolization"[28] played a significant role in the responses generated towards the female victims of Partition, and that "the violence of the Partition was folded into everyday relations."[29] Portraying the myriad ways that Partition "came to be incorporated into the temporal structure of relationships,"[30] Jyotirmoyee Devi's work marks a negation of the patriarchal discourse of colonialism/nationalism by exposing the brutal and isolating practices that ritualized forms of purity demanded. The compelling question animating her novel *Epar Ganga Opar Ganga* is not so much *how* did state-intervention affect the lives of women? but, rather, *what* happened after that? It focuses on the reception, or non-reception, of women in the community to which they had returned (or, were forcibly returned to on the basis of the religion of their fathers/brothers/husbands). Some of the questions that resonate through the text are: Why after their "recovery" are women who were abducted, violated, and dislocated by Partition repeatedly displaced to boarding schools or to hostels for single/working women? What makes their reinstatement in their original families impossible? How does the symbolic burden placed on a woman by cultural nationalism produce an immediate effect on the female body? What is the status of the individual detail, and does the specific case matter?

Charting the histories of women's oppression is a political project of sorts for Jyotirmoyee Devi. Questions of historical visibility or the denial thereof, the constitution of the political subject through history, and the deliberate evasions/perversion of history are central to her interests: the privilege of who gets to write, whose history is written, and how. That the state manipulates the process of the dissemination of history – for instance, the state sanctions for undergraduate studies the work of historians with certain political biases while refusing patronage to others – constitutes the core of Jyotirmoyee Devi's critique of history writing in the opening chapter of the novel *Epar Ganga Opar Ganga*. (The project of historiography in the years immediately following Independence focused overwhelmingly on the struggle for national liberation. Thus, these typically centered around a select group of leaders from the Indian National Congress, detailing their role in the heroic process.) Although the novel's counter-history incorporates a larger concern for the recuperation of obliterated narratives of other groups subordinated by class and caste, the narrative focus is on the experiences of women. It analyzes with relentless intensity the condition of the women-victims of Partition.

Drawing upon the ancient Sanskrit epic *Mahabharata*, the novel *Epar Ganga Opar Ganga* was originally entitled *Itihashe Stree Parva* or *The Canto of Women in History*. "*Stree Parva*" or "The Canto of Women" is the title of one of the books in the original epic, whose generic title is "*Itihasa*" or "History." However, in her authorial preface, Jyotirmoyee Devi indicates that, despite its name, "The Canto of Women" of the *Mahabharata* was not about sufferings specific to women, but focused on general grief and bereavement for the losses incurred in the battle of Kurukshetra. She therefore refers to the epic's "*Maushala Parva*" or "The Canto of Iron Clubs" which makes an obscure mention of the abduction and rape of the Yadava women. Critical of the

silences which structure that history, Jyotirmoyee Devi draws a parallel between the suppression of women's histories of oppression in the epic poet Vyasa's scant attention to the predicament of the abducted and violated women in the "*Maushala Parva*" and the recent historical context of Partition. Placing Partition on a comparable scale with the devastation of the subcontinent during the battle of Kurukshetra, and the violation of Yadava women after the death of their men in the battle, Jyotirmoyee Devi positions the Partition atrocities as the unrecited epic of the modern Indian nation.

It is not coincidental that in *Epar Ganga Opar Ganga* the description of the student population at the women's college at Delhi where the protagonist Sutara teaches, named Yajnaseni (another name for *Mahabharata*'s Draupadi), bears mutilated and distorted traces of the Indian national anthem. The original line naming the different provinces runs "Punjab, Sindh, Gujarat, Maratha, Dravir (Tamil Nadu) …," while the line in Jyotirmoyee Devi's novel emphasizing the all-India character of the college is, "There were students from all parts of the split 'mahaBharata,' … Marathi, Gujarati, Madraji (Madrasi), Punjabi women …"[31] The difference is because between the time of Rabindranath Tagore's composition of the song about undivided India and Jyotirmoyee Devi's writing of the novel, the sacred geography of the subcontinent had been altered by the Partition. Conspicuously absent from Jyotirmoyee Devi's line is the mention of Sindh (and of Sindhi women in the college), since following Partition it was Pakistani territory. The violence performed on the original line from the anthem thus becomes a metaphor for the severed subcontinent as well as for the brutalities visited upon women. Opening with Sutara meditating on the absences in the historical discourse, *Epar Ganga Opar Ganga* narrates the costs of the violence surrounding Partition, offering in place of the glorious textbook histories of the Indian freedom struggle an account clearly deviant. In telling a story that has been deleted, the novel provides a corrective, re-inscribing the obliterated, unspeakable women's bodily experience of the political division of the country as the new "*Stree Parva*," "The Canto of Women."

Jyotirmoyee Devi evokes the "Indian" (rather than only the Bengali) experience of the Partition catastrophe through adopting a strategy of bringing together women from the two partitioned provinces: Sutara from Bengal with Kaushalyavati, Sita Bhargava, Mataji, and other women from Punjab in *Epar Ganga Opar Ganga*; and in her short story "*Shei Chheleta*" ("That Little Boy"), Rajkumari, a refugee from Lahore and her two Bengali friends, Baruna and Sujata. Sutara's feeling of a special affinity with her Punjabi friends at Delhi is based on a shared history of violence, homelessness, and migration. The stories of brutalities in Punjab which Sutara's colleague and friend Kaushalyavati shares, echoes the violence in Sutara's village: the murder of her father, her mother's disappearance, the abductions of her older sister Sujata and her friend Aloka, Sutara's friend Durga's suicide, and the assault on her. The author thus underscores the similarities in the circumstances of Partition's victims, circumstances that do not pause at provincial borders. (In

What the Body Remembers (1999) set in Punjab, Shauna Singh Baldwin uses a similar technique bringing together the Sikh protagonist from Punjab, Roop, and her Bengali Muslim employee from Dhaka, Jorimon, to suggest the cross-regional and cross-religion character of the impact of the Partition.)[32]

The victim-survivors of Partition in Jyotirmoyee Devi's writings – Sutara, Kaushalyavati, "Mataji" (*Epar Ganga Opar Ganga*), and Raj's mother (in "*Shei Chheleta*") – are, as C.M. Naim has remarked, "deeply wounded people,"[33] "who in a most organic way, are tied to a history and a place but who, overwhelmed by yet another more powerful history, must live out their days elsewhere."[34] But the "elsewhere" Jyotirmoyee Devi's women characters encounter is not only a different country but a different life outside the domestic pale, the possibilities of which they could never have foreseen, and for which they lack the necessary survival skills. Perhaps if the Noakhali riots had not shattered her familiar world, Sutara Datta's life would have taken much the same trajectory as that of her older sister Sujata, some education, marriage, and so on; instead, Sutara's circumstances compel her to acquire an education that would lead to gainful employment, because she must consider the possibility of remaining single. In "*Shei Chheleta*" too, history violently interrupts Raj's mother's sheltered existence, ravages her home, invades her body, and eventually makes her homeless. Originally from a wealthy family and married into one, later violated and accompanied by her son resulting from the violence, Raj's mother adjusts to the contingencies of life by perfecting the ingratiating smile and the pleading talk of a beggar. Independence makes little sense in the lives of migrant women like Sutara or Raj's mother, for whom the freedom from imperialism is tethered to betrayals by their families, by the nation, and more substantially, by the loss of control over their bodies and the erosion of consent. Jyotirmoyee Devi's novel depicts the community's intense disdain towards abductees and women's resultant discovery of spaces for themselves outside of middle-class domesticity as well as for friendships fostered on a shared basis of suffering.

The novel is structured in four parts: the last three, the "*Adi Parva*" ("The Canto of the Beginning"), the "*Anusashana Parva*" ("The Canto of the New Rule"), and the "*Stree Parva*" ("The Canto of Women"), derive their names from books of the *Mahabharata*; the short first section is titled "Sutara Datta." The second, third, and fourth sections plot Sutara's continuous migrations: the locale for the second is a village in Noakhali, the third Calcutta, and the fourth Delhi. Further, towards the end of the fourth section, the author hints at a future possibility of Sutara's passage to England with Pramode. Within these larger changes of location there are smaller displacements too: Sutara is transferred from her parents' home to her neighbors' at Noakhali; from the residence of her extended family to the boarding school at Calcutta. Small or large, each of the transitions is permanent, Sutara never returns to the original site, whether it is her parents' home, her Muslim neighbors at Noakhali, or to her brothers and extended family at Calcutta. Her perpetual movements advance the feeling of homelessness, and each site becomes a new

place of exile. As with Raj's mother in "*Shei Chheleta*," gendered migration constitutes a central trope in the novel. But the impossibility of "return" allows Sutara to forge a new life for herself. Not that she forgets the past, she simply refuses to allow it to eclipse her present and her future. It is among the women refugees from Punjab, residing at Delhi, that Sutara, for the first time, feels the bond of community, a community where she can narrate her past without the fear of shaming.

The attack on Sutara, followed by her prolonged contact with the Muslim family who shelter her, brands her as "impure," "polluted," an Other in her "native" community, whose material practices in the performance of daily life are troubled by her presence. Her re-integration within her community is almost impossible because her body carries an alternative history, the imprint of another set of practices which constitute another everyday life. The details of her life are rendered meaningless for others, and the course of future events, the multiple instances of psychological harassment, is determined by the single incident of bodily violence. In stating a claim for exemplarity, Jyotirmoyee Devi furnishes a bounty of details, but she suggests simultaneously that the details are inconsequential: Sutara could have had a particular kind of life, she could have had a particular kind of dignity, or she could have had no dignity, but the moment she is sexually assaulted she becomes a non-person, the details of whose life and personhood translate only into so many petty minutiae. The event of violation becomes the definitive moment of Sutara's life. It determines the plot, so that the novel itself enacts the simplification of the character socially. Sutara becomes paralyzed in deciding her conditions, in determining the status of the detail in her own life. Like Bhuvaneswari Bhaduri in Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's essay "Can the Subaltern Speak?,"[35] Sutara's only practicable mode for signification is by the negation of a negation. However, eventually she escapes being defined by the sexual violence she encountered as an adolescent.

Sutara's alterity is insupportable in the upper-caste Hindu family that had been made secure from all contact with the outside through discourses of cultural nationalism insisting on Hindu domesticity as the sanctuary for launching (and sculpting) a Hindu national identity. It is difference that constitutes community identity – different religion, different set of customs, different foods – so that communities, like nations "are forever haunted by their definitional others,"[36] and Sutara's position at the periphery of two rival communities makes her allegiance to her community/nation suspect. Thus, Jyotirmoyee Devi situates Sutara within the "woman-as-nation" paradigm, but in her writings the fallen woman is the symbolic representation of the nation. It is interesting to note that women's citizenship is contingent not only on residence in the *right* country and following the *right* religious faith, but also on their possessing the *right* (chaste) body. In the domain of the elite home, the definitive factor for belonging was unsullied virtue.

The gender dynamics in the novel do not operate on the basis of an antagonism between men and women. Rather, excepting the gendered character of

the violence during the night of the riot, the novel highlights the role of women not as "victims" of a patriarchal culture but as active in policing one another and reproducing repressive masculinity (and femininity) against women. While Jyotirmoyee Devi deems the fetish of women's bodily purity to be the cardinal cause of Sutara's miseries, she also indicates that its perpetuation was guaranteed by women who, as Nira Yuval-Davis and Floya Anthias caution, "actively participate in the process of reproducing and modifying their roles as well as being actively involved in controlling other women."[37]

As preservers of domestic sanctity, women were authorized to take crucial decisions in assessing other women's rectitude. In *Epar Ganga Opar Ganga*, Bibha's mother and aunts endorse the continuity of patriarchy and veto Sutara's belonging because of her contact with the forbidden that disrupted her caste and religious practices. Bibha's mother monitors, with reproving vigilance, the social and intimate contacts between family members. She orchestrates Sutara's alienation both from her brothers and from the extended family, in the name of safeguarding the future for Bibha's daughters. When Bibha's mother's efforts to isolate Sutara are defeated by her idealist son Pramode's decision to marry her, she reproaches Bibha for restoring her orphaned sister-in-law (Sutara) to her extended family in Calcutta:

> After a long silence, [Bibha's mother] turned to Bibha, "I told you repeatedly not to bring that girl here. Don't. Don't get her. But you persisted! You let her stay here. Good for you! Saved your face from people's gibes. A fine thing you did ruining my family; dug a canal and courted a crocodile into my backyard. … What was the point in fetching her anyway, she who had lived with those unclean non-Hindus [*mlechchha*]? Whatever happened was her misfortune. She should have stayed back. There are countless women like her in that country [Pakistan]. You think she retained her religion-caste purity living with them for such a long time? Who knows what she ate! And then, what had happened? That about which no one knows! She certainly could not have remained a Hindu living with Muslims!" Anger, disappointment, and revulsion swept through her and she burst into tears.[38]

Bibha's mother, though the most vocal, is by no means the only character in the novel to harbor such sentiments. However, it is her acknowledgment of the possibility of marriage, even in its denial, that is radical. Sutara's stay with a "*mlechchha*" (impure; Muslim) family realizes the worst fears of "pollution" in the upper-caste Hindu household. Sutra seems to undergo a process of losing her original caste, and as a result, she is treated as a low-caste "untouchable." As the term "untouchable" suggests, she cannot inhabit the same space as the other members of the family. At the wedding of Bibha's sister Subha's wedding, elderly women who have no clue as to the exact nature of the events during the night of the attack make suggestive comments about her past, and a well-wisher warns the family that guests, especially the women, will probably

refrain from participating in the wedding dinner for fear of the contagion of Sutara's contaminating presence. It is only after Sutara escapes the supervision exercised by the patriarchal family and community and migrates to a new space of economic independence that it is possible for her to establish some genuine social solidarity – a sisterhood with refugee women from western Punjab.

Jyotirmoyee Devi illustrates the modalities of women's participation in upper-caste Hindu patriarchy "as reproducers of the boundaries of ethnic/national groups; as participating centrally in the ideological reproduction of the collectivity and as transmitters of its culture; as signifiers of national differences."[39] Thus, the women ensure the continuation of the ideology of purity developed in the name of some abstract national good. The question we are compelled to ask is that, while the national patriarchy has a stake in controlling women's sexuality ranging from material questions of property to more abstract ideas of national/community purity, why did women participate in segregating other oppressed members of their own gender? The answer lies, not in false consciousness, but perhaps in that (chaste) elite women benefited from these isolating practices in the form of privileges patriarchy offered, receiving, for instance, a certain access to the public sphere in exchange for endorsement of the patriarchy's views.

(While she is unwelcome in her native community, Sutara cannot enter into a meaningful relationship with her Muslim neighbors through marriage with Tamizuddin's older son, Aziz. This is because, despite the kindness she receives from them, she regards marriage into a Muslim family as a betrayal of her parents' deaths, her sister's abduction, and her personal suffering. Sadly, her response to the marriage proposal holds Tamizuddin and his family guilty by association; she treats them not as individuals who sheltered her and even endured threats from their own community for that reason, but rather as part of the community that shattered her life. She corresponds regularly with her old Muslim friends, meets them occasionally, but cannot make the leap to a commitment of marriage. Through the conversations in Tamizuddin's family after she turns down the marriage proposal brought by Sakina, Tamizuddin's daughter and Sutara's friend, the novel presents Sutara's decision as a problem of love, and of her inability to forget. As an educated and financially independent woman Sutara actively overcomes her circumstances, but she remains subject to the logic of commemoration in her rejection of the marriage with Aziz.)

Jyotirmoyee Devi subtly reinforces the implication of Sutara's violation through such incidents as Sutara's quarantine on the night of Subha's wedding; she also alludes throughout to humiliated heroic women of legends: Mary Magdalene, Lucretia, Amba, Draupadi, and Sita. However, it is critical to note that in the novel, the event of the assault that ruptures the women's "good" past lives from the "tainted" present is not central to the narrative; in fact, it is even left slightly ambiguous. On the evening of the attack, Sutara's father rushes to consult with Tamizuddin, leaving at home his wife and two

daughters. The village is ablaze and then the rioters, led by the family's employees Karim and Rahim, show up:

> Suddenly, their garden too was alight – the light of the fire. And in the cowshed, the cattle were lowing. They were restless, Ma could hear them. Was the thatch on fire too?
>
> Ma stood stock-still. Then, slowly she started to open the door, saying "Let me go and let the cows loose. You bolt the door." When she opened the door, Karim, Rahim and a few strangers were on the other side. Terrified, Ma seemed to stop breathing. Despite that, she said, "You're back? Go release the cows. It seems the fire has spread to this side."
>
> They just grinned, their teeth showing. One of them said, "Okay."
>
> But no one moved.
>
> Ma, agitated by the mooing of the cows, proceeded to the cowshed – Sutara stared fixedly at her.
>
> Didi suddenly let out a sharp, shrill scream, "Ma, Ma, Baba," and keeled to the ground. Their mother, unlocking the door to the cowshed, was shocked. Then she said, "I'll be there right away, dear."
>
> But Ma couldn't reach them. Shadows had surrounded her. They were reaching for her hand. But Ma freed herself and ran to the pond behind the house and leaped into it.
>
> The fire had set the whole locality ablaze. One of the men tried to stop her, another said, "Don't bother. Let her go, that's the mother. Leave her." Didi was nowhere, was she dead?
>
> What's the matter with Didi? Sutara did not see her again. She wanted to run to where Ma was, but her feet were caught in something and she stumbled.
>
> And then?[40]

This sparse description preserves a feel of the sinister and elicits the horror of the events despite the euphemistic quality of Jyotirmoyee Devi's prose. Jashodhara Bagchi notes that Sutara's "sexuality is the great violation, 'unspoken' in the novel."[41] Beyond this evocative narration and another mention that, "Psychologically and physically Sutara was devastated,"[42] the trauma of the sexual assault resurfaces mostly as a confused, nebulous memory, with scattered references to her torn and dirty clothes, her friends' suicides, drownings, and abductions. It is referred to again in Bibha's mother's words, "And then, what had happened [on the night of the attack]? That about which no one knows." The staging of sexual violence remains beyond the narrated (and the narratable). What the novelist represents are the aftereffects of that trauma.

Jyotirmoyee Devi's condensed description is not the product of reticence, much less the residual prudery of a post-Victorian writer, because the discussion of rape is not rare in her writings, especially in her essays. Rather, the veiling of bodily trauma through language constitutes a counter-discourse to

the economy of display of women, and thus, her prose recovers something of the private pain that women suffered. Also, her seeming reluctance to engage further with the issue of violation is not to devalue the sexual terrorization of women – indeed, she discerns the threat of sexual assault as a primary form of control over women's bodies – but rather, not to compromise the unmitigated intensity on women's rejections in their afterlives in the community.[43]

The withering away of Sutara's matrimonial possibilities, based on the occurrence of sexual abuse, which Bibha's mother obliquely refers to as "other problems," illustrates how sexual violence involves a process of de-gendering the body. In her essay "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe: An American Grammar Book," Hortense Spillers contends that to have gender is to have a relation to privacy and dignity, especially, to sexual dignity, and that in the specific context of slavery she studies, African-American women do not have a gender in that sense, because they have no access to privacy. Following Spillers, I would argue that the act of rape de-genders the woman's body in the default ideology, insofar as it takes away personal dignity, the capacity for it, and for being an agent in her own life. It is significant that between Sutara's restoration to her extended family in Calcutta and her finding employment in Delhi, she has little textual presence by way of speech. Although her condition constitutes the problematic, and she is constantly acted upon, she rarely speaks. I understand her silence not as resistance but as a metaphor for her loss of social agency through what Spillers refers to as the "*theft of the body*"[44] (italics in original). Sutara's silence is socially structured and policed by the family: her brothers' limited interaction with her; by the community: her presence is unwelcome in social events; and by the state: the prohibition on biographical exchanges between students at the residential school she attends. In reinserting Sutara back into the script of middle-class domestic sexual economy, the novelist re-genders her, by way of establishing a claim for a different destiny for gender, and eventually makes the details of an individual life matter once again.

Veena Das has suggested that marriage was a strategic practice of the community by which some repatriated women were rendered invisible through absorption within the family.[45] However, I read Pramode's wedding proposal to Sutara neither as a part of any community scheme nor as a fairytale ending, but, rather, as an individual act of will. Pramode and Subha, Bibha's brother and sister, witness Sutara's repeated disgrace and disenfranchisement within their family. The high points in this continuum of harassment are the quarantine on the night of Subha's wedding; the overheard gossip between their aunts insisting on Sutara's being left with the Muslims; and the deliberately delayed invitation she is sent in order to prevent her from attending her niece's wedding. (While Sutara's reinsertion within middle-class respectability might signal a compromise to the love-interest – of which there is not much in the novel – Pramode's proposal is not inconsistent with his compassion towards her since her arrival from Noahkhali at their home in Calcutta. Both Pramode and his younger sister Subha are sensitive, even apologetic, throughout the novel, to Sutara's distress induced by the seniors in the family.) Beyond simply constituting a "happy

ending" at the level of the plot, Pramode's proposal is a conscious, if slightly patronizing, act of good will by a concerned citizen: "Very gently, Pramode asked, 'You won't say no, will you? We, Subha and I, talk about you often. We liked you a lot. Can't tell whether it's love, but we were pained by your plight. Could you try and like us?'"[46] Perhaps not the first admission of distress by her kinsfolk (Pramode's father, Amulyababu, is pained by her condition earlier on), it is nevertheless the first pro-active step taken to reintegrate Sutara within the Hindu fold. Although this "restoration" within the community remains incomplete since Pramode's impending departure for England off-centers him to some degree, it nonetheless contains a possibility, if slightly contrived, of transcending community disdain through individual arbitrations.

Re-contextualizing Sutara within bourgeois domesticity, Jyotirmoyee Devi immediately undermines the happy ending by returning to themes of the solitude of socially excluded women (with hints at their non-reproductivity). Upon her return to the hostel, Sutara:

> switched off the lights in her room. Stars sparkled in the dark *Chaitra* [March–April] sky. At the corners of the garden a few Eucalyptus trees stood straight and tall, apart and lonely. … Like the women residents of the hostel. Solitary trees lacking shrubbery, fruits and flowers, branches and twigs. Storms would bend but couldn't break them.[47]

Separated from middle-class domestic life, Sutara with her colleagues and friends working in the college and residing in the dormitory constitute a community, a women's community that disregards regional differences and sustains a mutual support system. From a fledgling suggestion in "*Shei Chheleta*," signaled by Raj's relief after sharing with her friend Baruna the knowledge that her mother had been violated, something she had not divulged even to her family, the author develops and fine-tunes the notion of women's solidarity in her novel. Writing in the 1960s, her recognition of the potentials of feminist solidarity is remarkable, although by ultimately distancing Sutara from the women's hostel Jyotirmoyee Devi declines to advance a radical alternative to the family. Also, while Sutara's entry into middle-class respectability marks a definitive break from the fixation with purity, it also weakens the possibilities of a life as an independent, single woman. The ending of the novel raises several questions: Does Sutara's reinstatement within the domestic space with its demands for women's chastity suggest potentials for its reorganization? Or, on the other hand, is the act in itself a subordination of the women's struggle to the struggle for the nation? Can it be because the nation still requires this construction to shore up its integrity?

Exiled at home

Epar Ganga Opar Ganga details the abandonment of Sutara by her brothers and her extended family, and ends with her contemplating marriage to

Pramode. Would the situation have been different if she had been married at the time of the attack on her? Would husbands prove to be more compassionate than brothers? Would Sudam, in Jyotirmoyee Devi's short story "*Epar Ganga Opar Ganga*" discussed at the beginning of this chapter, reinstate Durga in his life as he pledged? The last is impossible to know on account of Durga's death, but one of the most evocative answers to the question is offered in Rajinder Singh Bedi's Urdu short story "Lajwanti" which makes a nuanced exploration of the collapse of a marriage weighed down by history. Like Sutara, Lajwanti, is restored to her home and husband without any tell-tale signs of the violence she endured. Still, no return is possible to the life she had known.

The story is set in Ludhiana, Punjab around 1948–49.[48] Babu Sunder Lal's wife, Lajwanti, was abducted in the riots, and is missing. Her memory drives him to work zealously for the local rehabilitation committee whose members plead for the acceptance of repatriated women. Just as Sunder Lal becomes reconciled to his loss, his wife returns and, true to the ideals he advocated so long, Sunder Lal brings her home. In contrast to many "husbands, fathers, mothers, brothers and sisters [who] refused to recognize"[49] the Hindu and Sikh women reclaimed from West Pakistan, Sunder Lal accepts her, although not without some anxiety. His uneasiness is caused by sartorial minutiae like the arrangement of Lajwanti's *dupatta* "in a typical Muslim fashion, with one end of it thrown over her left shoulder"[50] as well as other changes like the improvement in her health and skin-tone. He reads these as signs of wellbeing with her captor, whereas he had imagined that she would be shriveled with the grief of being away from him. He is plagued by doubts regarding whether she had returned to him voluntarily. His "acceptance" of her is also rather chilly because Lajwanti's brief absence has altered the dynamics of their marriage, a fact condensed in the switch from his former intimate mode of address "Lajo" to the courteously distant "*devi*" (goddess). This discursive (and ironic) recasting of her desecrated body into the sacred, inviolable body of a goddess, pushes her beyond human contact, and constitutes a denial of her embodiedness. It amounts ultimately to a rejection of her sexuality.

Sunder Lal's negation of her sexuality is directly related to her (coerced) sexual activity outside of marriage. He responds to it by turning her into a goddess, thereby evacuating his marriage of sensuality. His wife becomes an object of his worship rather than of his desire; Sunder Lal, the narrator says, "had enshrined the golden image of Lajwanti in the citadel of his heart and himself stood at the doorway, keeping … watch lest the image [be] lost again."[51] A Hindu woman, Lajwanti experienced the intimate "touch" of a Muslim man and her knowledge of that forbidden touch now makes her "untouchable" to others. In ways both obvious and obscure Lajwanti's sexuality constitutes an abiding source of anxiety. Regarding her abduction and her life before returning home, her husband raises only three questions: "Who was he?," "Did he treat you well,?" and "He never beat you?"[52] The queries are all centered around the other man in Lajwanti's life and Sunder Lal's agitated vow of compassion (abstaining from domestic violence) is prompted, not by a renewed love for

her or the memories of the pain he had previously inflicted on her, but by the unreal threat that the other man, who never subjected Lajwanti to domestic abuse, was superior to him and that she might actually desire the life she had with her abductor. Thus, while he discursively annuls her sexuality, it remains the terrain of contest with his absent adversary. The actions of both men thus conspire to negate Lajwanti's autonomous sexuality – her ability to consent and feel pleasure.

That he transcends convention and "pardons" Lajwanti marks Sunder Lal in his own self-conception as superior to the rest of his community, and an all-forgiving, virtuous godhood is something he arrogates to himself. But he sanctions no space for Lajwanti to be heard. No sooner has he asked "Who was he?" than he halts her response with "Let the past be the past."[53] The narrator says that Lajwanti had wanted, at this point, to unburden herself, but felt "gagged" and "stifled" by her husband's reaction. He silences her not only because her narrative would contain evidence of intimacy outside of marriage, but also on a subterranean level he suspects that she might express satisfaction with the quality of her other life and thus shatter *his* re-construction of their histories in separation. Lajwanti's continued presence in his life is made conditional on her repression of the past. Normality is not simply postponed, it is prevented. The un-narrated events of her abduction and rape arrest the possibility of a return to "pre-lapsarian" bliss (that is, her abduction and rape as her failure or "lapse" of character) or the working through of the trauma she suffered. Lajwanti's initial relief at her husband's kindness is replaced by the realization that "she had got back everything and yet she had lost everything – she was rehabilitated and she was ruined."[54] This is not to suggest that she missed the domestic violence of the former days – in fact, after her return she requests Sunder Lal to desist from it in the future – but at least the earlier domestic disagreements enacted a more equal footing in the marriage. Also, the use of the nickname "Lajo" conveyed a certain intimacy. After her "restoration," she craved the affability and intimacy she had once shared with Sunder Lal but now "the question of a quarrel between them did not arise for she was *devi* and he her worshipper."[55] The irony in the title of the story, "Lajwanti" meaning "woman of modesty," is further compounded by its being the Punjabi name for the "Touch-me-not" plant. It is thus a metaphor for the character's condition: a violated-woman-turned-goddess, she is "protected" now and forever more from all human contact.

Like the political figures of his day, Bedi draws upon classical stereotypes from the *Ramayana* to underscore the plight of abducted women,[56] but the difference lies in his deeply ironic treatment of the motifs of Sita's chastity and *Ramrajya* (lit. "kingdom of Rama/God," a term Gandhi adopted to express his vision of a political utopia which assured its subjects of democratic and righteous rule). Bedi's reference to Sita is central to the organization of the narrative. It occurs twice: first, when the local holyman Narain Bawa exhorts the villagers to reject abducted and/or violated women in the name of preserving the purity of the Hindu religion and *Ramrajya*, thereby provoking a debate

with Sunder Lal; and, second, Lajwanti's "return" home with Sunder Lal is compared with the royal couple Ram and Sita's homecoming to Ayodhya. But by putting the violated Lajwanti on par with the famously chaste Sita, Bedi gives the myth a satiric twist. Bedi similarly turns the concept of *Ramrajya* on its head, not only by making its champion the unsympathetic character Narain Bawa (who represents the Hindu religious right), but also through Sunder Lal's questioning of the ethics of Rama's banishment of Sita. Sunder Lal exposes how *Ramrajya* contradicts its own ideal of universal contentment by disregarding the question of Rama's (and Sita's) personal happiness. Bedi's ironic allusions to the myth of Sita and his quarrels with the idea of *Ramrajya* challenge Gandhian nationalism on its own terrain, confronting its nostrums and its simplistic certainties with a modernist insistence upon the manifold complexity of the living individual's predicaments. By exposing the emptiness and the debased level of the political debate regarding abducted women, Bedi makes a critique of its naiveté, even its moral frivolity, in the face of such horror.

Jyotirmoyee Devi deploys a similar symbology in her novel, and takes an analogous critical stance. She draws parallels between the episodes in the *Ramayana* and the situation in contemporary India, and censures the patriarchal despotism in *Ramrajya* – a place from which modern-day Sitas have been banished and forced into the "netherworld" (prostitution):

> Sita was abducted. A battle ensued between Rama and Ravana. Bibhishana and Rama were crowned, and ascended the thrones of Lanka and Ayodhya. But none could halt the banishment and "descent into the netherworld" of multitudes of Sitas. King Rama and the *Ramrajya*-ists, with cheery dispositions and robust health, are illumining the royal court, as they have always done. Yes, that was the arrangement in *Ramrajya* too. Rama's exile meant exile for Sita, but Sita's banishment to the forest wasn't a banishment for Rama.[57]

Through a change in verb tense, from the past tense to the present continuous, Jyotirmoyee Devi suggests that the present perpetuates the oppressive practices of the remote past. Also telling is a comment by Samar, a friend of Pramode, who mocks political leaders with, "All we sought was *Ramrajya*, we didn't think of the people,"[58] thus dissociating Gandhi's utopian kingdom of God from any genuine concern for the actual wellbeing of the citizenry.

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The crucial issue raised in various ways by this examination of Jyotirmoyee Devi and Rajinder Singh Bedi's writings is that of the gender pathology, the denial of women's sexuality, at the heart of South Asian modernity. Marked and conditioned to its very core by the experience of colonialism, this psycho-sexual pathology nevertheless has persisted well beyond national independence, so much so that it seems increasingly fruitless to grasp it in terms of South Asia's

postcoloniality alone. Literature, in the postcolonial period in India, allowed readers to grasp this fact with a degree of moral seriousness largely lacking in the public domain. Displaying a willingness to confront the horrible consequences of this gender pathology as manifested in the Partition, the literary domain has served as a place-holder for a public debate and confrontation with the Indian past that could not, or at least, did not then take place.

Notes

1 Mohandas K. Gandhi, *Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi* (hereafter *CWMG*) (Delhi: Publications Division, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Govt. of India, 1958–1994), v. 92, 355.
2 Ibid., v. 92, 344.
3 Ibid, v. 96, 388–89.
4 The following report, for instance, published in *The Statesman*, dated March 15, 1947, attests to Gandhi's influence on popular thinking:

> The story of 90 women of the little village of Thoa Khalsa, Rawalpindi district … who drowned themselves by jumping into a well during the recent disturbances has stirred the imagination of the people of Punjab. They revived the Rajput tradition of self-immolation when their menfolk were no longer able to defend them. They also followed Mr. Gandhi's advice to Indian women that in certain circumstances even suicide was morally preferable to submission.
>
> (Cited in Urvashi Butalia, "Community, State and Gender: On Women's Agency during Partition," *Economic and Political Weekly* 28:17 (1993), WS-16)

5 "Devi" is not the author's last name. It reflects a Hindu-Bengali social convention of referring to upper-caste women as "Devi" meaning "goddess." Although the practice is now outdated, women writers from the past few generations, most of whom were from the upper castes, are habitually referred to using "Devi": "Swarnakumari Devi," "Anurupa Devi," "Radharani Devi," "Ashapurna Devi," "Mahasweta Devi," etc. Since "Devi" fails to actually distinguish between writers, I use "Jyotirmoyee Devi" throughout this chapter.
6 Jyotirmoyee Devi, "*Epar Ganga Opar Ganga*," in *Bhed Bibhed* (*Differences and Divisions*), ed. Manabendra Bandyopadhyay (Calcutta: Dey's Publishing, 1992). The title literally means "this bank of the Ganges and that." The story is translated as "The Return" in Bashabi Fraser ed., *Bengal Partition Stories* (London: Anthem, 2007). I have used my own translation. Page numbers refer to the Bengali text in *Bhed Bibhed*. As the title of the story I use "The Search." I find it evocative of Sudam's many searches – for his beloved wife, Durga, his lost home, his lost past, and even his rapidly disintegrating self. I thank Sulagna Banerjee for suggesting the title.
7 Jyotirmoyee Devi, "*Epar Ganga Opar Ganga*," 48.
8 Ibid., 49–50.
9 Urvashi Butalia notes how in contrast to the silence around "abducted" and violated women, "chivalrous women, for example those who had committed mass suicides in order to save themselves from being converted to the 'other' religion, were the subject of much discussion. In remembrance services, in gurudwaras they were honoured and their shahidi (martyrdom) valorized." Urvashi Butalia, "Muslims and Hindus, Men and Women," in Tanika Sarkar and Urvashi Butalia, eds. *Women and the Hindu Right: A Collection of Essays* (New Delhi: Kali for Women, 1995), 62.

10 Rajinder Singh Bedi, "Lajwanti," translated by the author in *India Partitioned: The Other Face of Freedom* v. 1, ed. Mushirul Hasan (Delhi: Roli Books, 1997), 183.

11 Jyotirmoyee Devi, *Epar Ganga Opar Ganga*, in *Jyotirmoyee Debir Racana-Sankalan* v. 1, eds. Subir Roy Chowdhury and Abhijit Sen (Calcutta: Dey's Publishing and School of Women's Studies, Jadavpur University, 1991). All page numbers refer to this text. Initially titled *Itihashe Stree Parva*, this novel was first published in the autumnal issue of the journal *Prabashi* in 1966; it was published in book form under its present name in March 1968 ("My Words," 127). The novel has been translated into English as *The River Churning* by Enakshi Chatterjee (New Delhi: Kali for Women, 1995). All translations from the novel are my own.

12 On December 7, 1947 in speech at a prayer meeting Gandhi called for the reintegration of women within the family fold with:

> It is being said that the families of the abducted women no longer want to receive them back. It would be a barbarian husband or a barbarian parent who would say that he would not take back his wife or daughter. I do not think the women concerned had done anything wrong. They had been subjected to violence. To put a blot on them and to say that they are no longer fit to be accepted in society is unjust.
>
> (*CWMG* v. 98, 9)

He raised the issue again later that month, and in January 1948, the Prime Minister of India, Jawaharlal Nehru also made a similar plea:

> I am told that there is an unwillingness on the part of their relatives to accept those girls and women [who have been abducted] back in their homes. This is a most objectionable and wrong attitude to take and any social custom that supports this attitude must be condemned. These girls and women require our tender and loving care and their relatives should be proud to take them back and give them every help.
>
> (Jawaharlal Nehru, *Hindustan Times*, January 17, 1948, cited in Ritu Menon and Kamla Bhasin, *Borders and Boundaries*: Women in India's Partition. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1998, 99)

13 Menon and Bhasin, *Borders and Boundaries*; Menon and Bhasin, "Recovery, Rupture, Resistance: Indian State and the Abduction of Women during Partition," *Economic and Political Weekly* 28:17 (1993): WS2–11. Urvashi Butalia, "Community, State and Gender: On Women's Agency during Partition," *Economic and Political Weekly* 28:17 (1993): WS12–24; and The Other Side of Silence: Voices from the Partition of India (Delhi: Viking, 1998). Veena Das, "National Honour and Practical Kinship," in *Critical Events* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1995).

14 See Sibaji Bandyopadhyay, "Producing and Re-producing the New Women," *Social Scientist*, 22:1–2 (January–February, 1994), 19–39; Sumanta Banerjee, *The Parlour and the Street* (Calcutta: Seagull, 1989); Uma Chakravarti, "Whatever Happened to the Vedic Dasi? Orientalism, Nationalism and a Script for the Past," in *Recasting Women: Essays in Colonial History*, eds. Kumkum Sangari and Sudesh Vaid (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1989), 27–87; Partha Chatterjee, *The Nation and its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993); Tanika Sarkar, *Hindu Wife, Hindu Nation: Community Religion and Cultural Nationalism* (New Delhi: Permanent Black, 2001).

15 See Indira Chowdhury, *The Frail Hero and Virile History: Gender and the Politics of Culture in Colonial Bengal* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1998); Ashis Nandy, *The Intimate Enemy: Loss and Recovery of Self under Colonialism* (Delhi: Oxford, 1983); Sarkar, *Hindu Wife, Hindu Nation*; and Mrinalini Sinha, *Colonial Masculinity: The "Manly Englishman" and the "Effeminate Bengali" in the Nate nineteenth Century* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995).

16 As the passage from Gandhi cited earlier illustrates, during the communal violence surrounding Partition, Hindu and Sikh women sometimes committed suicide or were murdered by male kin, and these acts – designed to thwart the rival community's (Muslim) aim to dishonor the nation by violating its women – were lauded as self-sacrifice by the woman's community.

17 Sangeeta Ray, *En-Gendering India* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2000), 135–36.

18 Hyunah Yang, "Re-Membering the Korean Military Comfort Women: Nationalism, Sexuality, and Silencing," in *Dangerous Women: Gender and Korean Nationalism*, eds. Elaine H. Kim and Chungmoo Choi (New York: Routledge, 1998), 132.

19 In her ethnographic work on the rape of Bosnian women by Serbian soldiers in 1993, Slavenka Draculic notes women's reluctance to engage with issues of sexual violence:

> Finally I have to ask if they have heard of mass rapes. If they saw any. There is a silence, even among the children, as if that horrible word renders them speechless … Then I get a kind of unison answer: there were no raped women in our village. We were just lucky I guess, says one of the women. But yes, we heard it happened in other villages, adds Smail cautiously, he's the oldest man in the room.

and that "A woman whose family knows she was raped told me none of them ever mentioned it. I asked if women talk among themselves. No, she said, they prefer to go through it alone." Slavenka Draculic, "The Rape of Women in Bosnia," in *Women and Violence*, ed. Miranda Davis (London: Zed Books, 1994), 177–78. But as in the case of the Korean Comfort women, the Bosnian women subjected to violence remain embedded within their families and communities.

20 Bharata is the Sanskrit name for India.

21 This phrase is attributed to Sardar Patel. Cited in Aijaz Ahmad's *Lineages of the Present: Ideology and Politics in Contemporary South Asia* (London: Verso, 2000), 3.

22 Madhu Dandavate, "Social Roots of Gender Justice," *The Modern Rationalist* 27:2 (February 2002), http://www.themronline.com/200202m3.html.

23 *Epar Ganga Opar Ganga* is among the few literary works that attend to the riots in Noakhali.

24 Jyotirmoyee Devi, "Dedication," *Epar Ganga Opra Ganga*, n. p.

25 See Jill Didur, *Unsettling Partition: Literature, Gender, Memory* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2006).

26 Joan Kelly, *Women, History, and Theory* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 1.

27 Jyotirmoyee Devi's short story "*Shei Chheleta*" ("That Little Boy") was first published in 1961 in *Prabasi* (*Prabasi, Bhadra* 1368 BS), and reprinted in *Jyotirmoyee Debir Racana-Sankalan* v. 2, ed. Gourkishore Ghosh (Calcutta: Dey's Publishing and School of Women's Studies, Jadavpur University, 1994).

28 Ray, *En-Gendering India*, 135.

29 Veena Das, "The Act of Witnessing: Violence, Poisonous Knowledge and Subjectivity," in *Violence and Subjectivity*, eds. Veena Das et al. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 220.

30 Ibid.

31 Jyotirmoyee Devi, *Epar Ganga Opra Ganga*, 97.

32 Shauna Singh Baldwin, *What the Body Remembers* (New York: Nan A. Talese, 1999).
33 C.M. Naim, *Ambiguities of Heritage* (Karachi: City Press, 1999), 176.
34 Ibid., 175–76.
35 Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?" in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture,* eds. Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988).
36 Andrew Parker, Mary Russo, Doris Sommer, and Patricia Yaeger, "Introduction," in *Nationalisms and Sexualities*, eds. Andrew Parker et al. (New York: Routledge, 1992), 5.
37 Nira Yuval-Davis and Floya Anthias, "Introduction," in *Woman-Nation-State*, eds. Yuval-Davis and Anthias (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1989), 11.
38 Jyotirmoyee Devi, *Epar Ganga Opar Ganga*, 243–44.
39 Yuval-Davis and Anthias, "Introduction," *Woman-Nation-State*, 7.
40 Jyotirmoyee Devi, *Epar Ganga Opar Ganga*, 135–36.
41 Jashodhara Bachi, "Freedom in an Idiom of Loss," in Jashodhara Bagchi and Subhoranjan Dasgupta, eds., *The Trauma and the Triumph: Gender and Partition in Eastern India* v. 1 (Calcutta: Stree, 2003), 20.
42 Jyotirmoyee Devi, *Epar Ganga Opar Ganga*, 137.
43 Is it possible that because Sutara was destined to re-enter the space of elite domesticity that Jyotirmoyee Devi chose to maintain its "sanctity"? And was her allegiance to that space responsible for withholding details of the attack on Sutara's body? Or, was it anxiety about her readership? Any of these contentions would diminish the potentials of her indisputably radical critique of patriarchy, and I feel are less valid since she was a fairly established writer at the time the novel was published.
44 Hortense Spillers, "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe: An American Grammar Book," *Diacritics* 17:2 (Summer 1987), 67.
45 Das, *Critical Events*, 55–83.
46 Jyotirmoyee Devi, *Epar Ganga Opar Ganga*, 249.
47 Ibid., 253.
48 Rajinder Singh Bedi, "Lajwanti," translated by the author in *India Partitioned: The Other Face of Freedom*.
49 Bedi, "Lajwanti", 183.
50 Ibid., 188.
51 Ibid., 190.
52 Ibid.
53 Ibid.
54 Ibid., 191.
55 Ibid.
56 A member of the Parliament, for instance, speaking in support of the "Recovery Mission" said, "we all know our own history, of what happened at the time of Shri Ram when Sita was abducted. Here, where thousands of girls are concerned, we cannot forget this. We can forget all the properties, we can forget every other thing but this cannot be forgotten. … As descendants of Ram we have to bring back every Sita that is alive." Cited in Urvashi Butalia, "Muslims and Hindus, Men and Women," in *Women and the Hindu Right*, 72. Elsewhere Butalia writes that, "we were told in one of our interviews that stories were published which openly accepted that Sita had sexual congress with Ravana, despite which she remained pure," "Community, State and Gender: On Women's Agency during Partition," p. WS18. Gandhi also borrows from the ancient Sanskrit epics especially using stories of Sita and Draupadi to speak on women and chastity. For a discussion on Gandhi's views on chastity and violence, see my essay "To be *pure* or not to *be*: Gandhi, women, and the Partition of India," *Feminist Review* 94 (2010).
57 Jyotirmoyee Devi, *Epar Ganga Opar Ganga*, 177.
58 Ibid.

2 Midnight's children

Inhabiting the postcolonial landscape

This chapter grows out of the discussion opened up in the previous one addressing the predicament of women subjected to Partition's violence, but it proceeds to excavate how the situation is altered by the presence of a child. It studies how the birth of a child, resulting from intimate violence, diminished its Hindu or Sikh mother's chances of finding acceptance within her original family and community. The chapter then moves to a discussion on how for Muslim fathers migrating to Pakistan, the birth of the child serves to alleviate an ontological crisis, a crisis of belonging. Unlike the former set, these children are not born of sectarian violence, but in wedlock, in other words, their paternity is never a source of unease; and their birth is attended with joy. The children in both sections are typically silent and matter only as symbols. (*All* of the children in the narratives examined in this chapter are male, and the gender neutral "child" is a shorthand for "son.")

The first section, "Mothers and sons," examines the child as a symbol of shame. Through a study of short fiction in Bengali, English, and Malayalam, focusing on both Bengal and Punjab, this section examines a range of literary inquiries into the mother and child's homelessness in the postcolonial landscape. Collectively, the narratives map a mosaic of responses to a single contingency – that of a Hindu or Sikh woman bearing the child of her Muslim abductor. Through the evidence offered in literature, this section explores the mother's limited choices. It addresses how the homelessness of these last children of empire symbolizes the failed project of secular nationalism, and how the inability to find a home forms a recurring trope of South Asian modernity. The second section, "Fathers and sons," considers the birth of a child as an anchor for his Bengali Muslim migrant parents' hopes for belonging in the new homeland. The child marks a new beginning for a hopeful set of migrants looking to settle in the new-born country, yet unsure of their place in it. The discussion in the two sections is entrenched within categories of homeland and nationhood (both of which were literally and figuratively reshaped by the Partition), and it explores questions that, curiously, are nationally bounded: thus the narratives included in the section "Mothers and sons" are composed by writers from India and the Indian diaspora, while those in "Fathers and sons" are exclusively from East Pakistan/Bangladesh. This partitioning of the

literary domain, which appears to reflect a hijacking of the literary by the social-historical, must be thematized in any examination of these questions.

Mothers and sons

The dilemmas of women subjected to forced intimacy and the placelessness of the children produced by the violence surrounding the Partition have been excavated in narratives about Hindu and Sikh communities. Children of Muslim fathers, fathers who after the Partition were citizens of Pakistan, and Hindu or Sikh mothers repatriated to India, their presence frequently raised questions regarding their communal belonging. And given the uneasy alignment between religion and nationality at this political and historical juncture, the children's citizenship was subject to dispute. Attempting to resolve these matters, Mahatma Gandhi in his speech of December 26, 1947 had a liberal view:

> I do not want that a single Hindu or Sikh should take up the attitude that if a girl has been abducted by a Muslim she is no longer acceptable to society. If my daughter had been violated by a rascal and made pregnant, must I cast her and her child away? Nor can I take the position that the child so born is Muslim by faith. Its faith can only be the faith of the mother who bore it. After the child grows up he or she will be free to take up any religion.[1]

Gandhi's view that a child could have an identity without a father defies tradition and is clearly quite radical. He leaves room for the articulation of adult individualism, but for the minor child, he makes the Hindu/Sikh mother the determining parent for his/her religious and national belonging. But could such complex questions be so easily settled? Jyoti, in Lalithambika Antherjanam's Malayalam story "*Kodumkattilpetta Orila*" ("A Leaf in the Whirlwind"), a woman who was subjected to intimate violence, responds to the Gandhian position with skepticism:

> An important and well-known visitor came to the camp. He had been sent with a message from the Mahatma. He spoke to the people … and told them that young men must be prepared to accept the victims of rape as their mothers, sisters, or even as their wives. … "The children they bear are the citizens of Bharat – the new citizens of a free Bharat".
>
> Jyoti's face turned the color of flaming coal. What a contradiction this was! How could such children be citizens of Bharat alone, of Bharat as it was today? They would grow up and their tender minds would begin to grasp the truth. They would learn that the blood in their veins had spurted from hate and not from love. Would not a fierce desire for revenge take hold of them, then, and would they not shatter the country's frontiers to achieve their revenge?[2]

Gandhi's attempt to solve the problem of the children's homelessness by asserting that they shared their mothers' religion and, thereby, find both mother and child a place within Hindu/Sikh families and communities appears facile in the face of questions Jyoti raises. Her response indicates that Gandhi's solution may prove unstable. It is viable as long as the children are little and unaware of the circumstances of their birth. She speculates that once the children recognize their societal (even national) in-between-ness or indeterminacy, their crisis of belonging could lead to political crisis.

Insofar as the issue of social rehabilitation of the mother and the child was concerned politics was inadequate. In fact, political discourse failed to address seriously what was to be done, but literature did not shy away from the severity of the issue. Thus, while the political discourse could not, or did not want to, imagine the dilemma that these women and their children confronted, it is this unspeakability that the narratives evocatively apprehended. By an ironic undermining of the political debate, writers mediated a moral recognition of these private agonies of the Partition. The vignettes below examine different ways that women dealt with the crisis, and the many faces of motherhood. Since the narratives focus on repatriated women, the fathers of the children are mostly absent from the narratives; the only exception is Ramapada Chaudhuri's story "*Karunkanya*" or "Daughter of Sorrow," in which the abductor-husband appears briefly at the end of the story.

The disgraced mother

Ramapada Chaudhuri's "*Angapali*," published in 1949,[3] opens in eastern Bengal. During the riots of 1946, Savita's home is attacked and she is abducted. About a year-and-half later when she is recovered by the police and restored to her family she brings with her, her eight-month-old son. The reception is less than lukewarm. The presence of the child, resulting from Savita's abduction serves to deepen her mother's silence already caused by the loss of Savita's father and older brother. The tension caused by Savita's arrival is partially resolved when her mother finally hugs the child, and holds him for the rest of the day. Savita, aware of her mother's observance of ritual purity, feels an overwhelming sense of relief, but her happiness is short lived. The story's title, "*Angapali*" (*lit*. "Body-Guard") or "Protector," is deliberately ambiguous, referring both to Savita as her son's protector as well as to her mother as guarding the purity of her own body and domestic life.

Savita returns to what remains of her family (her mother and two siblings) bearing the evidence of her attack, the child of a Muslim man. Contrary to Gandhi's view that the minor takes the mother's religion, the practice was the opposite. Thus, in this Hindu household, Savita's child is considered Muslim. Since she hopes to resuscitate her relations with her family, she is reluctant to respond to questions even vaguely connected to her "other" life, for instance, when her sister Kavita asks the baby's name: "No name. Savita replied in a dry voice."[4] In case Savita's voice and reply to the question are insufficient

indications, the narrator adds that the child has a name that cannot be disclosed.[5] It is a Muslim name. Whereas, under normal circumstances, a baby embodies hope for the future, for Savita's family, this baby represents past violence, death, and dishonor. Thus Savita's younger sister Kavita's choice of name for her baby nephew, "Khushi" – meaning happiness, delight, joy – is laden with irony. This new male in the family, moreover, can never replace Savita's father and older brother since he is considered Muslim and hence, an outsider. The rejection of Savita's child and metonymically of her is poignantly evoked at the end of the story when Savita overhears her mother explaining to Savita's younger brother Boku that the reason she took a late-night-bath despite her poor health was that she held the child, adding, "She may be rearing him but he's not *our* child after all"[6] (emphasis mine). In other words, not a Hindu child! Savita's mother regards her contact with her grandson as polluting and cleanses her body to recuperate her "purity." For her, washing her body aware that she is risking her frail health is a form of penance – the performance of self-mortification for her "transgression" of touching a Muslim. Contact with Savita would perhaps also evoke a similar response since she gave birth to "their" child, and belongs with "them." The mother and daughter, in fact, avoid physical contact throughout. Savita's mother even rhetorically distances herself from her daughter through the use of the third person pronoun when speaking to Boku – "*She* may be rearing him" (emphasis mine) – and seems to refuse involvement in the rearing of the child. For Savita's mother, the daughter's return, and more importantly, the appearance of her grandchild, have shamed her socially. Savita's longing to revive "normal" relations with her family is thwarted by her mother's implicit rejection of her child. There is no place in the narrative of the joy of being reunited with a missing family member. Even Savita's contact with her sister Kavita is tentative at best, a contact Savita initiates: when purporting to hug her son Khushi she also encircles Kavita (who is dandling Khushi) in her arms. Savita's abduction was, in a sense, a metaphorical death. Her family would rather believe that it was literally the case, thus, Boku's statement "We thought you were dead"[7] elicits from Savita the reply, "That would've been better, wouldn't it?"[8] Dead or alive, there is no longer a place for her in the family, as she describes to police who comes to "rescue" her, she is an "untouchable."

There are two moments of violence in the story. The first, coming towards the beginning of the narrative, presents evocatively the attack on Savita's family, and her abduction. It is about the infliction of physical violence:

> Fire had suddenly blazed everywhere tearing apart the dark skies. And screams. The cacophony of the bloodthirsty and the shrieks of the helpless floated in the breeze and filled the skies. Savita had woken up in the middle of the night. And fear took over her just-awakened eyes. On the faces of her parents and her brothers and sister, she saw panicked bewilderment. With faces pale like color-worn sheets they waited. Waited, waited. Then. With feral eyes and ghostly bodies they approached. Those

> shadow-dark humans. Outside there was darkness and inky rain, but over the rhythm of the falling rain rose the angry howls of the blood-intoxicated. They approached. Some held flaming torches, some had knives. Then something happened. Savita couldn't recollect too well. Perhaps she had lost consciousness. Lifting mute, naïve eyes she looked on helplessly. Blood and blood.[9]

The second comes at the end with Savita's mother's quiet rejection of her grandson. Laconic as her reply is, and delivered without histrionics, it is charged with immense cruelty. It is particularly poignant because, for Savita, inserted between the two moments of her removal from and restoration to her family is a fleeting moment of joy at the prospect of her approaching motherhood. Her child bears the promise of future happiness:

> And then one day, she suddenly discovered that her body was filling up with the gentle felicity of motherhood. There was a beatific tiredness in her eyes. Unwanted, unasked-for, it may be. A child not conceived with love and affection, but instead, in venom and vengeance. Nonetheless. Savita forgave it all. A child created of her own flesh and blood, she nursed him lovingly. She started to dream.[10]

Savita's mother's insensitivity shames her motherhood, her only source of joy.

The reluctant mother

Narendranath Mitra's "*Jaiba*"[11] ("*Biological*"), published in 1948, centers around a couple, Sudatta and Mriganka Majumdar. Their story is nested within a frame narrative in which the Majumdars' friend and family doctor, Dr. Mukherjee, reacting to Mriganka's radio-talk on eugenics, shares their story with the anonymous narrator and his wife Karobi. While visiting relatives in Lahore, Sudatta is abducted during the communal riots. When she is restored to her husband a few months later, she is an expectant mother. The distraught Sudatta wants to abort the fetus; but given her advanced stage, Dr. Mukherjee refuses to put her life at risk. At her insistence, Mriganka agrees to give the baby away, but, after he is born, Mriganka reverses the decision and brings the newborn home. A year later, Sudatta approaches Dr. Mukherjee again, this time she wants to abort her husband's baby. She tells him that since the birth of her son, Bishu, Mriganka has developed an interest in genetics and treats Bishu as a subject in an experiment. Reluctant to provide him with another test-subject, Sudatta wishes to terminate her pregnancy.

The story uncovers the double layers of violence: The first, Sudatta's violation during the riots, is corporal and clearly defined. The second, Mriganka's conduct towards Bishu (and herself), is psychological, the violence subtle, invisible. (Here we encounter a binary incorporated into the Bengali narrative

that in other ways divides representations of violence in writings on the Punjab and Bengal partitions.) In Lahore (Punjab), Sudatta is abducted, and her body "sullied"; in Calcutta (Bengal), her husband's insidious abuse strips her of her dignity, less crude perhaps, but no less painful a "dishonoring." The latter is "insidious" because, despite Sudatta's psychological torment, there is no violence "to see." On the surface, Mriganka can hardly be faulted. He appears a loving husband, one who goes so far as to rear the child born of his wife's violation. But the comfortable life he arranges for Bishu is actually part of creating the right experimental conditions for his inquiries into heredity and the environment. To Mriganka, Bishu is merely an object of scientific (and sociological) curiosity. The affection he showers on the child is strictly calibrated by a scientist's alert (but detached) eyes. He is always equipped with his notebook and pen. His routine checks on Bishu, "three or four times daily,"[12] read like a medical prescription. They have less to do with fatherly affection than they have with a scientist's disciplined observations. Bishu is no more than the other laboratory animals Mriganka keeps, except he is not kept locked in cage. To protect Bishu from Mriganka's clinical gaze, Sudatta, the baby's only known biological parent, hopes to send him away, but Mriganka disallows it: "Who parts with one's own things?"[13] Bishu is Mriganka's "thing." It is the thingification, the de-humanization, of her son (and future children) that Sudatta resists.

Not only Bishu, but Sudatta too is trapped. Mriganka's preoccupation with the child's genetic make-up, of interest because of his paternity, perpetuates the memory of her rape-trauma. Mriganka's conduct re-enacts the violation she experienced earlier, but on an emotional plane, wounding her psychologically. The difference is that this time round, there is no escape for her, no "recovery." She is locked in the marriage. With no parents and no employment, there is nowhere for her to seek refuge. Sudatta's distress at having her dignity hijacked comes out clearly in her question to Mukherjee, "Isn't a scientist's wife also a human being? Is she a guinea pig or a rat?"[14] Sudatta equates her status with the animals in Mriganka's laboratory, but it is actually worse: she is a machine, a baby-machine, a supplier of test subjects.

The Mriganka–Sudatta story is split into two segments, separated by the event of the child's birth. Prior to the birth, Mriganka seems compassionate and understanding, solicitous of his wife's health and emotional wellbeing, consolatory when she is disappointed by the doctor's advice. But after Bishu's birth, a new and unsavory man emerges. He dismisses Sudatta's objection to bringing the child home, and later, even constrains her efforts to make decisions for the benefit of her son. The story's climax is when, at the hospital, Mriganka momentarily catches Sudatta gazing upon her new-born son with maternal tenderness. For Mriganka, it is a moment of betrayal, because her doting gaze conveys a silent acceptance of the act of forced intimacy. In her eyes, "there was no loathing, no fury, no sign of uneasiness or inner turmoil" and instead, she appears "deeply contented, serene,"[15] even, beautiful. This troubles him. When Sudatta condemns the rape and demands that the fetus be

aborted, which for her constitutes her rejection of her rape, he appreciates it. When the couple approach Dr. Mukherjee before Bishu's birth and she tells him agitatedly, "Every second I'm being scorched to death. My body continually roils with disgust, I feel nauseated. … I can't take it anymore, I just can't. Save me, I beg you. Please rescue me from this uncleanness,"[16] Mriganka is sensitive to her agony. To him, her rage is proof-positive of her allegiance *to him*. But in her budding love for the offspring of her rape, she is no longer "his." Prior to Bishu's birth, Mriganka exploits Sudatta's self-reproach and her fear of societal shaming to keep her in her place, but when she abandons both, momentarily, in favor of Bishu, he retaliates with cruelty. He cannot forget that she, his "thing," was "taken" by another man. His investment in the issue of Bishu's paternity thus reveals itself for what it is, and he refuses to allow Sudatta to forget it. (This is why he disregards her renewed pleas to leave Bishu with the nurses at the hospital, as previously arranged with Dr. Mukherjee, and brings the baby home.) Her decision to abort her husband's offspring is her desperate attempt to wrest that control back.[17] That Sudatta's demeanor when she meets Dr. Mukherjee with a request to abort the second fetus – her frenzied look, her revulsion – resembles the earlier time, puts her abductor and her husband on par: both have violated her, one her body and the other, her mind.

The relenting mother

Also published in 1948, the plot of "*Kodumkattilpetta Orila*" ("A Leaf in the Whirlwind") by Lalithambika Antherjanam revolves around Jyotirmayi Devpal. An educated Sikh woman from western Punjab, she rejects purdah and youthful marriage in favor of nationalist activism. During the Partition riots, Jyoti is abducted, and later, she is brought to a refugee camp in India, an expecting mother. There, she contemplates suicide and by turns considers aborting the fetus, infanticide, and abandonment. But, ultimately, maternal love prevails.

Telling the life-stories of the refugees at the camp, Antherjanam's narrative captures women's experience of displacement, loss, and violence. Independence of the country is contrasted with the subjugation of women both through the violence already performed on them, as well as the state's assertion of authority in re-configuring their citizenship and belonging in the present. At the beginning of the story, India and Pakistan trade abductees, supposedly, to bring them relief by restoring them to their respective homelands. But paradoxically, the recurrence of words like "tomb," "prison," and "bundled" suggests not their rescue but their lack of freedom, no matter where they are, no matter on which side of the new border they stand. "The exchange" says the narrator, "was effected at the frontier. Bundled shapelessly in black, the women glided from one side to the other like ghosts. … [Jyoti] held back and asked, 'Are you taking us from one prison to another?'"[18]

As a young, single, nationalist activist, the nation is the object of Jyoti's deepest, almost worshipful, attachment. Even after her ordeal she carries it so

far as to regard her unborn child as a "seed of destruction"[19]; destruction of national wellbeing. This attitude sits uneasily with her experience. This child is a potential threat because of who his father is – a Muslim man; and what the father represents – Pakistan, Partition. (When she is alerted to the possibility of personal harm, she loftily declares, "'I trust my brothers!'"[20] She refrains from explaining further whether she trusts them not to harm her, or expects them to protect her. This ambiguity, however, adumbrates a sweeping condemnation of the national fraternity – Hindu, Sikh, and Muslim – for betraying women's trust.) Taking borders to a literal level, the narrator suggests a curious reason for the resentment towards the children born from these violent encounters: their foreignness, an intimate foreignness capable of patrilineal yet biological transmission. Finding in the washroom the unclaimed body of a strangled newborn, Jyoti notes its light skin tone "like the border people"[21] and its "copper colored"[22] hair, that is, its phenotypical differences. This supposition of alienness leads her to question the possibility of the children's social absorption urged by Gandhi.

The act of violation alters Jyoti's perception of the body so that, although she had earlier refused purdah, she now withdraws from public view and refuses to show her face. Her pregnant condition is a source of shame, one that she only gradually overcomes by nursing her child. Jyoti develops from a victim reacting to a past she cannot change, to an adult deliberately assuming responsibility for the future, her newborn son. The first step in the process is to acknowledge the child as a human being and not just a memento of violence. Whereas at first, Jyoti distances herself from her baby, and views him almost as "non-human," both being simultaneously articulated in the narrator's recurring use of the pronoun "it," by the end she "gather[s] her son in her arms and hug[s] him."[23] In this act, she refuses to allow the assault to define either her or her child. The narrative resolution comes only with her owning up to her past. The acceptance of her child marks the recognition of the impossibility of her earlier nationalist commitment.

The decisive mother

Published in 1961, Jyotirmoyee Devi's Bengali short story "*Shei Chheleta*"[24] ("That Little Boy") is set in mid-1950s Delhi, though its plot is actuated by the communal violence preceding Partition in Lahore during 1946–47. When under police protection the little girl Raj (or Rajkumari) and her family evacuate from the city during the riots, her mother is accidentally left behind. On arrival at Khasa near Amritsar – a "safe" place with Hindus and Sikhs in majority – the family conducts a desperate, but futile, search for the missing wife and mother. Eventually, they assume from reports of suicides, arson, and communal violence, that the deserted woman has been killed in the riots. That is, they conclude – notwithstanding reports of abduction and/or rape – that she died "honorably." Several years later, returning from work one evening, Raj – now living in the refugee colonies in Delhi – meets a beggar on Delhi's

streets. It is her mother, and she is accompanied by an unfamiliar little boy. She approaches Raj and her friends Baruna and Sujata for alms. At that moment, her mother recognizes her. But Raj – the "correctly" born daughter – at first bewildered at the beggar's questioning, later shrinks from the embarrassed realization that her mother, who she has told her friends is dead, is alive, and was raped in the communal violence. Deliberately withholding recognition, Raj returns home, but the memory of the Lahore riots haunts her, reignited by her meeting with her abandoned, destitute mother. The presence of the little boy, the "wrong" child, however, makes it difficult for her to accept the truth. Raj decides to confront the beggar woman the following day to clarify her suspicions. But for all her searches (and later Baruna's too) in the beggar-haunts of Delhi over the next several weeks, the mother and child are nowhere to be found.

Whether by suicide or murder, the only contingency imaginable for Raj's family is her mother's death, deliberately closing off the other, "less respectable" and sinister possibility, her abduction and rape. While the memory of a mother, whom for several years Raj considered dead, brings tears to her eyes, the moment of meeting her, the moment when the beggar woman's identity dawns on her, is saturated with anxiety and shame. The mother's alternative life is too much for Raj to contemplate, and the fact that she is alive more unbearable than the previous assumption of her death. She is caught in an emotional impasse: while she realizes that her mother is alive and that she has a half-brother conceived in violence, she also desperately wants to believe that she is mistaken.

Jyotirmoyee Devi's prose – the use of short, crisp sentences, mostly unsentimental (except in the third section where she recounts the family's retreat from Lahore), her spare description, short paragraphs and, hence, frequent breaks – intensifies the feel of the sad, broken lives she narrates.

> [Raj] lay wide awake. The vision of the beggar woman returned to her – clad in a dirty salwar kameez with a ripped chunni covering her head, a face pleading and weary, holding by the hand a boy, small and skinny like a beggar. How long had she been begging? How long did it take her to perfect the beggar-speak and that ingratiating smile?
>
> Why did she take to begging? … Mother had her parents. And brothers and sisters too. She had her in-laws on this side. Why didn't she look for them? At least, she knew where her parents were settled. Her childhood home was in Ludhiana, she came from a well-known family there.
>
> Raj couldn't think of all the "why"s. It was all too complicated … She felt she should say something about it to her father, or to her uncles. But what if they ask why she hadn't mentioned it before? What would she say? That she had not been able to recognize her properly! Or, … or what?
>
> She remembered the little boy. What could she have said about him? Whose child was he? Mother's? Could Mother have come? Then why did she hide? Perhaps the woman was not her mother after all? … Yes, that

> was a possibility. A feeling of relief surged through her. The disquiet was fading. But from the deepest reaches of her mind, a thin, dark, beggar woman with sad eyes, ill-clad, holding the hand of a small boy, gazed steadily at her, near the bushes of Queen's Park.
>
> Her mother. And that little boy who wasn't her brother.[25]

The mother's repudiation, embodied in Raj's refusal to recognize her, is tacitly encouraged by the community, in the figure of Raj's friend, Baruna. The latter believes Raj's story that the beggar woman they had met was her mother, and she commiserates with Raj's loss. But when the discussion shifts to the child, Baruna, like Raj, recoils from acknowledging the existence of another sexual life for a Mother. When the child's paternity becomes suspect, her initial compassion – "Why didn't you say so right away? You could have taken her home"[26] – is displaced, not by a cautionary qualification but by outright denial, "Maybe you were not able to recognize her properly, Raj. That was not your mother."[27] Baruna's silences, together with her insistence that Raj must be mistaken, force the victimized mother into a "discreet disappearance."[28] For the survival of the community's myth of its own purity it becomes almost imperative to isolate, even negate, the raped woman. Raj's mother's withdrawal from her daughter's presence is itself occasioned both by the pain of her daughter's non-recognition and by her own intense feeling of shame resulting from a profound internalization of the patriarchal imperative of chastity. This is why, despite Raj and Baruna's searches, the mother–son duo are never seen again. They have self-displaced.

Women confronted with circumstances similar to those of Raj's mother, and hoping to return their families, had some difficult choices before them. First, they could leave the child in state-sponsored orphanages built to house abandoned children, or second, they could get medically "cleansed." (The Indian state, aware of the social contempt women with children born from the abductions were likely to encounter, not only sponsored orphanages to house these children, but also clandestinely organized mass abortions, something contrary to its own law.) But Raj's mother keeps her child. For this, she exchanges all hope of returning to her family.[29] She makes the "dangerous" choice. She refuses to relinquish her child, and opts, instead, for a beggar's life with her son over returning to her affluent parents or her affines. In so doing, she rejects patriarchal management of her sexuality whether by family, community, or the state. The child, the living evidence of the mother's extra-marital sexuality, shatters cultural templates of virtuous womanhood (fundamental to which are monogamy, endogamy, and chastity). This renders impossible her re-absorption in her former family/community, as the child is itself an abiding proof of the failed manhood of her community. The child fathered by the Rival is testimony to their virility and thus a reminder of the national humiliation.

The conscious omission of the mother's name is intriguing – the narrator refers to her throughout as "Raj's mother." On the one hand, the

identification of women by the names of their children is common in South Asia and embeds women in the familial to the point of refusing to acknowledge their individuality. On the other, the absence of a name also suggests that Raj's mother's condition is nondescript. By remaining nameless she symbolizes the abundant casualties of the intimate violence associated with Partition. But, most importantly, the repeated use of "mother" ("Raj's mother") emphasizes the woman's biological destiny – her ability and fate to bear children and her attachment to her defenseless young son – an attachment that transforms her life so profoundly. Her motherhood constitutes her source of selfhood.

The daring mother

Ramapada Chaudhuri's "*Karunkanya*,"[30] published in 1952, continues the exploration of the crisis opened up in "*Angapali*," examining, in this case, how the anguish inflicted at home drives one woman to the red-light area and another to return to the man who violated her. "*Karunkanya*," meaning "daughter of sorrow," begins with the riots of 1946 in eastern Bengal. An unmarried young Hindu woman, Arundhati, is abducted while fleeing from the violence and returns, five years later, with a child fathered by a Muslim man, to a truncated family (her father was killed in the riots) and to the contempt of neighbors. While Arundhati resists being shamed by prying neighbors, she conceals her recent past and her child from Subimal, her childhood love, whom she meets again several years after the riots. For his part, Subimal repeatedly evades her questions regarding his sister and Arundhati's childhood friend – Madhuri. Finally, he tells her that Madhuri was abducted and returned "spoiled," and that his family married her off without disclosing her past. However, Madhuri revealed her experience to her husband, whereupon he deserted her. At this point, unable to withstand her family's censure, Madhuri opted for the red-light district. Arundhati realizes that Subimal would react to her past with similar disdain. Aware also of her mother's unease regarding her child, in the end, she chooses to leave her family and return, with the child, to her abductor (and husband of three years).

Madhuri and Arundhati's stories reveal the hard choices women faced. Madhuri's story provides an alternative ending to that of Lajwanti, discussed in the previous chapter. Like the latter, Madhuri returns without any visible signs of violence, but unlike Lajwanti, who must stifle her sufferings in the interest of domestic security, Madhuri refuses to suppress her trauma. But her admission of violation, of being "spoiled," shatters her marriage. For Arundhati, the child is the source of her troubles: Offering a "respectable" solution, Arundhati's mother requests her to send her child to an orphanage. When Arundhati rejects this, her mother suggests that she don the garb of a widow so that the family may keep the child and still live honourably in the new neighbourhood. Thus they can disown the rape and claim legitimacy for the child. But Arundhati refuses this "solution" as well. (Given the stigma against widowhood in upper-caste Hindu society, Arundhati's dressing like a widow would

terminate any future prospects of marriage.) In the end no better solution presents itself apart from returning to the father of the child because the very presence of the child wrecks Arundhati's prospects of marriage. Her hopes of escaping from her family and neighbourhood by marrying Subimal are dashed by his illiberal views and his tacit support for his mother and brother's intolerance towards Madhuri. Unaware of Arundhati's recent past, Subimal tells her: "'The mind is subordinate to the body, if the body is tainted …'."[31] He does not finish the sentence, but the implication is clear. Further, he remains silent when his mother reproaches Madhuri with "Let Madhu do as she pleases, but we've to get the other girls married. The rest of us have to live with respect and honour. The entire family can't be doomed because of her."[32] Subimal also shares his older brother's sentiment that, "It'd have been better if Madhu hadn't survived, if she hadn't returned."[33] Realizing that her mother and siblings will likely come to feel the same way about her, Arundhati has to choose between owning her past and keeping her child on the one hand, or accepting one of her mother's proposed solutions (send the child to an orphanage, or keep the child but act as a widow), on the other. Rejecting her family (and community), she chooses her child, her past. In so doing, she elects to return to her child's father, the "Other" with whom she had once been coerced into intimacy.

If Arundhati was discontented with her family and Subimal, her chances of finding happiness with her abductor-husband are few. In contemplating her future life with him she smiles "balefully," "cruelly,"[34] and even "venomously."[35] Her decision is inspired by an urge for vengeance – vengeance on both her unnamed abductor-husband and Subimal, the man she once loved. On the day she leaves her mother and siblings to return to her abductor, Arundhati feels "her blood restless with a keen thirst for revenge. One [of the men] is only worthy of her repugnance, the other detests her – at this moment she wanted to tear both apart in malevolent ecstasy."[36] Clearly, building a home and personal happiness are, at this point, unimaginable. (In Hindu mythology, Arundhati, the wife of the sage Vashishtha, is famous for her purity and wifely devotion. In an ironic twist, Arundhati in "*Karunkanya*" remains the dutiful wife of her abductor-husband.) Arundhati and Madhuri's stories, particularly the shattering of Madhuri's marriage and the collapse of Arundhati's romance with Subimal, illuminate how Hindu women's forced sexual encounters with Muslim men during Partition's violence led to the removal of their bodies from circulation within the libidinal economy of "respectable" Hindu middle-class domesticity. They were, in fact, not allowed to desire anymore, not even within the strict parameters inside which women's sexuality was already confined.

In both "*Angapali*" and "*Karunkanya*," the abducted women – Savita and Arundhati – resist repatriation, but the agents of the state who arrive to "rescue" them remain deaf to their pleas. When Savita, in "*Angapali*," expresses her anxieties regarding possible rejection by her family and wishes to stay back, the police are adamant "Law, they said, it was the law. Even if her parents didn't take her back there were orphanages, they said to assuage

her fears."[37] The irony is not to be missed. In "*Karunkanya*" Arundhati critiques, state-policy saying: "[Madhuri] didn't return of her own choosing, Subimal. Perhaps accepting destiny, she might even have fared well where she was. But, you all raised a countrywide furore. You implored the rains before you repaired your roof."[38] Her implication is that while the state demanded the return of "its" women, the nation was ill-prepared to receive them. Questions of the women's security or wellbeing were of little consequence: whether they made their "home" in brothels or orphanages was irrelevant, the state was only concerned with ascertaining that these new "homes" were located in the *right* country.

The deadly mother

Shauna Singh Baldwin's short story "Family Ties,"[39] included in her 1996 collection entitled *English Lessons and Other Stories*, is set during the 1971 war between India and Pakistan but flashes back to the events of 1947–48. (The Indo-Pak war of 1971 is an apt choice since this war re-partitioned the subcontinent with the breakup of Pakistan and the emergence of Bangladesh as a sovereign nation. The violence that accompanied these events revivified memories of 1947 that many had tried to suppress.) The ten-year-old anonymous narrator is surprised to learn that she has a paternal aunt, Chandini Kaur, whose name and existence had previously gone unmentioned. Curious about her missing aunt, the narrator discovers that in 1947, eighteen-year-old Chandini, a Sikh woman, was abducted by Muslims from her home in western Punjab. By the time she was "recovered" by social workers, she had been converted to Islam and had given birth to a baby boy. Renamed Jehanara Begum after her conversion, she contacted her brother, the narrator's father, but he refused to acknowledge her. So, in order to make herself acceptable to her family, Chandini-Jehanara killed her child. Still, her brother did not relent. He merely "sent her money, told her his sister was dead and he was sorry for her troubles and to trouble him no more."[40] Subsequently, she lapsed into insanity. Her story is a cautionary tale for the young narrator, and framing Chandini's story is a chilling exchange between the narrator's father and her brother, Inder, concerning the ten-year-old narrator's "safety." Set in the context of the Indo-Pak war and taking as its subtext the wartime victimization of women, the narrator's father hands his son a revolver and instructs him: "[T]here is a war now, and I want you to know how to use it to defend this little kukri [chicken] … If the Muslims come and your sister is in danger, you must shoot her rather than let her fall into their hands";[41] to which Inder responds, "I will."[42] While he had failed with his sister, with his daughter, the narrator's father will take no chances – if she lacks the courage to die at the "right" time she will be murdered by her brother before her abduction/violation can sully the family honor. The handing of the revolver to his son, Inder, is loaded with crude symbolism: rather than let "their" phallus dishonor our woman, "our" phallic weapon (the revolver) will take her life. The refusal of both men, the

father and the brother, to make eye contact with the narrator during their verbal exchange underscores its one-man-to-another character, an exchange in which the woman is an absence, given that her presence remains unacknowledged by either man.

For women like Chandini-Jehanara national Independence is a tale of trauma. The country's freedom is inseparable from the loss of homeland through Partition, the loss of control over their bodies in the violence surrounding Partition, and, finally, their loss of home through the betrayal of their families. The predicament of the women who died, or were killed, to preempt violation and preserve family honor as well as of those who suffered rejection by the family after the fact, both present the family as a site of risk to the wellbeing of women. The young narrator in "Family Ties" sums it up thus: when troubled by the conversation between her father and brother about taking her life, she remarks that, compared with the perils of the war outside, "far more is the danger from those within."[43] For Chandini-Jehanara, home proves a place of impossible longing. Desperate to return, she underestimates the potency of her (patriarchal) family's investment in her chastity, mistakenly believing that her Muslim son is the sole impediment to her restoration. Her tragedy is her failure to realize that, as an abducted and violated woman, she has lost, irrevocably, her home, her nation, and her religion. As noted in Chapter One, at this time of escalating communal hostilities, any contact between a Hindu or Sikh woman and a Muslim man, including coerced intimacy, was regarded as a betrayal, since it was along religiously defined lines that the country was partitioned.

The anxiety around the loss of women's chastity was not driven by a concern for women's wellbeing, but by the shame of what was perceived as failed manhood, a political form of castration anxiety. After all, the protection of women constitutes one of the fundamental functions of patriarchal masculinity. But here this traditional conception and traditional religious endogamy is crossed by a nationalization of the notion of family "honor." Rather than ensuring the safety of women, this new notion was concerned with preserving male prestige against men of the opposed political-national lineage. The point is illuminated further in Baldwin's story by the domestic help Nand Singh's repeated mentions of "your father" when the narrator questions him about Chandini: "For *your father*, she is dead";[44] "Any sister of *your father's* would have died before allowing herself to be called Jehanara Begum";[45] "She was dead for *your father*";[46] and "[N]o woman of *your father's family* would have allowed herself to become a Musalmaan and then to have a Musalmaan's child"[47] (emphasis mine). For Nand Singh, the victim is not Chandini-Jehanara, but her brother, as her abduction was a source of disgrace for him. He was clearly overpowered by his sister's abductors, and failed to protect her. He and his devoted employee Nand Singh blamed her for lacking the courage to die at the right time. As Nand Singh puts it, "She should have taken her own life when she had her wits."[48] For her brother, who cannot be fully exempted from responsibility for the murder Chandini-Jehanara commits and her loss of sanity, she is unsafe, except as a memory which he has preserved for almost

a quarter of a century in the form of her photograph from 1947. She is allowed to be present in his life only in that time-frozen way. By thus possessing her image, he remains Chandini-Jehanara's custodian for life, controlling the discourse around her absence. He exercises this control by withholding her story even from his children before he "locks the Moonlight Princess away again in his steel almirah."[49] Protected in the steel armoire and in his memory, Chandini-Jehanara can no longer tarnish *his* family honor! His actions also reveal some residual guilt. For he has not only preserved her photograph but also the letter informing him of her recovery by the Indian state and her contact information. Chandini's transformation into Jehanara represents the triumph of the Muslims over Sikhs, and therefore, of the rival nation Pakistan over India. And to preserve community and national pride, Chandini-Jehanara must be expelled/forgotten – "Her name was never to be spoken again in this house."[50] Through the preemptive killings of women and the expulsions of violated women, women's chastity was perpetuated as a sign of national probity, and demarcated the nation's spiritual boundaries. ("Family Ties" counters Gandhi's commemoration of the preemptive deaths of women (see Chapter One) with, "Is it worse to be caught, converted, killed or raped by Muslims than to be killed by a brother? A brother – my brother – who said 'I will' in the voice of his warrior ancestors without once asking his usual, everlasting, Why?"[51]) As something belonging to the past that insinuates itself into the present, Savita, Sudatta, Jyoti, Raj's mother, Arundhati, and Chandini-Jehanara are all "ghosts" (remnants from the past), a word that, interestingly, occurs in "*Kodumkattilpetta Orila*," "*Angapali*," and "*Shei Chheleta*."

Whereas the narrator's aunt is preserved as a chaste girl inside the armoire, her Muslim cousin is never acknowledged to have lived. Like the sons of Savita, Sudatta, Raj's mother, and Arundhati, for the Hindu community, the sons of Jyoti and Chandini-Jehanara are standing reminders of Sikh men's failure to protect their women. Chandini-Jehanara's brother, burdened by shame, comes to terms with his failure by denying her survival. Likewise, in "*Angapali*" the deaths of Savita's father and elder brother in the riots (and of Arundhati's father in "*Karunkanya*"), men who would typically be expected to protect her, strengthen the theme of an overpowered manhood. Their absence also eliminates the question whether, as senior male family members, they could have shielded her from social intolerance and recovered the family honor. In "*Kodumkattilpetta Orila*" the assertion of a demoniac masculinity is dramatized by Jyoti's recalling during the torment of labor the "raucous laughter"[52] of her exultant captors at the time she was taken as war booty, "Their faces, maddened with communal fever, flushed with hate, devilish."[53] This part-Muslim male child claiming the love of his Hindu/Sikh mother embodies a continued threat to the Hindu/Sikh man's assertion of privilege over *his* woman. Also, it is no coincidence that the women in all the narratives bear sons, as the male child continues the father's line and can never, as Gandhi naively suggested, be made solely the offspring of his mother.

As in the case of Raj's mother in "*Shei Chheleta*," Chandini's rejection by her family is reinforced by the community, embodied, in this case, in the figure of the domestic help Nand Singh. Singh dismisses any connection between Chandini-Jehanara and his honorable employer saying "They found a woman whose name was Jehanara Begum and who said she was your father's sister, Chandini Kaur … It was a lie, of course";[54] and that "[N]o woman of your father's family would have allowed herself to become a Musalmaan and then to have a Musalmaan's child. So I came back and agreed with your father that she must be an imposter, for she couldn't possibly be his sister."[55] Devoted to his employer almost to a fault, Nand Singh does not hesitate to assign base motives to Chandini-Jehanara's desire to return to her family: "Who knows, maybe she was mad, maybe she wanted a share of this house he got in compensation for Thamali, or who knows what she wanted."[56] He remains unmoved by her agonized desperation – she just wanted to return to her family. The employee Nand Singh speaks not only as a loyal dependent but also as a member of the Sikh community. Since the community demands the nullification of the "fallen woman," Singh abets the process of disowning Chandini-Jehanara.

***

This body of literature concerning the mother and her "wrong" child draws its inspiration from the political sphere: debates were held in India's Constituent Assembly to determine the citizenship of these children whom the state identified as "illegitimate" and to settle the issue of the recovery of their Hindu and Sikh mothers. Urvashi Butalia notes:

> The mothers of illegitimate children had somehow forsaken their claim to legitimate motherhood. The "purity" of the mother, her sanctity, and the suppression of her sexuality were thrown in question by the presence of such children or of the … mother's wish to keep them. Just as abducted women had to be brought back into the fold of their religion, their nation, their community and family, so also their children had to be separated from them, rendered anonymous, so that the women could once again be reinstated as mothers.[57]

But the state's attempts to separate mother and child often met with firm resistance from the women concerned. Indeed, many Sikh and Hindu women refused to leave Pakistan without their children. In the end, they were permitted to take the children to India but had to decide whether or not the infants would accompany them when they returned to their kin. By sponsoring orphanages to house abandoned children and arranging abortions for expecting mothers, the state tried to facilitate the abductees' social reinstatement and accommodate the families' illiberality regarding the children. The state intervened to re-constitute the "legitimate" family. With so few alternatives,

many women gave up their children and sought to simply erase their experience for the sake of domestic security.

Fathers and sons

If the previous section focused on the impossibility of integrating abductees and their children within the family and the nation, this section examines the dilemmas of the Partition-migrant father, particularly the fears he hopes to resolve through the birth of his child in the adopted land. The child is his anchor. In a number of writings from East Pakistan/Bangladesh – *Nongor* (*Anchor*, 1967) by Abu Rushd, *Gayatri Sandhya*[58] (*An Evening of Prayer*, 1994) by Selina Hossain, and "*Pukurwala Bari*"[59] ("A House with a Pond," 1955) by Ashraf Siddiqui – childbirth for the migrant Bengali Muslim couple is a magical moment. The child born in the adopted land is a repository of hope, the hope of belonging. In each of these narratives, the new parents are migrants from western Bengal to Pakistan and are still quite unsure of their place in the new country. The birth of the child-citizen quells insecurity because his birth opens up the possibility of renegotiating, and consolidating, the parents' ties to the land.

These children, as noted at the beginning of this chapter, are not products of abduction or communal violence. Thus, the somber mood that attends the narratives discussed above is replaced in the writings from East Pakistan with a note of joy. The birth of the child attended by rejoicing is in keeping with the note of optimism that characterizes much of the early writings from, and about, East Pakistan. The newborn child is a metaphor for the newborn nation, Pakistan, whose founding as a homeland for South Asian Muslims promises a safer, more democratic society for Muslims free of both British and Hindu domination. (Bapsi Sidhwa's novel *Cracking India* (1988) makes the analogy obvious with one of the characters remarking, "'we have to celebrate the new arrival yet.' … 'We've all produced a baby … We've given birth to a new nation. Pakistan!'"[60]) Through the child's birth, the migrants are transformed into custodians and citizen-parents of the new nation. While the note of joy is prominent, Rushd and Hossain's novels also demonstrate that the euphoria is short-lived as disappointment with political aspirations sets in and Urdu linguistic chauvinism, poverty, sluggish growth, and urban decay emerge as major sources of discontentment. So, a certain ambivalence attends to these sons as well, but one bound up with the reproduction under changed conditions of the patriarchal-national order.

In Ashraf Siddiqui's "*Pukurwala Bari*" (1955), Anwar, originally from Bardhaman in West Bengal, relocates across the border to Rajshahi at the request of his mother. There, he marries Selina, also a migrant. He is transferred to Dhaka and there, despite his long searches, he is unable to find a place to live. The friend with whom Anwar, his mother, and Selina take shelter in Dhaka wants them to vacate his house. He moves to a shanty where not only does he lose his belongings through theft, but also his mother, to death.

Despite exchanging his house and property in India with those of a Dhaka-based Hindu family, he is unable to move into his new home because another family has illegally occupied it. Anwar's appeals to higher authorities yield no results until a friend intervenes on his behalf. The house is restored to him. He and Selina move into their home, and there, their son is born.

Anwar's unsettled condition is captured through narrative commentary such as:

> Those who had homes in East Bengal, they were quite all right. But those whose homes had been in West Bengal, those who had left behind their ancestral homes in West Bengal, those who had left for ever the play-grounds of their infancy and wrenched themselves away from the loving arms of their relations and finally sought refuge on the soil of East Bengal – what did they have?[61]

Anwar's inability to find a home in Dhaka is a metonymy for the placelessness of the migrant in the new society.[62] It is also critical of the founding logic of Pakistan as a Muslim homeland, since it is in the new homeland that Anwar has no home. The birth of Anwar's child and the resolution of his uncertainties of home occur simultaneously. The concluding paragraphs of "*Pukurwala Bari*" bring the two events together:

> That evening Anwar brought Selina, now in an advanced stage, and occupied the place. After tidying up everything, he had a relaxing bath in the pond. Every pore of his being seemed to be full of happiness.
>
> Early next morning the new guest arrived. How strong his body was! How strong his limbs! His loud cries reverberated through the entire house.
>
> This land was this infant's birthplace. As he grew up he would realize all his rights. Meanwhile Anwar and Selina would settle down in the new house and make it their own home.[63]

The child makes the new dwelling place home. With the birth of their son, the couple will also settle down in the new land "and make it their own." The newborn brings with him assurances of safety, security, and comfort. Both Anwar and Selina were born in another country and as migrants, they feel disconnected. But not so for the child who is a citizen of the new country, where, importantly, he will "realize all his rights." The language of the citizen's juridical rights is important here, since Anwar never views himself as a person with rights, as one who enjoys equal protection under the law in East Pakistan. While he makes tearful appeals to his employer to help retrieve his home from illegal occupation, it is curious that he refrains from seeking legal redress to the problem. When he tells his story to his employer, or pleads with the man occupying his house, Anwar weeps quietly, whereas the bold newborn citizen's "loud cries [reverberate] through the entire house." The father interprets the

child's cry as a declaration of the self, whereas, as a migrant, he feels inhibited. Similarly, the mention of the baby's strong body and limbs serve to emphasize that he will not live in fear. He belongs in the country. The expansive reach of the newborn's first cry seems particularly significant, perhaps as the first sound, even preceding speech, laying claim to the land; Hossain's *Gayatri Sandhya* also mentions the newborn's sharp scream that "drifts over the rolling fields."[64]

Selina Hossain's *Gayatri Sandhya* opens with Ali Ahmed, his wife Pushpita, and son Pradipto fleeing from West Bengal after violence erupts in their village. During their flight, Pushpita goes into labor on the boat, and subsequently gives birth to their son Prateek on the train soon after it crosses the border into Pakistan. Like Anwar in "*Pukurwala Bari*," Ali Ahmed too fears that he and his family will be stigmatized as refugee, and only "the child who is about to be born, … will be able to say my birthplace is Rajshahi, East Pakistan. No one will point at him and call him a refugee."[65] The embedding of the individual in the national territory, the securing of the bond between the country and the body of the individual is taken to a literal level in *Gayatri Sandhya* through the practice of burying the placenta – the organ that enabled the nourishment and survival of the fetus – in the soil of the new homeland. The newborn's father, Ali Ahmed reflects upon the symbolic significance of the act with:

> On this desolate stretch of land under a dark, silent night, he enters life alone, and here he will grow to manhood. From now he is the progeny of this ancient soil, this grass over which the breeze has blown and water has flowed for thousands of years, but which has acquired a new political name. He will be rooted in its long past for all time to come – and the placenta, separated from which he emerged as a human being, will be buried in this earth.[66]

The burial of the placenta in the earth provides "a link between blood, earth, and self … mystically connecting the person to the soil."[67] The newborn citizen, Prateek is thus firmly planted in the land. His parents have been uprooted from their homeland, but for Prateek, his roots will go deep into this land whose history and geography are his inheritance. Like Saleem Sinai in Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*[68] (1981), born on the hour of India's Independence (and whose umbilical cord is buried years later under the family home in Karachi by his emigrant parents), Prateek, meaning "symbol," born concurrently with Pakistan is a metaphor for the country – the nation in its infancy, with a thousand and one hopes for the future.

While "*Pukurwala Bari*" and *Gayatri Sandhya* offer vignettes of migrant anxieties of non-belonging, Abu Rushd's *Nongor*[69] offers an extended meditation on the subject. *Nongor*'s plot is rather thin, comprised entirely of the hero Kamal's journey from naive enthusiasm regarding relocating to Pakistan through ambivalence upon his arrival there to a resolution of his

uncertainties. A young, educated, and employed, middle-class Bengali Muslim man, Kamal is excited by the possibilities opened up by the creation of Pakistan and relocates to Dhaka, leaving his parents and siblings behind in Calcutta. The process of adjusting to his new surroundings is difficult, and although some of his friends also move to Dhaka, Kamal feels isolated. He marries Saleha, the daughter of his boss and a co-migrant from Calcutta. The birth of their son, Mahmoud leads to his recognition of the land as his own. The tension in the novel centers around Kamal's crisis of belonging in his country of choice. Other little tensions, usually episodes of corruption, are quickly worked out.

The euphoria and optimism of young, middle-class Bengali Muslim men at the founding of Pakistan is captured in the following passage:

> Springing forward with tiger-like confidence, the 14th of August arrives. A new country is born. Pakistan, Pakistan, Pakistan. It's not just a name any longer. But an independent, tangible entity. Each grain of sand animated by the expeditions to the Khyber Pass wastelands. Every fold of the Karakorams, rock-hard and snow-soft. The scorching heat of the Indus valley desert. The historic glory of Lahore and Peshawar. The oceanic expanse of the Padma and Meghna; the ponds and wetlands. The soothing fragrance of Bokul and Shefali. Dhaka's royal past. The Buddhist monasteries and sanctuaries of Bogra and Comilla. The exultant ports of Chittagong rife with the memories of Arab merchants all of that is mine from now on. From today, Calcutta is no longer Kamal's own.[70]

The exuberance in the rhetoric reflects Kamal's luminous joy over the formation of the new nation. But upon his arrival in Dhaka, his earlier enthusiasm is overwhelmed by more practical concerns: the local lemonade tastes of soap and disgusts him, and the sight of open sewers repels him. He feels alienated from his new home city and the people:

> He didn't know this town at all, so to speak. The ways of its people, the sloppiness of their clothing, their modes of speech, all took the shape of a fear of the unknown – he couldn't integrate himself confidently. But if he lives with this reluctance, his psychological rift will grow, and this land will seem a little savage and peripheral. … If he couldn't put down his roots here, then where will he find a homeland, where that tranquility whose absence agonized him. God, take pity on me. … Let me realize this soil as my mother.[71]

The passage is indicative of a tension between the reality of Kamal's situation and his desire. He hopes to belong in East Pakistan but he rhetorically distances himself from the land and its inhabitants through his use of "the *sloppiness* of *their* clothing" and "*their* modes of speech." Clearly, he does not regard the locals as his equal. The land too is described as "savage." His idea of refinement is fostered by the memory of a life he lived elsewhere.

The burden of the memory of another life and place not only diminishes over time, but also, ceases to haunt him after his son is born. Immediately after Mahmoud's birth, in what seems like a sharp about-face, Kamal, who had earlier been easily appalled by everyday street scenes in Dhaka, contemplates the same effusively:

> Life is scattered everywhere in my country. In the fiery summer heat in the expanse of the Meghna in the diminishing flow of the Karatoya. In ports wharfs, on riverbanks and woodlands, in villages and cities. In canals marshes marketplaces. In warehouses of fish rice oil and salt. In thatched roofed huts. In the everyday melancholy of adolescent boys and old men. In hunger disease reproach, in the sweat of labor in the destructive dance of summer storms in the devastations of epidemics. In love's unfailing decay in chastity's certain ruin in vice's inevitable abundant power in poverty's scorpion-stings. Mother, so beautiful you are! Your loveliness is so soothing enduring deep your touch so calm, so tender. So infinite your love. The peace in your villages, the beauty of your grasslands, the wondrous music and fragrance of your birds and flowers, the bounty of your seasons – how do you endure so much degradation, disappointment and wretchedness, Mother, how do you endure?[72] [original punctuation retained]

It is as if Kamal has an epiphany! His attempt in the earlier passage to distance himself from the land is replaced here by a fervent and holistic appreciation of his new homeland marked by his use of "*my* country" in the opening sentence of the passage. The absence of commas, or pauses, and the uninhibitedly emotive language render fully the intensity of Kamal's altered feelings. The "Mother" to whom Kamal's paean is addressed is his new Motherland (East Pakistan). (This passage also reveals a considerable attenuation of his original characterization of Pakistan. There is no more mention of the Khyber Pass, the Karakoram range, the Indus valley desert, or of Lahore and Peshawar, in other words, of anything West Pakistani. Instead, in this passage with its references to the Meghna and Karatoya rivers, "my country" refers to East Pakistan alone.) The rapid succession of images resembles a camera panning over the landscape capturing a mosaic of topography, social geography, everyday life, and the human condition. The impassioned breathlessness conveyed by the language and absence of punctuation suggests that at the level of the metaphor Kamal is gazing upon the body of the beloved.

The birth of Kamal's son Mahmoud is offered as the only reason for this drastic alteration in Kamal's mindset. While Kamal had hoped that his marriage would diminish his feeling of isolation, and transmute his relationship with the country, that wife Saleha will be his "anchor and sail,"[73] she does not substantively assuage Kamal's wistfulness for the comforts of Calcutta, his longing for his parents and siblings, or his feeling of non-belonging in Dhaka. Their union, although for the most part uncomplicated, is just average. It is only after the birth of Mahmoud that Kamal and Saleha grow close, and

there is a passionate acceptance of the country. Thereafter, Pakistan is no longer an alien land, it is not simply a Muslim homeland, but the birthplace of their son, it is Mahmoud's own land, and by way of the child, Kamal and Saleha can also lay claim to it. The concurrent consolidation of the marital and national bonds is symbolized through Kamal's buying a gift for his wife. It is after the birth of his son that Kamal, for the first time, considers buying Saleha a present and gets her a locally woven, earth-colored cotton sari, a gesture towards East Pakistani economic nationalism – something that emerges almost as a political and civic duty in the pre-Liberation War years. Kamal's gift is a metaphor for his grafting his migrant wife, and in the process, himself, in the local soil.

The birth of Kamal's son is magically transformative in the way it completely alters his views, quells his dilemmas, and soothes his disappointments about his adopted country; his son, rather than his wife, is his anchor. The child's birth also offers Kamal a release from the prison of memory, while it makes his social immersion possible, it requires the forgetting of past attachments, "releasing himself into Dhaka's recently-intimate environment, he has learned to consider [his parents and siblings in Calcutta] detachedly."[74] The birth of his son has enabled Kamal to anchor himself in the land. His soliloquy, "In her rice fields, I find my own scent. In the frenzied dance of her nor'westers, the echoes of my tempestuous passions. In her birds and flowers my soul finds utterance and fragrance,"[75] marks his final reconciliation through a reflection of the self in the land.

However, while Mahmoud is the literal infant here, Kamal's journey itself is a metaphor for the infant's recognition of the Mother(land). The land addressed as "Mother" is Kamal's sublime love-object. In fact, it is the land, and not his wife Saleha, that constitutes the feminine principle in this novel. His poetic surges are reserved for the land, and continuing his "anchor and sail" metaphor, the land stimulates his imagination and makes it sail/soar, and it is in the new homeland that he yearns to be anchored/embedded. *Nongor* diagrams the course of Kamal's oedipal journey from his biological mother to his spiritual Mother – his replacement of mother with Mother(land). His mother's death, at the end of the novel, is the logical outcome of the plot since the moment Kamal feels the pull of the new Mother(land), his biological mother becomes redundant, and her death simply serves as a suitable conclusion to the plot.

The death of his mother also serves to augment his attachment to the new homeland. The older order (represented by his mother and Calcutta) has been displaced by the new (represented by his son and Dhaka), but the new, the future, will bear traces of the past (it is Kamal's mother who names her grandson). Her death is necessary for the alleviation of Kamal's inquietude since his questioning of the soundness of his decision to migrate is partly provoked by his mother's grief at the prospect of separation. But with her death "Amma has taken Kamal's past with her"[76] and in doing so, freed him from the burden of memory of his Calcutta life, and he can, henceforth,

pursue a fuller absorption within the society of his adopted homeland. (It is noteworthy that his words, "In her rice fields, I find my own scent. In the frenzied dance of her nor'westers, the echoes of my tempestuous passions," professing his emotional identification with Pakistan, are delivered at his mother's grave site, at the time of her burial.) Her death is a metaphor for the rupture of ties with the "original" motherland. This final snapping of the umbilical cord tying him to the old country leaves the individual free to forge new bonds with his chosen country, a process that started with the birth of his son.

The simplistic resolution to the migrant crisis of non-belonging through the birth of the child, offered in "*Pukurwala Bari*" and *Nongor*, is rejected in *Gayatri Sandhya. Gayatri Sandhya*, in fact, realizes Ali Ahmed's fears of feeling unwelcome in the new country. It begins with his experience of hostility from some Muslim students at the college where he teaches Bengali literature, on account of his deference for the poet Rabindranath Tagore. In labeling Ali Ahmed as "*malaun*,"[77] the students pointedly express their disapproval since "*malaun*," derived from Arabic and meaning "accursed" or "one denied God's mercy," is an insult for non-Muslims. Further, Ali Ahmed is verbally and physically assaulted by the Muslim League member Matloob Ali who is irate at Ali Ahmed's support for students' demands for the recognition of Bengali as a language of the state, and tells him "Bengali? What do you mean Bengali? We are Muslims. … The rascal thinks he knows a lot. Coming from the country of *malauns*, he remains a *malaun*. Try your tricks again, and I'll send you across the border with one swift kick."[78] (The irony in delivering his malice in Bengali while condemning the language escapes Matloob Ali.) Ali Ahmed confesses to his wife "Pushpita, I have no country."[79] Driven out of India by communal-minded Hindu rioters for being Muslim, and unwelcome in Pakistan for his insufficient animus towards Hindus, the secular humanist and Bengali nationalist Ali Ahmed, like Bishan Singh in Saadat Hasan Manto's "Toba Tek Singh" (1955), inhabits a no-man's land. Finally, it is Ali Ahmed's Bengali nationalism that leads to his ambush from his home and his subsequent death by the "protectors of Pakistan"[80] or, members of the Al-Badr militia, a day before the end of the Bangladeshi Liberation War in 1971. In death the question of belonging is ultimately resolved since, as his older son Pradipto remarks, he died a martyr for the country, not a refugee. In giving up his life for the emerging new nation, Ali Ahmed consolidates his claim to citizenship, citizenship of Bangladesh, not Pakistan. Thus, Pakistan-born Prateek, Ali Ahmed's younger son, provides no particular succor for Ali Ahmed's experience of marginality in Pakistan.

The enthusiasm over the creation of Pakistan in *Nongor* is much diminished in *Gayatri Sandhya*. The difference is attributable to the time and place of the two novels' composition. The plot of *Nongor* covers a period of two-and-a-half years beginning in August 1947.[81] Restricting itself to this brief period, *Nongor*, while touching upon the language issue, avoids going into the Language Movement beginning in 1952, thus circumventing a major source of Bengali disenchantment in Pakistan. On the other hand, *Gayatri Sandhya*, composed

in 1994, takes a retrospective look at the 1947–71 period from the point of view of a Bangladeshi cognizant of the historical memory of the political, economic, and social discontentment in East Pakistan caused by Pakistani policies and leading to the Liberation War.

"*Pukurwala Bari*," *Gayatri Sandhya*, and *Nongor* are all centered around the migrant male, and focus on the possible quelling of his anxieties through the birth of his son. It is rather curious that none of the narratives examine the dilemmas faced by migrant-women – Selina ("*Pukurwala Bari*"), Pushpita (*Gayatri Sandhya*), or Saleha (*Nongor*). Selina remains silent. Pushpita is haunted by memories of violence that forced her to leave her former home, and she longs for the company of her former co-villager Kalo Khala, but beyond that, the narrative refrains from probing deeper into whether she shares her husband's fear of being stigmatized as refugee in the new country. Saleha seems almost incapable of reflecting on her migrant condition, she is equally unruffled in Calcutta, on the boat ride to Dhaka, during her stay in Dhaka, or during her visits to Calcutta. Saleha suffers from no divided loyalties. In fact, she matters very little.

To extend this point further, *Nongor*'s politics of representation when it comes to women even border on the misogynistic. Kamal's story is largely peopled by men like him, middle-class Muslim migrants, and their shared struggles. Women appear fleetingly on the novelistic "manscape," and then, only to augment the hero's virtues. As the adventure hero Kamal journeys to the incomparable and non-threatening feminine, the land, he must avoid being waylaid by women's moral laxity, and, especially, their powers of seduction: Kamal's Hindu girlfriend in college Latika, irritated by Kamal's description of a dance recital as "an immodest woman's capering,"[82] makes an offensive generalization about Muslims; Kamal's sister-in-law (his brother Rahim's wife) is querulous and coquettish; his aunt flaunts her husband's high rank with her jewelry and fine clothes; his wife Saleha's apathy towards her father's corruption leads Kamal to suspect her ethics and wifely loyalty; his mother-in-law wears garish makeup; Saleha's cousin, Zobeida, cheats at card games and affects the manner of a much younger woman; the midwife, Mrs. Khan, is a flirt; and his friend Alamgir's beautiful wife, Jahanara, is a temptress. The misogynist strain in the novel is driven by a fear of women's (bodies and) sexuality, and against that force-field Kamal struggles "manfully." A metaphor for his need to maintain control is the episode of his first intimate encounter with his wife which barely qualifies above an assault. The "new" country, on the other hand, is beautiful without being emasculating, and the subject of narrative exploration is the son–mother(land) relationship.

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Why do the above issues stop at national borders? Where are the stories about Muslim abductees? The answer, I believe, is to be found in social processes. Comparing the situations in Pakistan and India on the societal acceptance of

abducted women, oral historians Ritu Menon and Kamla Bhasin note that, "There is … the possibility that in Pakistan the community stepped in and took over much of the daily work of rehabilitation, evidenced by findings that the level of destitution of women in that country was appreciably lower. We were told that both the Muslim League and the All Pakistan Women's Association were active in arranging marriages of all unattached women so that 'no woman left the camp single.'"[83] Huma Dar also writes that, "about 22,000 abducted Muslim women were recovered from India, re-patriated to Pakistan, and silently absorbed."[84] That abducted women's social rehabilitation, it seems, did not pose a problem in Pakistan perhaps accounts for the absence of literary reflections on the subject.

But only a quarter century later the story would be very different. The Bangladeshi Liberation War of 1971 was attended by genocidal rape of Bengali women (estimated at 200,000) perpetrated by the army from West Pakistan, and its collaborators. Victim-survivors of the violence and the "war babies" born of intimate terror were frequently unwelcome in their families.[85] The state intervened with measures of its own:

> After the war the Bangladeshi government mandated an abortion program to get rid of the "bastard Pakistanis" … A clinic for rape victims was set up in the heart of Dhaka city … A rehabilitation center called Nari Punarbashon was also established to assist victims.[86]

The government also launched a campaign to get them married to young men from the *Mukti Bahini* (Liberation Army), but that campaign was largely a failure.[87] So far there have been a small number of historical, literary, and cinematic explorations into the predicament of victim-survivors of the war.

As for the absence of a note of rejoicing over a new birth in the displaced family in writings from India, it is possible that the economic impoverishment that accompanied the forced relocations was so severe that a new addition to the family was viewed as a burden, an additional mouth to feed. Thus, for many Hindu Bengali refugees, the issue of survival took precedence over migrant anxieties of belonging. Often forcibly evicted from the ancestral home, Partition shattered their everyday life. The next chapter proceeds to explore how some displaced Hindu families coped with the economic devastation caused by the violence around the Partition, particularly how middle-class women stepped up to resuscitate the family's finances through wage-labor.

Notes

1 Mohandas K. Gandhi, *Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi* v. 98 (Delhi: Publications Division, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Govt. of India, 1958–1994), 117–18.

2 Lalithambika Antherjanam, "A Leaf in a Whirlwind," in *Cast Me Out If You Will* (New York: The Feminist Press, 1998), 84.

3 Ramapada Chaudhuri, "*Angapali*," in *Galpa Samagra* (*Collected Stories*) (Calcutta: Ananda Publishers, 1964). This story was first published in 1949 (Bengali year 1356).
4 Ibid., 148.
5 Savita similarly ignores questions about the child's age since it will set an approximate date to her violation.
6 Chaudhuri, "*Angapali*," 150.
7 Ibid., 149.
8 Ibid.
9 Ibid., 146.
10 Ibid.
11 Narendranath Mitra, "*Jaiba*," in *Bhed Bibhed*, ed. Manabendra Bandyopadhyay (Calcutta: Dey's Publishing, 1995). The story was first published in 1948.
12 Ibid., 158.
13 Ibid.
14 Ibid.
15 Ibid., 155.
16 Ibid., 150.
17 Although the issue of legality is raised by the doctor only in passing, abortion was not legal in India until 1971.
18 Antherjanam, "A Leaf in the Whirlwind," 79.
19 Ibid., 81.
20 Ibid., 85.
21 Ibid., 83.
22 Ibid.
23 Ibid., 87.
24 Jyotirmoyee Devi, "*Shei Chheleta*" ("That Little Boy"). I published a translation of this story, "'That Little Boy': An English translation of Jyotirmoyee Devi's Bengali short story '*Shei Chheleta*'," in *Meredians* 2:2 (2002). All page numbers refer to my translation.
25 Ibid., 144–45.
26 Ibid., 144.
27 Ibid.
28 Rajeswari Sundar Rajan, *Real and Imagined Women: Gender, Culture and Postcolonialism* (London: Routledge, 1993), 70.
29 Since the story is presented from Raj's point of view, the reader is never told whether Raj's mother "chose" to migrate to India or was recovered on state initiative, a subject that animates the gendered critiques of the state in studies on Partition. Feminist ethnographers Ritu Menon and Kamla Bhasin in *Borders and Boundaries* and Veena Das in *Critical Events* have critiqued the state policy of intervention in displacing "abducted" women, leaving no space for their exercise of preference in their citizenship. They emphasize that many of these women, far from longing to be "recovered," had married their abductors, borne children, settled in their new lives, and resisted state repatriation efforts. Ritu Menon and Kamla Bhasin, *Borders and Boundaries*: Women in India's Partition (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1998); Veena Das, *Critical Events* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1995). Sugata Bose and Ayesha Jalal on the other hand, argue that the events of abduction and rape – long before any initiative by the state to restore them to their former communities – serve as the starting point for an erosion of consent. They suggest that scholars "miss more than a historical nuance or two in their dogged anti-statism." Veena Das, claim Bose and Jalal:

> has suggested how the Indian state may have impinged on the exercise of choice by raped and abducted women by creating a legal category of "abducted women" for the purposes of its repatriation programme. While taking a strong and

> entirely laudable position against the many instances of violence by the post-colonial state, she is curiously silent about the negation of consent and choice at the traumatic, violent moment of abduction and rape. By dramatizing, if not romanticizing, examples of murderers and rapists turned into besotted husbands of their former victims (such as a big, bearded Sikh weeping copiously at the border checkpoint), she presents a more benign picture of acceptance of raped women by families, and of kinship communities of victims and perpetrators alike, than is warranted by the historical evidence or the cultural context.
>
> (Sugata Bose and Ayesha Jalal, *Modern South Asia: History, Culture, Political Economy*. Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1997; London: Routledge, 1999, 198–99)

Countering Bose and Jalal's argument, however, Martha Nussbaum maintains that the erosion of consent has a longer history, originating not with abduction and rape but with the denial in many cases of women's decisions pertaining to marriage (personal communication).

30 Ramapada Chaudhuri, "*Karunkanya*" in *Galpa Samagra* (*Collected Stories*) (Calcutta: Ananda Publishers, 1964). This story was first published in 1952 (Bengali year 1358).
31 Ibid., 252.
32 Ibid.
33 Ibid.
34 Ibid., 249.
35 Ibid., 253.
36 Ibid., 254.
37 Chaudhuri, "*Angapali*," 149.
38 Chaudhuri, "*Karunkanya*," 252.
39 Shauna Singh Baldwin, "Family Ties," in *English Lessons and Other Stories* (New Brunswick, NJ: Goose Lane Editions, 1996).
40 Ibid., 30.
41 Ibid., 25–26.
42 Ibid., 26.
43 Ibid.
44 Ibid., 29.
45 Ibid.
46 Ibid.
47 Ibid., 30.
48 Ibid.
49 Ibid., 26.
50 Ibid., 29.
51 Ibid., 26.
52 Antherjanam, "*Kodumkattilpetta Orila*," 86.
53 Ibid.
54 Baldwin, "Family Ties," 29.
55 Ibid., 30.
56 Ibid.
57 Urvashi Butalia, *The Other Side of Silence*: Voices from the Partition of India (Delhi: Viking, 1998), 219.
58 Selina Hossain, *Gayatri Sandhya* (Ḍhaka: Bidya Prakas, 1994–). The title is translated as *An Evening of Prayer* in Debjani Sengupta's *Mapmaking: Partition Stories from Two Bengals* (New Delhi: Srishti Publishers & Distributors, 2003).
59 Ashraf Siddiqui, "*Pukurwala Bari*," originally published in the collection *Rabeya Apa* (Dhaka: M.M. Hosain, 1955). I have used Niaz Zaman's translation of the story in her edited collection *The Escape and Other Stories of 1947* (Dhaka: University Press, 2000). All page numbers refer to this text.

60 Bapsi Sidhwa, *Cracking India* (Minneapolis, MN: Milkweed Editions, 1991; originally published in 1988 with the title *Ice-Candy-Man*), 151.
61 Siddiqui, "*Pukurwala Bari*," 64.
62 Anwar's homelessness is not caused by forcible eviction from his birthplace and homeland. Instead, he relocates to Pakistan to keep his mother happy after she tells him: "Please listen to my last request. Sell our house and land and let us also go to Pakistan" (65). It is after her death that he fully detaches himself from his original homeland by exchanging his Indian property for a house and property in Dhaka. Therefore "sought refuge on the soil of East Bengal" unnecessarily sentimentalizes his condition.
63 Siddiqui, "*Pukurwala Bari*," 70–71.
64 Hossain, *Gayatri Sandhya*, 22.
65 Ibid., 10.
66 Ibid., 23.
67 Neil Ten Kortenaar, *Self, Nation, Text in Salman Rushdie's Midnight's Children* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2004), 105.
68 Salman Rushdie, *Midnight's Children* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1981).
69 Abu Rushd, *Nongor* (Chittagong: Boi Ghar, 1967).
70 Ibid., 41–42.
71 Ibid., 86.
72 Ibid., 223–24.
73 Ibid., 138.
74 Ibid., 244.
75 Ibid., 266.
76 Ibid., 265.
77 Hossain, *Gayatri Sandhya* v. 1, 33.
78 Ibid., 76.
79 Ibid., 110.
80 Ibid., v. 3, 231.
81 The novel makes references to Kamal's past, particularly his days at the university, and other events from the early 1940s such as Tagore's presence at Shantiniketan.
82 Abu Rushd, *Nongor*, 27.
83 Menon and Bhasin, *Borders and Boundaries*, 122. Urvashi Butalia corroborates Menon and Bhasin's findings with, "Apparently abducted Muslim women were more easily accepted back into their families, and in Pakistan, the All-Pakistan Women's Association and other organizations worked hard at arranging marriages for many women who were recovered and returned." Butalia, *The Other Side of Silence*, 128.
84 Huma Dar, "Can a Muslim be an Indian and not a Traitor or a Terrorist?," in *Shared Idioms, Sacred Symbols, and the Articulation of Identities in South Asia*, eds. Kelly Pemberton and Michael Nijhawan (New York: Routledge, 2015), 104–05.
85 Yasmin Saikia, *Women, War, and the Making of Bangladesh: Remembering 1971* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011); Bina D'Costa, *Nationbuilding, Gender and War Crimes in South Asia* (London: Routledge, 2013); Nayanika Mookherjee, *The Spectral Wound: Sexual Violence, Public Memories, and the Bangladesh War of 1971* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2015)
86 Saikia, *Women, War, and the Making of Bangladesh*, 52.
87 Susan Brownmiller writes:

> Imaginative in concept for a country in which female chastity and purdah isolation are cardinal principles, the "marry them off" campaign never got off the ground. Few prospective bridegrooms stepped forward, and those who did made it plain that they expected the government, as father figure, to present them with handsome dowries
>
> (Susan Brownmiller, *Against Our Will: Men, Women and Rape.* New York: Simon and Schuster, 1975, 84)

3 Teachers, train hawkers, sales-girls
Women, wage-work, and the family

In Samaresh Basu's story "*Pasharini*"[1] (hawker-woman), Pushpabala, "daughter of school master Nirapada from Bajrohaat in the Dhaka district"[2] peddles hand-made rag dolls to passengers on commuter trains. An eighteen-year-old middle-class migrant, Pushpabala and her family have been displaced by Partition from their native village in Pakistan to the outskirts of Calcutta, where in the absence of a senior male breadwinner, she assumes responsibility for maintaining her widowed mother and younger siblings. But, Pushpabala's only skill is her handiwork – making rag dolls. It pays little, and her work conditions are grim: on the one hand, Pushpabala's mother is mistrustful of her afternoons spent away from home; on the other, she encounters hostility from male hawkers, among whom are displaced young men who view her as a threat to their livelihood. She is also subject to derisive comments from (male) commuters on the train who upon seeing her hawking her wares react with "surprise, shame, exasperation, pity and laughter."[3] And later, as an unlicensed vendor, she is arrested by the police and sentenced to jail for a week. The narrative captures Pushpabala's ambivalence as she struggles within a field of historical forces that compels her to a life of disappointment and labor.

That Pushpabala resorts to hawking on trains as a way to support her family is evidence of a conspicuous change in the attitude of Bengali Hindu middle-class society towards women's wage labor.[4] Her story evokes the conditions under which women displaced by Partition struggled to provide for themselves and their families. It celebrates the quiet courage of these formerly homebound women who, without knowing, or intending to, set off a transformation in the mindscape of both displaced and non-displaced middle-class women. The revolution at the heart of Basu's text made Bengali Hindu women's wage-work outside the home not only socially acceptable, but potentially even respectable. Basu's story also captures how, in the absence of official documents and statistics, contemporary literature has served a crucial documentary function.

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Nineteenth century social and cultural reforms in Bengal opened the door to formal education for elite and middle-class Bengali women with the

establishment of girls' schools in and around Calcutta – most significantly, the founding of Bethune School in 1849. Beginning in 1878, the University of Calcutta also added women students to its rolls. There was a rising demand for educated women to teach at primary and secondary levels in girls' schools.[5] Women also joined the fields of higher education and medicine: one of the first two women graduates of the University of Calcutta, Chandramukhi Basu (Christian) also completed a Master of Arts degree and was hired to teach in Bethune College and, later appointed its principal; while the other graduate, Kadambini Ganguly (Brahmo) received her medical license in Britain, and joined Lady Dufferin Hospital in Calcutta before starting a private practice. Chandramukhi Basu's sisters, Bidhumukhi and Bindubashini, were graduates of Calcutta Medical College. Upper- and middle-class women were forging a new identity for themselves. But while women's education received some endorsement within the Hindu community, working outside the home was a different matter altogether. Despite the market's demand for educated women, wage-labor for elite and middle-class women, even in the early twentieth century, was not widely accepted: the ridicule Rabindranath Tagore's niece Sarala Ghoshal encountered upon her return to Calcutta after resigning from her teaching position in Mysore due to an attack of malaria, is a case in point.[6] And so is Binoy Kumar Basu's cartoon, dated 1927, of a woman on her way to work, looking rather ungainly in a saree and a shirt, high heels, and a long umbrella tucked under her arm, titled "'*Etodin karini tai!*' *Officer pathe mahila*," literally "'Because I haven't done it so far!' A woman on her way to work." For middle-class Bengali women who wanted to work, options were limited, as few avenues outside education and medicine were considered respectable.[7]

Nineteen forty-seven changed that. For many migrant Hindu families from eastern Bengal the political and economic vicissitudes attending Partition compelled formerly home-bound middle-class women, both single and married, to work. Economic ruin occurred in innumerable cases due to looting, forced evacuations, and the consequent loss of landed property. This, combined at times with the deaths of male earning members in communally motivated violence, produced a situation that could be salvaged, at least partly, through women's labor in white-, pink-, and blue-collar occupations. Historian of the Bengal Partition, Joya Chatterji writes that, "As refugee women rapidly became more literate and as more of them joined the ranks of the employed, the working *bhadramahila* (gentlewoman) was a new and urban phenomenon in West Bengal."[8] Teaching positions were particularly favored, and openings in women's educational institutions in Calcutta were rapidly filled by displaced women. But as more East Bengali Hindus migrated to Calcutta, the supply soon exceeded the demand. On the subject of the diminishing demand for women school teachers, the narrator in Narayan Gangopadhyay's novel *Bidisha* (1952) makes a direct association with Partition noting that:

> Seven or even five years ago it wasn't like this. Finding a good teacher for a girls' school used to be very difficult, and schools would compete over a

> single college graduate. But overnight the situation has changed entirely. Partition! The uprooted people from East Bengal have flooded into Calcutta, and the struggle to survive is unrelenting. Nowadays there's no need to cajole the BAs and the MAs to teach, instead they are themselves making the rounds at girls' schools. Forty rupees, thirty rupees, even twenty-five rupees, they don't object to anything. Whatever they can get – just the smallest stable foundation on the quick sands of uncertainty.[9]

While educated women preferred to teach, for migrant women faced with the total collapse of their family's wherewithal, there was no question of selectiveness when it came to employment. To acquire skills suited to different occupations, they sought training from governmental and non-governmental bodies including the All India Women's Conference, the All Bengal Women's Union, the Nari Seva Sangha (Association for the Service of Women), and the Communist Party-affiliated Mahila Atmaraksha Samiti (MARS; Women's Self Defense Society). In her study *Coming out of Partition: Refugee Women of Bengal*, Gargi Chakravartty writes about the wide variety of professions educated migrant women chose:

> Middle-class refugee girls were employed in offices, telephone exchanges, administration, banks, insurance offices, food departments, sales, and in the police. … Refugee girls, defying social convention, became police personnel. Rani Das Gupta … writes: "Some of these women took up teaching, others government and non-government services, even the police service, something unbelievable in the 50 years gone by amongst the women of West Bengal." She also wrote about refugee women working as sales girls, including door-to-door sales jobs, which was also unthinkable for women in those days.[10]

The performing arts also benefited from the participation of displaced middle-class women.[11] Actor Sabitri Chattopadhyay, who made a name for herself both on stage and screen, is a case in point. And Chattopadhyay was not alone. Talented stage and screen actor Madhabi Mukherjee (née Chakraborty), Bengali folk theater or *jatra* performers Jyotsna Datta and Bina Dasgupta, and prominent cabaret dancer and film actor Arati Das (stage name Miss Shefali), all endeavored to avert the economic crisis brought upon their families as a result of Partition through successful careers in West Bengal's entertainment industry.[12]

Women's newly constituted roles as breadwinners had social consequences beyond simply ameliorating the living conditions of displaced families. In recognition of the broader social impact of the participation of displaced middle-class East Bengali women in wage labor Chakravartty writes:

> Generally, Partition's gender dimension evokes images of violence, rape of women, cases of abandoned and missing women, and the trauma of a

> communal situation, but the silent metamorphosis of a woman's life remains unnoticed. The sense of sharing responsibility, and at times taking on the entire burden of the family, was a new phenomenon in the trajectory of women's search for identity in Bengal. The economic responsibility for the family had so far been with the male members; it was always assumed that sons were to be the bread-earners of the family. Now daughters began to shoulder the burden, facilitating a major breakthrough in the attitudes of a patriarchal society. … The social and cultural transformation following the Partition changed the image of a Bengali woman. More than the mere physical visibility of women in the public domain, the transformation marked the emergence of a new woman, who had become self-reliant, independent, and who could challenge the rigidity of patriarchal domination and act as a true partner of man in the struggle for a new existence.[13]

Wage labor outside the home offered women some release from traditional gender roles, expanding their access to the public sphere while curbing patriarchal supervision. Crucially, it allowed some women a degree of economic independence. However, my reading of literary writings suggests that while the participation of women in the labor market and their presence in public defied conventional gender roles and contributed to some re-organization of the family, Chakravartty's rhetoric of a "major breakthrough" in patriarchal practices is challenged by these literary representations of the period. For instance, in the story "*Machh*" ("Fish") by Dibyendu Palit, the fact of Nirupama's professional employment does not fundamentally alter her responsibilities within the home: she replaces a son as the family's bread-winner, but upon her return from work, she is still expected to perform her share of "woman's work," that is, domestic chores. In viewing the question of displaced women's empowerment through wage-labor, Joya Chatterji is cautiously optimistic:

> Displacement, of course, was not automatically the harbinger of progress, still less of the emancipation or "empowerment" of refugee women in some simple or linear progression. Working women tended to have little control over the wages they earned. Despite the growing contribution their salaries made to the family's domestic economy, their control over their own lives was by no means securely established just because they had become wage-earners. Yet some refugee women did begin to achieve a measure of freedom and opportunity by joining the paid workforce or by gaining an education. These developments caused significant shifts in the social mores of caste Hindus. "Decent" women, traditionally tucked away in the *antahpur*, now went out and about in the big world, bringing irreversible changes in Hindu middle-class notions of propriety and respectability.[14]

Chatterji underscores the important link between the salaried worker's limited emancipation and her lack of control over her wages. The issue of women's

limited emancipation is illuminated in the literary writings which critique the reproduction of patriarchy through the women's seeming empowerment.

Education and, particularly, their involvement in nationalist activities had brought Bengali Hindu middle-class women out of the home, and although in the decades before Independence the number of women who participated in wage labor was still very small, in all likelihood, it would have risen over time. But, the process of social change would have been slow. Forced relocations and economic impoverishment attending Partition, agonizing as they were for the victims, were catalysts in compelling, in a short period of time, large contingents of middle-class Hindu Bengali women to seek paid work. And once women's work became socially acceptable, it paved the way for non-displaced educated women to also enter professional life.[15]

With very few exceptions, such as the work of Gargi Chakravartty, Bengali refugee women's participation in wage labor and the resultant social change is an area that has received little sustained consideration. In recent years, oral historians and ethnographers have gathered migrant women's memories – a project that will assist in documenting the contributions of these chance social actors who unknowingly modified the gender composition of the labor market in West Bengal.[16] But while this is a recent development, a different archive – literature – has, since the late-1940s, preserved overwhelming evidence of migrant women's participation in professional life. (See Table 3.1. The table illustrates an enduring preference for teaching positions: Bidisha, Joya,[17] Nirupama, Kamala Datta and Sutara Datta are educators. However, the list of the characters' careers is still quite diverse, and some are non-traditional, such as Pushpabala's decision to become a hawker on commuter trains, or Binoti Majumdar's inclination towards a career in the film industry.)

But more than merely documenting refugee women's professional employment, Bengali literature, as I discuss below, has been acutely sensitive to the changing family dynamics ushered in by women's professional employment.[18] Literature has depicted the sacrifices displaced young women made in trying to avert the financial collapse their families were suddenly faced with (as in the case of Nirupama and Pushpabala), as well as the disapproval working women encountered within their families. (Narendranath Mitra's work offers a nuanced presentation of this harassment ranging from Subrata, in *Mahanagar* or *The Big City*, who takes offense even at the clacking of his wife Arati's heeled shoes as she leaves for her office, and his mother Sarojini who reproaches Arati as an unfit mother for refusing to take a day off from work to attend to her son; to Binoy, in *Durabhashini* or *Lady Telephone Operator*, who resorts to violence to stop his wife, Kamala, from working.) Composed often in the melodramatic mode, this body of Bengali literary writings documents social and historical processes, and in the absence of other forms of contemporaneous testimonies, serves as an important record of the historical experience of Partition.

This chapter examines post-Partition novels and short stories that deal directly with how economics and particularly, women's wage labor, impacted

Table 3.1 Women and wage labor in Partition fiction from Bengal

Author	*Work*	*Character*	*Profession*
Samaresh Basu	"*Pasharini*"	Pushpabala	Train hawker
Narayan Gangopadhyay	*Bidisha* (1952)	Bidisha Majumdar Binoti Majumdar	School teacher Film actor
Narayan Gangopadhyay	"*Madhubanti*"	Joya Mitra	School teacher
Sunil Gangopadhyay	*Arjun* (1971)	Kamala Datta Purnima Ray	College professor Sex worker
Amitav Ghosh	*The Shadow Lines* (1988)	The narrator's grandmother	Teacher and school principal
Jyotirmoyee Devi	Published in the autumn issue of *Prabashi* in 1966 as *Itihashe Stree Parba*; published in book form in 1968 under the new title *Epar Ganga Opar Ganga*	Sutara Datta	Assistant professor in a girls' college
Narendranath Mitra	Published in the autumn issue of *Anandabazar Patrika*, in 1949 as *Abataranika*; renamed *Mahanagar* and published in book form in 1963	Arati Majumdar	Door-to-door sales-woman
Narendranath Mitra	Published in *Ganabarta* in 1951, titled Akathita*; renamed* Durabhashini *and published in book form in 1952*	Beena Guhathakurta Kamala Mukherjee	Telephone operator Telephone operator
Taslima Nasreen	*Phera* (1993)	Kalyani Roy/Das	School teacher
Dibyendu Palit	"*Machh*"	Nirupama	School teacher
Narayan Sanyal	*Bokultala PL Camp* (1955)	Kusum Kamala	Cook and housekeeper Cook and housekeeper
Prabodh K. Sanyal	*Hashubanu* (1952)	Meera Chaudhuri	Works in a government office

family dynamics. The first section, "Dutiful daughters," examines the circumstances of the single working woman from the middle-class using Dibyendu Palit's "*Machh*" ("Fish") and Samaresh Basu's "*Pasharini*" ("Hawker-Woman"). I argue that Palit's story reproduces the trauma of Partition in the protagonist's grim experience of imprisonment within the double bind of wage labor and the family – the individual fails to find either self-realization through wage labor or fulfillment within the traditional family. Basu's "*Pasharini*" interrogates the place of the working woman, through the instance of a peddler whose unconventional vocation provokes fears of the breakdown of the gendered division of space and labor. The second section, "Unwomanly woman," uses Narendranath Mitra's novels *Mahanagar* and *Durabhashini*, to illuminate the friction within marriage caused by women's entrance into the labor market. The section examines how the shift in the geometry of power within the family and the depletion in their status as the sole provider induced anxieties of emasculation in the workers' husbands, who view their wives' wage-work as deliberately transgressive. The writings present a society attempting to enforce traditional gender role-expectations on women working outside the home where patriarchal control does not apply.

Dutiful daughters

Dibyendu Palit's "*Machh*,"[19] set in a small town in Bihar, tells the story of a young woman, Nirupama, from a displaced family comprised of an aged father, a bed-ridden mother, and three younger siblings (Monu, Tulu, and Bulu). Nirupama works as a school teacher. Disenchanted with her work she eagerly anticipates her upcoming wedding. One evening while out with her fiancé Bijon, Nirupama encounters poverty in so raw and desperate a form in another displaced middle-class family, as to lead her to break off her engagement. In doing so, she attempts to forestall a similarly degrading fate for her parents and siblings.

Nirupama's deep inner conflict is captured through the third-person narrator's repeated juxtaposition of opposites: her demanding work-schedule during the day versus the quiet relaxation of the evening (replicated in the opposition between the scorching summer sun and the tranquil moonlight); her resentment at being exploited at work versus her pleasure in Bijon's company; the determination to be of assistance to her family versus her fear of remaining single. In short, her duty to her family versus her desire. And she remains divided between the two until the end of the narrative.

That Nirupama feels no pleasure in her professional employment is laid out in her exhaustion at working two jobs, as a private tutor and a school teacher, and her growing indignation at the guardian of the student she instructs as well as the principal of the school, for taking advantage of her vulnerability.[20] Her feeling of entrapment is further heightened by the sarcastic laughter from students at her failure to solve a math problem. She endures it because her family needs her salary. Nirupama's life at home is not only demanding – she is expected to complete her share of household chores – but also chaotic as is

suggested by the altercation with a neighbor. Relief comes in the shape of Bijon. After her long fatiguing day, she craves his embrace, because in his arms "there's only happiness and security!"[21] Nirupama daydreams about him, and cherishes their evenings together. Yet, her response to his question on whether their marriage will make her happy, to which she "absentmindedly" replies with "who knows,"[22] suggests that her dilemmas remain far from being resolved.

Nirupama's impending marriage to Bijon poses a direct threat to the family's economic security. His visits to Nirupama's home and her enjoyment of his company thus occasion anxiety in her family (represented metonymically through her three siblings). When Bijon invites Nirupama for a walk in the park "a silhouette of pleasure momentarily crossed her pupils,"[23] but she notices her three siblings watching her, "There was a look of fear in their eyes."[24] The family fears losing her to Bijon and tries to disrupt their relationship. For instance, one evening just as she prepares to go out with him, "Bulu held the end of her saree with both hands; and with helpless eyes was staring at Nirupama's get up."[25] That the unnamed "fear" conveyed in Bulu's "helpless eyes" is financial, at least in part, is made explicit when Bijon, in an effort to resolve the situation, hands Bulu a coin, and the child scampers away. The metaphorical tug-of-war over Nirupama between her family and Bijon sets the scene for the story's denouement.

During her brief excursion with Bijon into the Butchers' Quarters,[26] a part of the town populated by refugees from East Pakistan, Nirupama comes across a harrowing scene:

> A thin boy, very dark, a distended pumpkin-like belly below his jutting ribs. Gripping his neck like a pincer was a middle-aged woman, emaciated, a piece of dirty cloth hung from her waist down to her knees, two rag-like breasts on her bare chest. … The boy was shrieking desperately; and with his teeth he clenched something, only a part of it was inside his mouth. The woman was pressing on his throat with one hand, and with the other she was tugging at the remainder of the thing dangling from his mouth.
>
> … The weak light of the lantern flickered on the object. A fish!
>
> The boy's eyes were bulging. The woman with the ogreish mien uttered a few rasping words, "Let go, let go I say."
>
> The boy made a gurgling sound. … He didn't open his mouth, he clamped his teeth, and made a brutish effort to swallow the fish whole.
>
> "If you wolf down all of the fish, what will the rest eat? Let go I say! Okay, just wait! I'll strangle you to death."
>
> Again, a whimper! A choking sound from the boy.
>
> It was unbearable. … A fish, for just a piece of fish![27]

Bringing the narrative to a certain culmination is this brutally dark vision, where a woman chokes her malnourished son who is trying to ingest uncooked fish meant for consumption by the entire family. In this time of scarce resources, the mother, with a family to feed, cannot afford maternal

indulgence or compassion, whereas the famished boy, for his part, is incapable of charity towards his family. He would rather consume the fish raw but whole, than content himself with a smaller piece cooked and shared with the rest. That for many refugees moral norms were putrefying under the assault of poverty is amplified by the image, repeatedly invoked, of a vulture hovering nearby. Similarly, the name of the neighborhood, "Butchers' Quarters" serves to heighten the macabre ambience of a passage that culminates in an undernourished boy's attempt to swallow whole uncooked fish. For Nirupama, this ugly conflict between mother and child exposes the poverty-induced death of decency. That this takes place in a neighboring refugee family, also from East Pakistan (a fact reinforced by the mother's use of the East Bengali dialect that also marks her as middle-class), inspires terror in her, impressing upon her a baleful vision of her own family hopeless and destitute: Nirupama "recalled Tulu and Bulu's greedy, piteous faces. The dark circles under Monu's eyes … Who knows why Nirupama thought that the woman resembled her mother? And her father, gasping for breath, collapsed on the street, face-first."[28] Nirupama knows that her siblings Tulu and Bulu "cry at meal-times every day for a piece of fish."[29] Now suddenly, she realizes unmistakably that, if she marries and thereby deprives her parents and siblings of her economic support, her family too will be reduced to a similarly desperate condition, losing in the process all dignity and decorum. It is respectability and decency – the accoutrements of middle-class life – that Nirupama decides to preserve for her family. As she has just witnessed, "once the middle-class veneer is stripped away, the mode of intercommunication in such families is uncouth, horribly so."[30]

The narrator's interjection – "Who knows why Nirupama thought that the woman resembled her mother?" – suggests that the grim mother–son tussle over the fish is emblematic of Nirupama's irreconcilable dilemma within. The fish, a desired staple of the Bengali diet, is here a symbol of wellbeing or wealth. The hungry child, who wants the entire fish to himself, represents Nirupama's "greedy-self" or the id that aspires to a life of comfort with Bijon. The boy's mother, on the other hand, solicitous of the welfare of the collective (the family), rather than of the individual alone (her son), is a symbol of Nirupama's "dutiful-self," less her ego than her super ego. The dutiful-self suppresses the greedy-self's impulse to enjoy the good life (the fish) alone, and, ultimately, the dutiful-self prevails. That said, just as the famished child's need for food is genuine and from his point of view the mother is brutal even if she is right, in the same way, Nirupama's desire for marriage and personal fulfillment is a legitimate need, and the burden of duty is unbearable. In the grueling poverty so many migrant families experienced in the post-Partition era, the individual's legitimate need for self-realization can only be greedy. It is, therefore, forfeited to a collective good, which, nonetheless, precious few could actually enjoy. The individual's duty in such a world has grown tantamount, the story implies, to self-sacrifice. The conflict raging within Nirupama, in this sense, reflects at a personal level an unremittingly antagonistic relationship between the individual and society playing itself out historically.

Nirupama's psychological tug-of-war ends; she has made her choice. The family has won the prize fish, prevailing upon her to keep her job and forsake the marriage with Bijon. But this resolution of her dilemma brings her no happiness, nor even relief. Although her decision is made freely, Nirupama communicates to her mother her refusal to wed Bijon in a "curiously harsh, lifeless voice," accompanied by a "sharp" smile and repressing a "broken hearted sigh."[31] Her self-suppression is palpable. The lifelessness in question, her story implies, extends beyond her mere tone of voice, but reaches to her very condition. It indicates an end to the future with Bijon in which she expected to find joy. She knows that she has rejected Bijon's "invitation" to a beautiful life and instead, allowed her family to "drag her into the grindstone of narrowness and stupor."[32] Nirupama, meaning "the peerless," lives up to her name. Her sacrifice of her personal happiness to the needs of her family is truly beyond compare.

Like Nirupama, Pushpabala in Samaresh Basu's "*Pasharini*," cited at the beginning of this chapter, takes upon herself the burden of family breadwinner. Desperate to earn a living to maintain her widowed mother and younger siblings, she peddles hand-made rag dolls to train commuters. The narrative elevates her to the stature of a goddess: as provider for the family, she protects the helpless; and in appearance, her long, luxuriant hair, hanging loose, her being always wrapped in a blue saree and holding rag dolls in her hand evokes the popular iconography of the demon-destroying Kali with her blue body, her long, loose, flowing hair, and holding severed demon heads in her hands. Diffident and insecure, Pushpabala initially presents a contrast to Kali's power, but the impression gives way as the narrative chronicles her transformation into a more audacious version of herself. Extending the comparison, Pushpabala's bold foray into the gendered territory of train hawking is a metaphor for her grappling with the demons of patriarchal social and cultural practices that sanction the gendered partitioning of labor and of social space. From the outside this Kali threatens men with castration. The male hawkers feel impotent to combat what they believe is the inevitable loss of income caused by Pushpabala's youthful feminine presence, and the commuters view her as actively destroying social mores through her daring emergence in the public sphere.

However, while immensely heroic, Pushpabala is not representative of Kali alone; instead, specific mention is made of Shiva (Kali/Parvati's consort) in the context of Pushpabala's friends coiling her braids around her head like Shiva's matted locks. Thus, discursively constructed as a composite of Kali (Parvati) and Shiva, Pushpabala is *ardhanarishwara*. In other words, she is an androgynous figure. As a woman train hawker she is, I suggest, a synthesis of both masculine and feminine elements. She stands on the margins of "masculine" and "feminine" spaces, trespassing boundaries while at the same time trying to straddle both. And Pushpabala finds that in-between-ness deeply troubling.

The image of an androgynous Pushpabala is also invoked through narrative's treatment of her femininity as a terrain of anxiety. Her disappointment at her

own helplessness to adequately support her family induces in her an urge to annihilate the locus of her feminine attractiveness: her long, cascading hair. When she reflects upon the failure of her efforts to resuscitate the family's finances and seeks to destroy herself, her hair promises a solution: Pushpabala contemplates braiding her hair into a noose with which to hang herself, or, alternatively, setting it on fire and burning to death. Her luxuriant hair emblematizes the abundance of her youthful femininity. Therefore, it must be done away with. Also, as mentioned earlier, the resentment she encounters from the male hawkers stems from their suspicion that Pushpabala will deploy her sexuality to lure customers away from them; and they finally accept her as one of them when they realize that she has been treated like them and made to serve a week-long jail sentence for failing to produce a vending license. After this Pushpabala seems less threatening as the male hawkers perceive that her stay in jail has diminished her allure by wrecking her appearance, "matted hair piled high. No sandals, bare feet. Her scrunched up saree hung far above her feet. There were hollows under her eyes, her cheeks gaunt."[33] Her loss of sensuous appeal and her acceptance among men re-emphasizes her androgyny – she is finally "just one of the guys." The descriptor "matted hair piled high" indeed suggests not Kali but Shiva, marking Pushpabala's transition from the feminine to the masculine. For her rivals, the threat has been neutered.

Although she deliberately leaves behind the traditional women's arena, the home, to enter the masculine domain of hawking on trains, she remains entrenched within a traditional and patriarchal compass. Contemplating the name mockingly given to her by her male co-hawkers, "mother of dolls," Pushpabala concurs that she can only be a "mother of dolls, a female hawker. Not a woman. Without conch bracelets and vermilion. The dolls' father never appeared amid the music of a pledge of home and protection."[34] She views herself as "not a woman" because, for eighteen-year-old Pushpabala, womanhood retains its necessary association with marriage (presented metonymically through the conch bracelets and the vermilion) and motherhood. As an unmarried woman who peddles wares, she is simply confirmed in the denial/loss of middle-class respectability through marriage. She feels that all she can create are lifeless rag dolls, not living, breathing children.

While marriage and motherhood was the life Pushpabala imagined for herself and the economic ruin of Partition shattered that dream of domestic happiness, the tragedy is not simply her refusal to grow. Rather, she had once been excited at the prospect of work. On the day she first sets out to sell her craft, a diffident Pushpabala sits alone in an empty train compartment composing her resolve:

> She saw before her eyes, her widowed mother's face … and her mind responded, I can do this. She remembered her young siblings and, she thought, I can. Her famished body … and her mind stood before her, the mind responded with, I can, I can. As the breeze ruffled her long hair and

> it slapped against her, an invisible strength flowed from her spine towards her feet, it straightened her bent frame and sprinted back with, I can, I can do this.[35]

But that first day, Pushpabala loses the nerve to even announce her product to the commuters on the train. However, the following day, although her voice falters a little initially, she soon regains her composure. Her new-found confidence is manifest again when upon her release from jail she steels herself to repel her male co-hawkers' bullying.

Both the male co-hawkers and the (male) passengers on the train are preoccupied with Pushpabala's sexuality and both assume the worst about her moral character. Rival hawkers regard her, with no basis whatsoever, as "disreputable"[36] ("*kalankini*" lit. scandal-tainted), and make inappropriate suggestions that she must be "chummy with the police"[37] and "cozy with the railway authorities."[38] The men fear that as a young woman she will gain an unfair share of their clientele's sympathy and patronage, and thus deprive them of a living. On the other hand, for the commuters, she is at once a source of discomfiture/embarrassment and an amusing spectacle. Thus, on her return trip from Calcutta her first day, when a passenger offers her his seat in the crowded train before she has the chance to display the dolls, his "chivalric" gesture makes her "Not a hawker but a woman passenger. Respect for a woman passenger."[39] Pushpabala accepts the seat and sits with "her head bent low. Women's honor,"[40] while bearing silently her agony at her failure to sell a single doll that day. Deemed by other commuters on the train as a respectable woman passenger, Pushpabala is rendered incapable of saying "no" to her benefactor. Instead, her "appropriately feminine" deportment – her head bent, modesty, reticence – reinforces the social and cultural construct of the decent woman. The following day, by contrast, when she delivers her sales pitch the passengers, all of them male, react with "surprise, shame, exasperation, pity and laughter." A barrage of comments follows:

> "Shame, shame what's this!"
> "What's happening these days? And a grown woman too."
> "This isn't the end of it, who knows what else we'll have to see."
> "The country's going to pot!"
> "Married?"
> "Nnah. Who knows, perhaps she is! No vermilion though."[41]

The passengers

> skeptical, scrutinized her closely. … No, no way was she a good woman. Hawking on trains! … On the streets at this age … among crowds! There was something hazy about the whole thing. … Among the passengers were a few gentlemanly folk. They remarked, obliquely, "Not bad, what say you?! … The time will pass just looking."[42]

Now that she is trying to fend for herself, the commuters question Pushpabala's rectitude. The previous evening, she was treated as a respectable woman and offered a seat. But now, when she presents herself as a hawker, her morality is called into question. The day before the travelers remarked upon the verbal talents of the male hawkers on the train, but the moment Pushpabala speaks, it is her body, and not her spoken word, that becomes the object of the commuters' vulgar curiosity. They "scrutinize her closely," and speculate openly about her marital status. Their remark "Not bad … The time will pass just looking" is not about the dolls Pushpabala is trying so desperately to sell; instead, she is the focus of their prurient gaze. Needless to say, there is deliberate irony in the passengers' transference of their impropriety onto Pushpabala as well as in the use of "gentlemanly folk" in the description of the gawping passengers.

Pushpabala has more to contend with than just the opprobrium heaped on her by the rival hawkers and train passengers. She also battles with her mother's mistrust. Upon being taken to jail, she worries that her failure to return home that night will serve to confirm her mother's suspicions, and that her mother will conclude that her "ruinous" daughter has "eloped and ruined the family."[43] The fact of Pushpabala's being outside and alone in public, regardless of her purpose, unsettles those at home as well.

A contrasting portrayal of the working woman is presented in Sutara Datta in Jyotirmoyee Devi's novel *Epar Ganga Opar Ganga* (discussed in Chapter One). Sutara's salary enables her to live independently, but her freedom comes at a price: the loss of her family. Newly employed as a college professor Sutara relocates to Delhi where she opts to stay in a hostel for working women. Her musings about her living quarters, with a nod to Virginia Woolf (with whose writings Jyotirmoyee Devi was deeply familiar), dwell on the issue of women's independence, particularly economic empowerment, and intensifies the novel's feminist content:

> [I]t was a room of her own, her place acquired by her earnings. … From now on, her brothers wouldn't have to provide for her. They wouldn't even have to spare a thought. Has she become independent? Are women ever independent?[44]

Sutara's autonomy and personal wellbeing are grounded in the economics of ownership – her ownership of *her* room, *her* private space made possible by *her* salary. After being repeatedly moved around at the will of her brothers and the extended family – from her natal village to Calcutta and, then, from the home of her brother Sanat's in-laws to a boarding school and from there on to college dormitories – her room offers stability. It is a haven for which she is indebted to no one. Within that rented space, Sutara is free.

Financial independence serves as Sutara's escape route from a possible future in a women's home or a government-sponsored Permanent Liability Camp for displaced persons. But most importantly, her autonomy gives her a "voice." As mentioned in Chapter One, muteness is a metaphor for Sutara's

loss of social agency, so that between her restoration to her family in Calcutta and her finding employment at Delhi she rarely speaks. She is the object of the compassionate or the repulsed gaze of her brothers and the extended family. But the silent, frightened, passive adolescent of the first half of the novel transforms in the second half to a much bolder and livelier woman who is no longer ashamed to share her story. Sutara's wages and the distance she puts between herself and her family by relocating to Delhi, enable her to live as she pleases – going on pilgrimages, meeting with her Muslim friends from Noakhali, and so on. It is precisely this sort of evolution that is denied to Pushpabala.

Unwomanly woman: working women, marriage, and masculinity

Self-sacrificing single women dominate the landscape of Bengali fiction on displaced women and salaried work. Comparatively speaking, literary representations of married middle-class women and mothers in the work force are fewer. This reflects the prevailing social mindset which often required women to give up work after marriage in order to keep the peace at home. Elsewhere, the trend was different, with large contingents of married middle-class women participating in wage-labor. Lee Holcomb's work on English and Welsh working women in the years before World War I and Stephanie Coontz's study on white American families during the period 1900–1990,[45] demonstrate the rise in middle-class women's paid employment beginning in the early decades of the twentieth century. So far, this is similar to what happened in Bengal. However, Coontz also finds that, in the United States:

> By 1930, almost 20 percent of clerical workers were married women. In addition, consumerism had produced a new cultural rationale for the employment of married women: an ideology stressing the importance of the home as a center for consumption and encouraging aspirations toward a higher standard of living. … The Second World War brought a major shift in women's work. Between 1940 and 1945, the female labor force increased by more than 50 percent: Three-fourths of the new female workers were married, and a majority were mothers of school-age children. … The war eliminated many barriers to the employment of wives, mothers, and older women. It also gave thousands of women who had already been working, their first experience of occupational mobility and the rewards of challenging, well-paid work. … Married women comprised the majority of the growth in the female workforce throughout the 1950s, and between 1940 and 1960 there was a 400 percent increase in the number of working mothers.[46]

While in West Bengal, India there was a sizeable escalation in women's employment from the 1940s through the 1960s, there was no proportional rise in participation by married women. For the Bengali working wife and mother

in the late 1940s and 50s, the journey from the home into the world was often beset with difficulties. Literary writings on Bengali women who continued to work after marriage bring into relief the reorganization of patriarchy by the demands of the market. Aware of social prejudice towards married women working outside of the home, employers were often unwilling to hire them so as to avoid complications. The Calcutta Telephone Exchange, for instance, preferred unmarried women as telephone operators. This adds an intriguing dimension to Kamala's story in Narendranath Mitra's novel *Durabhashini.* Kamala is a married woman looking to work at the Exchange. To increase her eligibility, she conspires with her husband to erase all outward signs of marriage.

The struggles of married working women both in their workplace and at home have been sensitively presented in Mitra's novels, *Mahanagar*[47] and *Durabhashini*.[48] Mitra's *Mahanagar* (*The Big City*, 1963) was originally published in the Puja issue of the *Anandabazar Patrika* in the autumn of 1949, as *Abataranika*. The name change was made by the Bengali auteur Satyajit Ray[49] when he rendered the novella into film in 1963, apprehending through his cinematography the fragmenting effected by Partition not only of families and relationships, but also of the landscape of the big city, Calcutta. Mitra adopted both the new name and some alterations Ray made,[50] expanding the story for publication in book form in 1963. (This is the version I discuss.) Still, the original name *Abataranika* is evocative in its rich ambiguity. Derived from "*abataran*" meaning "to descend," "*abataranika*" refers to "a flight of steps," "a staircase," "a ladder" (and more recently, "an escalator"). However, unlike its etymological source, "*abataranika*" as "flight of steps" or "staircase" refrains from specifying the direction of movement, thus the narrative leaves it to readers to contemplate whether Arati Majumdar, the main character, is reaching for the skies/freedom as she makes her way up to her office high above the city, or, whether as a woman working outside her home she is descending, as her husband and in-laws would like to believe, into moral ruin. In addition to meaning "a flight of steps," *abataranika* also denotes the introduction/preface/prologue to a book – that which enables readers to enter the text – thus suggesting that Arati's struggles presented in this short novella constitute the prelude to the new chapter/new life and identity that she fashions for herself.

A young, middle-class housewife displaced from East Bengal, Arati finds a position as a door-to-door sales-woman in a company selling knitting machines after her husband, Subrata, requests her help to alleviate the financial burden of maintaining their large family of eight – his parents and three young siblings, Subrata, Arati and their son.[51] Although Subrata defends his wife's professional life against his parent's disapproval, Arati's long hours combine with his own insecurities to put a severe strain on their marriage. Consequently, Subrata urges Arati to give up working, but to no avail. Finally, under immense pressure she capitulates, but just as she is about to hand in her letter of resignation, Subrata stops her – he has lost his job at the

bank. Arati continues to work, but quits a few months later to protest the slur by the company's director on the character of a woman-colleague and friend.

Two years after *Abataranika*/*Mahanagar*, Mitra published *Akathita* (*Woman Unspoken*/*Unsung*) in the autumn issue of the journal *Ganabarta* in 1951. It was published in book form the following year and the name changed to *Durabhashini* (*Lady Telephone Operator*, 1952). In this novel too Mitra explores the struggles of the working woman, this time through the lives of two telephone operators and friends, Beena Guhathakurta and Kamala Mukherjee. The narrator, Kalyan, is a journalist and author keen on writing about the lives of women telephone operators. Seeking first-hand information about them, he is introduced to Beena Guhathakurta by a co-worker. A Partition refugee, Beena works at the Calcutta Telephone Exchange. Through Beena, Kalyan meets her friend and colleague Kamala Mukherjee, also displaced by Partition. While Beena is single, Kamala is married. Her husband Binoy Banerjee's opposition to her work outside the home, coupled with his physical abusiveness, compel Kamala to leave him and return to her parents whom she then supports financially. Eventually, Kamala contracts phthisis, or pulmonary tuberculosis, and dies. (The novel chronicles the lives of both Beena and Kamala. Since this section focuses on married women, I have outlined only Kamala's story.)

Mitra's novels explore the changes in power structures within the family brought upon by women's professional employment. They study the dramatic potentials of his upper-caste Hindu and "middle-class" women characters' securing positions that the family and society-at-large were certain to disapprove of. Arati Majumdar is a door-to-door sales-woman while Beena Guhathakurta and Kamala Mukherjee are telephone operators. Prior to the economic catastrophe unleashed by the Partition, both professions had been scorned by women from backgrounds such as theirs. In *Durabhashini*, the narrator says "Kamala's father wasn't in the least agreeable to her working in the Telephone Office. Even a few years ago, Bengali women in such large numbers didn't work there."[52] Historian Gargi Chakravartty makes a similar point when she writes that refugee women accepted work selling goods, "including door-to-door sales jobs," a line of work that had so far been "unthinkable for [middle-class Hindu] women in those days."[53] The reasons for this were that door-to-door sales and telephone operating required women to interact with a large and miscellaneous set of people, mostly men. Door-to-door sales also meant visiting strangers in their homes. And such work often delayed women's return home at a "respectable" hour (before sundown). Telephone operators, on the other hand, were required to take turns in working the night-shifts.[54] For families where women had, so far, been confined within the home, their anxiety centered on the propriety of women's public-ness, not to mention their marital fidelity. Both occupations were viewed as compromising the family's prestige. Another reason for the stigmatization of the two professions was that they were considered the preserve of Anglo-Indian women.[55] Anglo-Indians had succeeded because of their communication skills, chiefly,

their ability to converse in English, and their general sociability. As Kuntala Lahiri Dutt notes:

> The Anglo-Indian woman was an unwitting trail blazer of women's emancipation in the city. She was carrying out secretarial duties in commercial offices, nursing and teaching at a time few Indian women ventured out to work – well before that other pioneer of women's independence, the refugee girl from East Pakistan.[56]

Yet, Anglo-Indian women's very extroversion and flair for sociality earned them the censure of upper-caste conservative Hindus who regarded them as morally slack. They shunned the idea of respectable Hindu women fraternizing with them. In *Durabhashini*, complaining about Beena to the narrator Kalyan, his colleague tells him, "It's beyond belief that a Bengali woman would behave in this way! As it is, she looks like an Anglo-Indian, socializes with them, and now, her deportment, her tastes, her inclinations are headed that way as well."[57]

For both Arati in *Mahanagar* and Kamala in *Durabhashini*, the resistance to their employment is articulated in the rhetoric of family honor and their own health and wellbeing. But the subtext of such complaints is their husbands' feelings of inadequacy. The crisis in both novels is driven by the husbands' desire to regain the control they believe they are losing as husbands of professionally employed women.[58] They hope to recapture their diminishing authority by persuading or coercing their wives to give up their careers and resume their dependent position in the household. In *Mahanagar*, Subrata tries to dictate to Arati when she should seek employment, and when she should quit, when to submit her letter of resignation and when to withhold it. He even appoints himself guardian of her moral life. He supervises with whom she socializes. Regarding her Anglo-Indian colleague Edith Simmons, he admonishes Arati with, "Careful, don't associate with those women."[59] And again after she visits Edith at home, "It's better for you to not go to those localities, especially after dark."[60] (The softening of the imperative in the first to the note of appeal in the second is prompted by Subrata's loss of employment and his consequent anxiety.) To him, Arati's "dressing up" for work is a sign of the gradual corruption of her morals, whether it is her preference for heeled shoes or her use of lipstick, a gift from Edith. (Aware of her husband's disapproval of lipstick, Arati keeps it a secret, but after he finds out, Subrata asks her with a "poisonously sarcastic smile … 'So, when are you taking to cigarettes?'"[61] Since during this time Bengali middle-class women's smoking was societally regarded as a signpost of the ruin of decency and rectitude, the question brings tears to Arati's eyes, and she silently tosses the lipstick out of the window.) Even her use of night cream worries him! Similarly, her success in the workplace only raises Subrata's suspicions. He:

> noticed that the tall, slender Arati looked even more beautiful; even younger in age. An intense joy seemed to fill her. But why so much joy?

> Was it just the few rupees she received as commission for selling the machines that made her so happy? Or was there something else? Fear pricked him.[62]

His fear might be based partly on the knowledge that, among her rich clientele, Arati meets men who are better providers than he is, so that, in time, she might find him inadequate. It is interesting to note that, among Subrata's many concerns Arati's personal safety in visiting the homes of strangers finds no place. Instead, Subrata and his parents are much more worried that Arati has been spotted in a restaurant in the company of another man – an elderly acquaintance of her parents.

After the initial excitement of "shepherding" Arati to her workplace or, "helping" her find her way around the city wears off, her employment seems almost a personal affront to Subrata. He finds himself in situations where he must defend her actions to his parents even as her employment constantly threatens his masculinity. The threat is twofold. On the one hand is his wife's stubborn refusal to quit her job despite Subrata's repeated requests and admonitions. It irritates him "how she forgets that she needs to rely on Subrata's opinions and good judgment because he is the husband!"[63] (The Bengali word used in the text for "husband" is "*swami*," which also means "master." Mitra's choice of "*swami*" over the more commonly used "*bor*" makes clear his point.) And on the other, are the comments of his arch-conservative father, Priyogopal: upon hearing that his daughter-in-law has accepted professional employment to support the large family, Priyogopal takes the news as an insult aimed at him for increasing the size of Subrata's household, and enraged, he strikes back, exposing "the weakness of [his son's] abilities and his masculinity" with, "'Such a large family! It's only seven or eight mouths to feed, including the children. Whereas, I, at the age of seventeen, had to fend for fourteen dependents, alone. And to do that, I didn't need to send your mother to work.'"[64] And when Arati is delayed in returning home, Priyogopal reprimands his son with "In what other family does the housewife stay out so late! I knew all along that this would happen. If you let go of the bridle of a horse or of a woman even once …"[65] Priyogopal's comparison of Subrata's failure with his success in reigning over the home (and reining in the woman) is calculated to wound his son's already-fragile psychological state. Subrata's anxiety escalates further when he loses his job and the household becomes dependent on Arati's income. That his survival depends on his wife's wages compounds his crisis. So when Arati, on her way to work, asks him to look after their son, Subrata lashes out with, "Yes, now I'm supposed to do all this – bathe him, feed him, put him to bed. I'm his mother now, given that you're doing the father's job."[66] In other words, salaried work/domestic chores = real work/care-giving = man's work/woman's duty = father's domain/mother's domain. According to Subrata, the order has been upended now that the "real" work is being done by the manly-mother, while he, the womanly-father, engages in mere care-work.

Mitra's *Mahanagar* serves as a prologue to *Durabhashini* where Mitra elaborates upon the themes adumbrated in *Mahanagar*. But *Durabhashini*'s Kamala is a much less compliant woman than Arati. Through his own negligence Kamala's husband, Binoy, is dismissed from his job, at which point he registers no opposition to Kamala's finding a position at the telephone exchange. But once he obtains new employment and makes "ten or fifteen rupees more"[67] than Kamala, his confidence is restored. He is no longer dependent on his wife, and, with a higher salary than hers, he is once more the family's primary provider. This leads him to demand, rather peremptorily, that she stop working – "No need to trouble yourself any longer. Give up the job."[68] But his self-possession is short-lived. Kamala, who has had a "taste of freedom,"[69] declines to resign; Binoy then realizes that she has dreams of a more comfortable life than is possible on his salary alone. (This mirrors Coontz's mention of working middle-class women's "aspirations toward a higher standard of living.") While feeling inadequate, he, nevertheless, tries to reassure her with:

> You quit that job. If you need money, I'll bring it to you however I can. I'll take two tutoring jobs like before, find work as an insurance agent, and if that isn't enough, I'll commit theft or robbery. But let the homemaker stay at home. The allure of money has hardened your heart. Earning it has left calluses on your hands. And I don't want that. *I want a woman – womanly woman*.[70] [Italics mine, the italicized sentence is in English, using roman letters, in the Bengali original. I use italics to distinguish between the Bengali and English texts.]

Binoy expresses his insecurities as concern for Kamala's wellbeing and the preservation of her femininity, thereby presenting himself as a benevolent patriarch. But his abrupt switch to English signals the forced and ideological nature of his claims.

In the context of Binoy's demand for a "womanly woman" and Subrata's telling his wife "you're doing the father's job," we can further analyze the "androgyny" of the train-hawker Pushpabala in Basu's story "*Pasharini*." As we have seen, she is a composite of the masculine and the feminine, the working woman is regarded as part-male, a "mannish" woman. A woman who is not involved in "feminine professions," such as teaching, medicine, nursing, in other words, a woman who is not a nurturer or care-giver, is perceived as threatening. She has exceeded her gender-appropriate role and is usurping the masculine role of providing for the family. The working woman, a woman acting like a man, represents a dangerous and indefinable (therefore, uncontainable) "third kind." Binoy's concerns go beyond preserving Kamala's femininity and focus instead on protecting his position as *pater familias*. To continue the Kali metaphor into Mitra's texts, the masculine fear of the inversion of gender hierarchy is crystallized in the popular iconography of Kali where dressed only in a garland of human heads and with disheveled hair she stands above a supine Shiva. To end the demon-slayer Kali's subsequent destructive rampage,

Shiva intervenes by lying down in her path, but Kali, unafraid, steps on him. This woman-on-top scenario is the source of deep disquiet for Binoy and Subrata who view their wives' refusal to depend on them as the first sign of the women's inevitable moral decay. They transfer their own feeling of inadequacy onto their wives, viewing them as falling short on morality and femininity.

Like Subrata, Binoy too wants to dictate his wife's life. But unlike Subrata, Binoy is much more aggressive about what he wants, and takes matters into his own hands, literally. When Kamala refuses to resign from work, Binoy "gripping her firmly by both shoulders, continued to push her until she was pinned to the wall," then, releasing her shoulders, "he held her head tightly and with all the strength in his body, he repeatedly struck her head against the wall,"[71] until finally Kamala starts bleeding from the head and faints. Blaming Kamala for the breakdown of the marriage and glossing over the violence done to her, Bengali literary critic Srikumar Bandyopadhyay simply takes sides in the very social conflict Mitra's novel captures. Reviewing *Durabhashini*, Bandyopadhyay writes that Kamala "takes a job against the wishes of her husband, and wrecks her marriage through her own excessive independence of spirit and his unfair importuning."[72] Clearly if Bandyopadhyay is any indicator, many readers could not stomach such "fiction." For, it is incorrect to claim, as he does, that Kamala "takes a job against the wishes of her husband." It is only after Binoy is dismissed from his workplace and is unable to find new employment, and the household (comprising of Kamala, Binoy, his mother, and his siblings) is running out of financial resources that Kamala approaches her husband with "I could find something or the other," to which he responds "Do it."[73] "The two of them"[74] check the classifieds for employment opportunities and prepare her applications. It is only *after* Binoy finds a new job that he first insists that she give up hers, and Kamala resists. Kamala even adjusts her work schedule to accommodate Binoy's wishes such as switching to the night-shift since he wants her home in the morning to prepare his meals, though as soon as she does that, Binoy demands that she stay home at night. Like Binoy, Bandyopadhyay shifts all the responsibility for the marriage onto Kamala, while making no mention of Binoy's abuse. The critic's attempts to whitewash Binoy's actions ("unfair importining") find no textual support whatsoever. Instead, his observations expose entrenched patriarchal biases that sacrifice textual detail to prejudice.[75]

While for a married, professionally employed woman her in-laws offer little solace, the parental home for both single and married women, as all the narratives examined in this chapter suggest, is no haven either. And nowhere is this more starkly presented than in Mitra's *Durabhashini*. Kamala returns to her parents to escape her abusive marriage. But after her younger brother's arrest, hers is the only income in the family. To support the family, she overextends herself at work, and further, living in squalid conditions, eventually contracts pulmonary tuberculosis, and dies. Kamala's tuberculosis is indicative not only of the disease's large presence in West Bengal at this time, but it is also a metaphor for her entrapment within the family where there is no air left for

her to breathe, and she suffocates to death. Kamala's role as the family's breadwinner destroys her. In death, she "redeems" herself as a self-sacrificing and dutiful daughter. The theme of the callous dependence of the family on the single income of the selfless daughter (and her martyrdom) would be explored cinematically, a few years later, in Ritwik Ghatak's critically acclaimed film *Meghe Dhaka Tara* (*The Cloud-Capped Star*, 1960).

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The narratives discussed in this chapter chart refugee women's struggles, as well as the reconstitution of, and power-brokering within, the patriarchal and patrilineal family as women start earning a living. The stories illuminate the resolute spirit of displaced women who picked up the pieces of their broken lives and set about re-building new ones in new places, and among people they had not known before – people who had different food habits and spoke a different dialect of Bengali. Whether it was teaching, hawking on trains, or the duties of a telephone operator, the popularity of Bengali long and short fiction (and frequently their on-screen renditions) among middle-class readers (and viewers) gave middle-class women's wage labor some degree of intelligibility and esteem, if not legitimacy.

I end this chapter with an excerpt from the memoir of a displaced woman writing about her struggle to put food on the family table: the talented Bengali actor Sabitri Chattopadhyay. Chattopadhyay was selected to play the title-role in the cinematic rendition of Basu's short story "*Pasharini*" as *Putuler Ma* (*Mother of Dolls*; 1973). It was a fight much like her own, and she delivered the part with characteristic skill, illuminating sensitively the plight of the displaced woman. Chattopadhyay also played a prominent part in the theatrical and cinematic presentations of Salil Sen's play *Notun Ihudi* (*The New Jews*; first staged in 1951, and made into a film in 1953) which also dealt with issues of dislocation and dispossession of Partition's refugees from East Bengal. She was selected for the role because of her "refugee-like appearance"[76] – she was undernourished and, therefore, very slender at this time. In a biographical essay "*Amar Katha: Ki kore nayika holam*"[77] ("My Story: How I became a heroine"), Chattopadhyay reminisces not only about her life in theater and film, but also about her family's impoverishment upon relocating from Kamalapur to Calcutta that led her to seek work even as an "extra" in Bengali films, and of postponed dreams.

> We were going through very difficult times. Father didn't have an income. We had to rent out one room of the small two-roomed house we were living in, and use the rent-money towards domestic expenses. But it didn't do much. … So, to help father run the household, I cast aside all shame and lined up at the gates of the film studio day after day. There would be openings in a crowd scene or two, or dance sequences. It wasn't much money. And if I earned ten rupees, the agent deducted five. … At such

times I'd forget that we had once owned an enormous house at Kamalapur. … Not only had we never experienced scarcity before coming to Calcutta, but we couldn't even imagine it. From there to this sliver of a house, it was a nightmare. … My father was very strict. He was staunchly opposed to my acting with strangers. But such was providence that at a time of rising costs, it wasn't possible to run the household on the rent from one small room. In the midst of the riots, the Partition, and his terrified escape, father couldn't bring anything. In exchange for our huge home, this little house was all he received. So, I had to plunge into acting and be the economic stave for my penniless family.

What I missed out on was having a family of my own. … Perhaps it wasn't destined. Yet, it was to preserve the home that I'd fought so hard and sacrificed my personal interests. During those difficult days, I'd stood by my late father and did whatever was necessary to survive. From trivial dance roles, to acting in amateur theater clubs it was all part of the effort towards collective survival.[78]

Notes

1 Samaresh Basu, "*Pasharini*," in *Raktamonir Haré: Deshbhag-Swadhinatar Galpo Sankalan* (*In a Necklace of Garnets: Collection of Stories on Partition and Independence*) v. 1, ed. Debes Roy (Calcutta: Sahitya Akademi, 2005; first published 1999).
2 Ibid., 195.
3 Ibid., 198.
4 This chapter focuses on middle-class women from Bengali Hindu families displaced by Partition (all of them from the upper castes). It does not include economically underprivileged women who, long before the Partition, were part of the labor force.
5 Middle-class women's preference for careers in teaching is not exceptional to this region. In their study on the English middle class 1780–1850, Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall note that around the middle of the nineteenth century "teaching became the only occupation in which middle-class women could preserve something of their status. By 1851, women made up 64 per cent of the teaching force in Essex and 79 per cent in Burmingham." Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall, *Family Fortunes: Men and Women of the English Middle Class, 1780–1850* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 293. Lee Holcomb's work on the subject focusing on England and Wales from 1850 to 1914 indicates that while new fields such as civil service and clerical work were opening up for women, many still opted for careers in teaching and nursing. Lee Holcomb, *Victorian Ladies At Work: Middle Class Working Women In England And Wales, 1850–1914* (Hamden, CT: Shoe String Press, 1973).
6 See Malavika Karlekar, "A Very Different Life," in *The Telegragh*, Calcutta, India, March 11, 2007, http://www.telegraphindia.com/1070311/asp/opinion/story_7498447.asp.
7 According to the Census data from 1901, in Bengal 1156 women were teachers, 849 were nurses, 151 were doctors, and 67 were clerks. Ghulam Murshid, *Rasasundari there Rokeya: Nari Pragatir Eksho Bochhor* (Dhaka: Bangla Academy, 1984), 145. Documentation, particularly census data, exists on underclass women laborers (workers in cotton and jute mills and mines, domestic servants, and sex workers). In an essay on refugee women and work, Ishita Chakravarty and Deepita Chakravarty have documented the participation of refugee women in the domestic service industry in this period. Ishita Chakravarty and Deepita Chakravarty, "For Bed

and Board Only: Women and Girl Children Domestic Workers in PostPartition Calcutta (1951–1981)," *Modern Asian Studies*, 47 (2013). See also Geraldine Forbes, *Women in Modern India* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

8 Joya Chatterji, *The Spoils of Partition: Bengal and India, 1947–1967* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 153. See also Jagori Bandyopadhyay's essay, "*Meyeli Jibon: Bhagabhagir porer yug*" ("Womanly Life: The Era after the Partition") in *Deshbhag: Smriti ar Stabdhata* (*Partition: Memories and Silences*), ed. Semanti Ghosh (Calcutta: Gangcheel, 2008).

9 Narayan Gangopadhyay, *Bidisha*, in *Narayan Gangopadhyay Rachanavali* v. 9 (*Narayan Gangopadhyay's Works*) (Calcutta: Mitra and Ghosh, 1985), 26. This novel was first published in 1952.

10 Gargi Chakravartty, *Coming out of Partition*: *Refugee Women of Bengal* (New Delhi: Bluejay Books, 2005), 88–89.

11 By prevailing standards of middle-class respectability, professional acting was certainly a non-traditional career choice due to the "notoriety" of the entertainment industry. In the nineteenth century, Bengali theater opted to replace the male actors playing women's parts with women. However, since women's respectability demanded that they shun public visibility, elite and middle-class Hindu women did not participate in theater. Thus the women the theater companies were able to recruit were "public women" such as Binodini Dasi, 1862–1941, and Anglo-Indian women. The replacement of male actors with women elicited much criticism, particularly around questions of morality. (On the other hand, women in the Tagore family regularly participated in plays staged at home, but these were private performances with a select audience comprised of family members and invitees.) As in the case of theater, when it came to film production in the early twentieth century, mostly women from the Anglo-Indian community and socially marginalized women were willing to perform. Partition changed that. For many displaced families the financial need was so severe that women's careers in the entertainment industry came to be regarded as acceptable.

12 One area of displaced middle-class women's labor alluded to in many of the narratives but never detailed is sex work. Jyotirmoyee Devi refers to it euphemistically as women's descent into the "netherworld." In Salil Sen's play *Notun Ihudi* (*The New Jews*), first staged in 1951, Pari resorts to prostitution as a way to spare her family the burden of feeding and clothing her. In Sunil Gangopadhyay's novel *Arjun*, Purnima also takes to the flesh trade (see Chapter Four).

13 Chakravartty, *Coming out of Partition*, 86–87; 91. Rachel Weber's study offers a different perspective on the displaced working woman. See "Re(Creating) the Home: Women's Role in the Development of Refugee Colonies in South Calcutta," in Jashodhara Bagchi and Dasgupta Subhoranjan, eds. *The Trauma and the Triumph: Gender and Partition in Eastern India* v. 1 (Calcutta: Stree, 2003).

14 Chatterji, *Spoils of Partition*, 153–54.

15 See Manikuntala Sen, *Shediner Katha* (Calcutta: Nabapatra, 1982).

16 Ishita Chakravarty and Deepita Chakravarty argue, in "For Bed and Board Only," that in the domestic service sector, "Poor refugee women, in their frantic search for a means of survival, gradually drove out the males of the host population who were engaged in domestic service in urban West Bengal by offering to work for a very low wage and often for no wage at all" (581).

17 Narayan Gangopadhyay, "*Madhubanti*," in *Raktamonir Haré: Deshbhag-Swadhinatar Galpo Sankalan* (*In a Necklace of Garnets: Collection of Stories on Partition and Independence*) v. 1, ed. Debes Roy (Calcutta: Sahitya Akademi, 2005; first published 1999).

18 Elsewhere too literature has preserved traces of the shift from deep-seated bias to a gradual acceptance of middle-class women's labor. Studying representations of women's artistic labor in the writings of Victorian authors Anne Bronte, Diana

Craik, Elizabeth Gaskell, and Margaret Oliphant, Patricia Zakreski notes that in Britain in the nineteenth century, "Working women, who in the middle of the century had been represented as either victims of degrading circumstances or unfeminine creatures were now by the end of the century being seen as legitimate, self-sufficient and socially valuable members of a modern workforce" (185). Patricia Zakreski, *Representing Female Artistic Labour, 1848–1890: Refining Work for the Middle-class Woman* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006).

19 Dibyendu Palit, "*Machh*," in *Raktamonir Haré*. All page numbers refer to this text.

20 Ashok Mitra's 1968 essay, "Take a Girl Like Her," captures a typical day in the life of a hypothetical woman, displaced by the Partition and working as a school teacher:

> The girl gets up between 4.30 and 5 in the morning; one brother leaves for work at 6.15, so whatever cooking has to be done has to be done by 6; after serving tea and some breakfast to mother and the other brothers, she hurriedly gets ready. Two tuitions have to be crowded in before 9. … Hurrying back, she eats her lunch, arranges things for mother, and with silent, rapid efficiency completes the bulk of the washing-up. A run for the bus stop; she catches it, gets a seat, has her first moment of leisure since morning. … By the time she reaches school, it is past eleven, she is fifteen minutes late … from then on, it is a crowded agony. … In between, her only nourishment is perhaps a banana carried from home, and a cup of watery tea. She catches the bus again at 4.30, and pushes her way out at Sealdah. Her third tuition of the day; some days the child's mother offers her a cup of tea, plus a few snacks, but this does not happen every day. It is dusk; she collects some vegetables and sundries at Sealdah, and now, fatigue and dust and perspiration each nearly indistinguishable from the other, the bus to Garia. Back home, a brief wash, and the household chores left over from the morning. Feeding the mother, waiting for the brothers to return late in the evening, working out … what lessons to teach in the class the following day, matching the sums of a budget … stitching something or other … the flimsy meal late at night; sleep, merciful sleep, if it comes, another day, another monologue with hopelessness.
>
> (Ashok Mitra, "Take a Girl Like Her," *Calcutta Diary*. London: Frank Cass and Company, 1977, 18)

21 Palit, "*Machh*," 221.
22 Ibid., 223.
23 Ibid., 222.
24 Ibid.
25 Ibid.
26 Given that butchers were predominantly Muslims, and the story is set in Bihar where there was a tidal wave of anti-Muslim violence in retaliation for the attacks on Hindus in Noakhali and Tippera in 1946, the Butchers' Quarters locality deserted by its original inhabitants is a reminder of Partition's violence.
27 Palit, "*Machh*," 224.
28 Ibid.
29 Ibid., 219.
30 Mitra, "Take a Girl Like Her," 17.
31 Palit, "*Machh*," 225.
32 Ibid., 222.
33 Basu, "*Pasharini*," 204.
34 Ibid., 201.
35 Ibid., 195.
36 Ibid., 201.
37 Ibid.

38 Ibid., 202.
39 Ibid., 197.
40 Ibid.
41 Ibid., 198.
42 Ibid., 199.
43 Ibid., 204.
44 Jyotirmoyee Devi, *Epar Ganga Opar Ganga*, in *Jyotirmoyee Debir Racana-Sankalan* v. 1, eds. Subir Roy Chowdhury and Abhijit Sen (Calcutta: Dey's Publishing and School of Women's Studies, Jadavpur University, 1991), 142.
45 Stephanie Coontz, *The Way We Never Were: American Families and the Nostalgia Trap* (New York: Basic Books, 1992).
46 Ibid., 158–61.
47 Narendranath Mitra. *Mahanagar* (Calcutta: Mukunda Publishers, 1963).
48 Narendranath Mitra, *Durabhashini*, in *Narendranath Mitra Rachanabali*, ed. Niranjana Cakrabarti (Calcutta: Granthalaya, 1977–).
49 Author's note "A Few Words" (n.p.).
50 For instance, in *Abataranika*, Arati and Subrata have a daughter, Mandira, and a son, Bablu; in *Mahanagar* they have only one child, a son named Pintu.
51 Madhabi Mukherjee, mentioned earlier, played the part of Arati Majumdar in Ray's film.
52 Mitra, *Durabhashini*, 278.
53 Chakravartty, *Coming out of Partition*, 88.
54 I disagree with the critic Srikumar Bandyopadhyay's statement about *Durabhashini* that "The problems that [Beena and Kamala] face are applicable to any young woman working in an office, and does not have much to do with telephones" (707). Srikumar Bandyopadhyay, *Bangasahitye Upanyaser Dhara* (Calcutta: Modern Book Agency, 1962 revised and expanded fourth edition; originally published in book form in 1939). Instead, I contend that it is the specific demands of their profession, particularly, the night-shift work in combination with the operators' regular verbal contact with other men, which precipitates the crisis in Kamala's marriage.
55 In its current usage, "Anglo-Indian" refers to a person of mixed British (or European) and Indian ancestry. Formerly referred to as Eurasians, they form a very small interracial community in India, and many have migrated from India to other parts of the world, particularly, Britain, Canada, and Australia.
56 Kuntala Lahiri Dutt, "The Anglo-Indians of Calcutta," in *Calcutta: The Living City* v. 2, ed. Sukanta Chaudhuri (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1995), 69.
57 Mitra, *Durabhashini*, 269. Arati's Anglo-Indian colleague and friend Edith Simmons (in *Mahanagar*) and Beena's Anglo-Indian (male) supervisor (in *Durabhashini*) are indicators of the past dominance of this community in both fields. Mitra also exposes the prejudices regarding Anglo-Indian women through both Arati's boss Himanshu Mukherjee's innuendos concerning Mrs. Simmons' character, and her husband Subrata's disapproval of her intimacy with Mrs. Simmons.
58 See Sheba George, *When Women Come First: Gender and Class in Transnational Migration* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2005).
59 Mitra, *Mahanagar*, 23.
60 Ibid., 95.
61 Ibid., 67.
62 Ibid., 48.
63 Ibid., 2.
64 Ibid., 17.
65 Ibid., 2.
66 Ibid., 82.
67 Mitra, *Durabhashini*, 295.
68 Ibid.

69 Ibid.
70 Ibid., 296.
71 Ibid., 298–99.
72 Bandyopadhyay, *Bangasahitye Upanyaser Dhara*, 707.
73 Mitra, *Durabhashini*, 294.
74 Ibid.
75 Narendranath Mitra's writings not only focus on the pressures working women encountered within marriage, but they also celebrate the different life women experienced outside the restrictions of home and family, their ability to make (limited) financial decisions, and, perhaps most importantly, the widening of their horizons through new and lasting friendships they establish with their women colleagues. Arati Majumdar and Edith Simmons in *Mahanagar*, and Kamala Mukherjee and Beena Guhathakurta in *Durabhashini* derive much comfort from their companionship, and the colleague and friend is a confidante and a much needed respite from the resentments simmering at home.
76 Sabitri Chattopadhyay, "*Amar Katha: Ki kore nayika holam*," *Anandalok*, Pujo Sankhya (1990), 251.
77 Ibid., 238–69.
78 Ibid., 252–53; 258–69. Translation mine.

4 The diminished man

The mythic and the mundane

A deep melancholy and ambivalence surrounds Indian independence. Inextricably bound to its attainment are the dislocations and dispossessions that occurred with the Partition. The experience of displacement casts a pall over the postcolonial experience, so much so that, for many, the memory of it is doubly fraught – not only does it recall past suffering, it emblematizes present discontent as well. The felt inadequacy of the actuality of independence to the hopes it had kindled comes to take on the proportions of a full-scale civilizational crisis. In endeavoring to work through the memory of Partition violence, therefore, some Indian writers have taken recourse to an ancient epic imaginaire, particularly that of the *Mahabharata* – that tangled skein of narrative whose date, place, and purpose of composition seem destined to remain forever enigmatic. This enigmatic character of the *Mahabharata* is compounded by the dark mystery of its content, the text's near complete lack of moral orientation. Thus it seemed peculiarly suited as a guide from India's long past to its uncertain present. The epic too relates the dissolution of human bonds, contestations over territory, and a massive and senseless loss of human life. Like the postcolonial present, at the *Mahabharata*'s narrative core lies an unredeemable act of violence against civility, brotherhood, and women.

Sunil Gangopadhyay's Bengali novel *Arjun*[1] (1971) views the unfolding of Indian modernity through the lens of the epic, simultaneously invoking and distancing itself from that epic universe. It is not, as might be expected, nostalgic for the epic past. Rather, set between the late-1940s and 1970 and narrating the story of refugee families settled in a colony, the novel alludes to the *Mahabharata* only in the most oblique manner. The novel seems to summon the past to bear witness to the present instead of giving voice to a longing for a romanticized Time before time. On the one hand, the text traces the "fall" from epic magnificence. On the other, Gangopadhyay's *Arjun* affirms this fall as a fall into the enabling possibilities of modernity and modern individuality.

The character Arjun, from whom the novel takes its title, faces the predicament of subjectivity, and unlike his epic prototype, he constitutes the problematic individual of whom Lukács speaks (see below). In the end of the epic, the hero Arjuna[2] is essentially what he was at its beginning – there is no shift in his consciousness. He is an embodiment of certain virtues of the

community, and this is so even when he is on his solitary journeys gathering divine weapons and royal allies, and this is because Arjuna undergoes no "education." In re-situating the epic in the present, Gangopadhyay tracks how modernity has altered man's relationship with the community and thus reconstituted the structure of humanity. In so doing, he novelistically instantiates Lukács' argument about the relationship between epic and novel as a form: "The novel is the epic of an age in which the extensive totality of life is no longer directly given, in which the immanence of meaning in life has become a problem, yet which still thinks in terms of totality."[3] In this sense the novel conflates the Partition with the coming of modernity itself. At the same time, Gangopadhyay's deliberate and sustained invocation of the epic past, serves as a comment on the modernity that has come. It is a modernity predicated upon an unmastered past where individuals compulsively enact a past of which they are only dimly aware.

The first section of this chapter examines the novel in light of the *Mahabharata*, tracing Gangopadhyay's use of allusions from the epic. It focuses on the manner in which the characters consistently fail to comprehend the past, which condemns them to repetition. The second section builds on the first to study the dilemmas of the Partition's dislocated and dispossessed subject. The concluding section examines the dilemmas of another migrant subject – the woman.

Arjun in a divided maha-Bharata

Arjun's dates of composition (July 1970) and publication (October 1971) are momentous. The novel was written on the eve of another mass political struggle in South Asia – the Bangladesh liberation war. This struggle, when it ended in December 1971, left what had once been British India split three ways. (As a human tragedy the Bangladesh War equals or surpasses the Partition, with three million casualties, at least 200,000 women and girls violated, and ten million people, mainly Hindus, displaced to India.) Gangopadhyay's dedication of the novel "To the freedom fighters of Bangladesh" makes the connection explicit. Twenty-four years after the Partition, East Pakistan's freedom struggle and its eventual split from Pakistan retrospectively called into question the rationale behind the earlier partition at least to the extent that it demonstrated conclusively that religion alone was an insufficient basis of national identity. Of course, this does not mean that the anti-Partition position of the Congress was finally being endorsed by Bengali-speaking Muslims. As I noted in the Introduction, the liberation struggle in Bangladesh neither explicitly rejected the two-nation theory nor did it call for re-integration with West Bengal. Although at the time of writing and publishing *Arjun*, East Pakistan's split from Pakistan was still a distant prospect, the possibility of another fragmentation in the political geography of the subcontinent stirred memories of the 1947 Partition.

Structured in the form of a *bildungsroman*, Gangopadhyay's *Arjun* is set between the late-1940s and 1970. Its storyline spreads over twenty-six

years – the life of its eponymous hero – although the narrative *per se* covers only about two months. These two months are demarcated by the two failed attempts on Arjun's life. Interrupted by occasional first-person accounts by Arjun, omniscient third-person narration is used through most of the book. This technique allows for extensive exploration of the community – the residents of the refugee colony where Arjun has come to live. Clearly, Gangopadhyay is keen to draw out in all its complexity their group solidarity as well as the later dispersions of interest and the fault lines in their unity. Arjun's first-person narrations come in the form of dramatic monologues where he reflects upon his earlier life and the contrast between that and his present surroundings. They suggest his growing alienation from the community in which he was raised.

The hero of the novel is Arjun Roychowdhury. Born a few years before 1947, he spends the first eleven years of his life in his native village in Faridpur district, in East Pakistan. Eventually, in the mid-1950s, following fresh outbreaks of communal violence, he migrates to India together with his mother Shanti and older brother Somnath. In Calcutta, they spend their first few weeks on the platforms of the Sealdah Railway Station before settling down, along with other migrant families, on a vacant piece of land on the outskirts of the city. This vacant lot – owned by a certain Datta family – is christened Deshopran Colony by its new (and illegal) inhabitants. There the migrants spend the next fifteen years in a state of constant insecurity. Unable to cope with the pain of leaving his homeland and the difficulty of the urban life they have come to live, Arjun's brother Somnath gradually loses his sanity and dies. By contrast, Arjun adapts to his circumstances and manages to become an educated city-dweller, pursuing a career in chemistry. For the uneducated youth of Deshopran Colony unemployment is a continual threat, leading some men to enter into the unskilled labor sector, and some young women to choose prostitution. Taking advantage of the general discontent growing among these young men, an entrepreneur, Kewal Singh patronizes them to further his plans to extend his factory located on the edge of the colony. Befriending the resident pugilist Dibya and his gang, Singh secures their assurance of support towards evicting five of the families in the colony so that he can secure their land. When Arjun opposes the plan, one of Singh's henchmen makes an attempt on his life. At this point, when Arjun is recovering from the attack, two new characters are introduced – Arjun's research supervisor and friend Abaneesh Mukherjee and his sister Shukla. Meanwhile hiring Dibya and a handful of other unemployed colony-youth in his factory, Kewal Singh cunningly proceeds with his plans for expanding his business. Trusting Singh as their benefactor, the young men try to persuade the five families to fall in with his wishes and vacate the land. This leads to schisms among the residents, and particularly, in a decline in Dibya and Arjun's friendship. Unwilling to confront Arjun directly, Dibya satisfies his wrath by raping Labanya – a young woman from the colony attracted to Arjun. With the five families remaining obdurate, Singh abandons his attempts at persuasion and takes recourse to arson one night. The following morning he proceeds to consolidate his claim by building

a wall around his newly acquired territory. Arjun, finding the government and law enforcement ineffective, decides to dismantle the wall with the help of a small group of colony residents. Kewal Singh and his recruits – Dibya and other young men from the colony, Ratan, Sambhu, Nitai – resist them and, in the violence that ensues, Arjun is seriously injured. Recovering at the hospital he learns that his "guide" Abaneesh has intervened and by generating media attention compelled the government to register the land in the residents' names. This marks the refugees' final realization of Indian citizenship. This news and Shukla's delicate admission of love rejuvenate Arjun.

As a composite character, Gangopadhyay's Arjun blends qualities from the Pandava brothers from the *Mahabharata*. Like Sahadeva, he has a flair for learning. Like Arjuna, he has a good aim and is a self-described "archer."[4] His final violent encounter with Dibya is reminiscent of the Bheema–Duryodhana encounter at Kurukshetra (both the novel's Arjun and *Mahabharata*'s Bheema strike their opponent on the thigh). It is arson that forces Arjun and his mother and brother to leave their homeland – the novel specifically mentions the famous "house of lac" in connection with the burning down of their village home soon after his father's death.[5] Also, concentrating on a target – the eye of a falcon in a picture on a calendar in Shukla's room – Arjun replies, when Shukla asks him that he sees, "Nothing except the eye of the bird,"[6] an answer identical to that Arjuna famously gave to his teacher Dronacharya's identical query. Finally, just before the clash with Kewal Singh and his party (the Kauravas), Arjun, like his epic namesake, is overcome with reluctance towards attacking the other colony-men whom he considers his kinsmen. Dibya, like Arjun, is another composite character. He combines the traits of the Kaurava brothers in his growing rivalry with Arjun and his violation of Labanya for her impertinence. However, he most closely resembles Karna. This parallel is underscored when, on the eve of the confrontation, Arjun's mother Shanti approaches Dibya discreetly, requesting that he resolve his differences with Arjun, just as Kunti had done on the eve of the battle at Kurukshetra. Shanti reminds him that the two of them are like brothers and that she had been a sort of proxy mother to him, further, she attempts to extract a promise that he will not harm Arjun. Finally, Arjun's mentor and friend Abaneesh – whose name means "the lord of the world" and who intervenes to resolve the crisis in the colony, and to whose sister, Shukla, Arjun is attracted – is the novel's Krishna.

Correspondences between the other characters in the novel and the epic seem almost co-incidental. Like Draupadi, Labanya, whose feelings for Arjun remain unreciprocated, is molested by Dibya before a crowd of his associates. Her grandfather, popularly called Nishi Thakurda (grandfather), blinded by the colonial police for his nationalist activities, is clearly the novel's Dhritarashtra. (The naming of Labanya's father, who runs a laundry, as Biswanath, meaning "lord of the world," adds a touch of irony.) Apart from the obvious parallels in the struggle over land, there are also more subtle ones, such as the novel's five homes in place of the Pandava's request for five villages, or the faithful dog that follows Arjun's older brother Somnath around.

But Gangopadhyay's Arjun, although named after the invincible archer and hero of the *Mahabharata,* is a much lesser man than his namesake. No prince cheated of his kingdom, the novel's Arjun is an ordinary young man living in conditions imposed by the political and historical vicissitudes of a "split maha-Bharat."[7] His world is shrunken and to occupy it he must accommodate himself to scarcity and discontent. Gangopadhyay dramatizes this contrast when he has the young Arjun, migrating to India, grow ecstatic when given some rice, two eggplants, and two potatoes as alms. Excited at what he has received that day, he returns home and from the other side of the door says to his mother "look what I brought for you today,"[8] echoing Yudhishthira's famous announcement to Kunti after the Pandavas' triumphal return with Draupadi, whom Arjuna had won at her *swayamvar* ceremony. The distance between the world of the epic and the twentieth century of the novel is compassed by the divide between these two objects of desire. Similarly, when Arjun plays darts the parallel with the epic hero's great feats of archery again marks the smallness and frivolity of the present. And finally, the atrophying of the world is marked manifestly by the absence of the mythic communion between the humans and the celestials of the *Mahabharata*. The gods have long since departed from the world of *Arjun* and thus no divine assistance reaches Labanya when Dibya violates her, and nor is omniscient counsel available to Arjun when he vacillates before the "battle" with Kewal Singh's party. But beyond this rather obvious point, the romantic wistfulness for the time when gods and men dwelt together is re-doubled in Gangopadhyay's novel by his portrayal not of modernity *per se* but of post-Partition Indian modernity in particular.

While the parallels with the epic are obvious to the attentive reader, the characters remain locked in place, nescient of the presence of the epic past. Their echoing of epic utterances in new and changed circumstances seems cruelly ironic. The characters in the novel live scripted lives, and not only do they not know this but the metaphysical ground of that script is lacking in the new setting, leaving them doomed to wander the narrative landscape repeating uncomprehended fragments of the past. Only once is the characters' lack of awareness broken. This comes when Shukla laughs at Arjun's response when he targets the bird's eye and tells him that it reminds her of something else. But she refrains from any further elaboration.

Selecting the *Mahabharata* as his subtext, Gangopadhyay gathers together the long past of the Indian subcontinent. But the dramatic irony is that most of the characters remain incognizant of that past. Only by coming to terms with the past, by understanding its movement and their place in it can they comprehend their present circumstances. To truly inaugurate a new postcolonial society would require this. But instead, the characters simply echo the past, signaling that the past for them remains un-mastered. Rehearsing it over and over again, the characters enact a kind of repetition compulsion. They cannot become agents of history, but rather, they are marionettes who know neither who is pulling the strings nor indeed that they are history's puppets. The text

thus becomes a series of these unconscious compulsions, and the accumulated references to the *Mahabharata* add up to nothing except for a body of stray allusions.

Gangopadhyay's repeat-performance of the *Mahabharata* is bereft of epic splendor, seeking as it does a new more prosaic democratic aesthetic. And the Arjun–Shukla relationship is a good example of this: in the *Mahabharata*, Arjuna could successfully aspire to Krishna's sister Subhadra because after all both were from royal families, whereas in the novel, Arjun and Abaneesh's sister Shukla reach out to one another across a gaping class divide. Similarly, Arjun's predicament in the face of the approaching confrontation with Dibya and the others expresses a deeper concern for properly human suffering. For unlike Arjuna encountering his kin at Kurukshetra, Arjun has no blood-ties with his adversaries and yet they represent a larger family of the oppressed that Arjun has entered into. Similarly, it is not in the name of a (status quoist) philosophy of predestination or of the futility of human action that Arjun is urged into battle but rather, it is the sight of blood on his brother's pet dog that propels him into fighting to change the oppressive conditions of his fellow migrants' lives. In the absence of the gods and of divine guidance Arjun gains scope for genuine ethical agency. This is why, despite its mythic allusions, the real setting and subject of Gangopadhyay's *Arjun* is none other than the contradictions of modernity.

Arjun homeless in the modern world

The repeated scaling-down of epic sublimity is at one level a metaphor for the impossibility of reproducing the epic form in the modern age. Partition has fundamentally altered the world of the text. (*Arjun*'s relationship to the *Mahabharata*, unlike that of *Don Quixote*'s to the genre of medieval romances, is not one of parody.) Lukács, distinguishing between the epic and novel forms, points out that the two genres "differ from one another not by their authors' fundamental intentions but by the given historico-philosophical realities with which the authors were confronted."[9] In *Arjun*, among the many epochal social, political, and economic transformations that have made possible the transition from the universe of the epic to that of the novel, one fundamental change is signaled by way of a metaphor – the calendar advertising a foreign airline with a picture of a falcon in flight. It is a hyper-literalized image of the commodification of nature in modernity – it is not simply a photograph of a bird in flight, but the bird has become something it never was before – an aesthetic object. Nature has been endowed with aesthetic value and is being deployed to sell a product. While the marketing of the product appears somewhat unusual – the aircraft as a soaring falcon, a bird of prey, instead of say, a swan – the image allows Gangopadhyay to not only indicate precisely the general brutality of the new times, but also to evoke the full subsumption of social relations to capital and, more concretely, foreign capital.

However, multinational capital digging its talons into small game has less of a direct impact on the everyday lives of the colony-residents than the profit-oriented schemes of the local Punjabi entrepreneur Kewal Singh. These raise the specter of displacement for some of the refugee families. The choice of the Punjabi-Sikh industrialist is interesting given that the non-Bengali commercial community in Calcutta is dominated largely by Marwaris; hence, the use of a Punjabi condenses the image of the Partition with the new capitalism. For, the novel makes clear that in the intervening twenty-plus years since the Partition and the present of the novel, Kewal Singh has emerged as a capitalist – the owner of a plywood factory. He has succeeded in the only way now success is to be had. The migrant families, on the other hand, have remained squatters. They are now largely unemployed except for the few hired by Singh. Between the settlers and the capitalist there endures an existential conflict – the conflict between rapacious colonial capital and bare life. Singh not only enjoys the support of the original owners, the Dattas, but also that of the police, so that when he takes recourse to arson to evict the five squatter families, the law-enforcement personnel choose to look the other way. It is the particular nature of the political state that not only does its coming into being in 1947 dispossess and displace millions but also that in the postcolonial period it is under the control of the elite and thus unresponsive to the needs of the poor. It is only after Abaneesh Mukherjee intervenes and the press carries the story that the government is compelled to take action. The squatters are recognized as Indian citizens now that the state accepts their claim to the ownership of the land.[10]

If Arjun's older brother Somnath stands for truth and innocence, his insanity and early death suggest that neither has a place in mid-twentieth century Bengal. For the refugees it is a quotidian hand-to-mouth struggle. Arjun survives only because he recognizes this fact. But this knowledge also denies his character the pathos that surrounds his brother. Wistful for the pre-Partition past, Somnath grieves the loss of his idyllic childhood spent in the vast open spaces of his village. He suffers the painful severing of the umbilical cord with everything stable and ancestral. In the new post-Partition geography of the Indian subcontinent there is no place for him. The energies of the national movement, betrayed by the communalist politics that reached its terrible climax in the Partition, have dissipated into the dystopias of independent India and Pakistan. Growing up partly in undivided British India, it is the Partition that Somnath, in his insanity, repeatedly claims has been revoked. Their village home is never far off. It is for him a place of the familiar, of an accustomed way of life. Still there is no life there anymore. Of course, the very notion that modernity comes with Partition seems a misrecognition. For while it is true that South Asian modernity explodes in the postcolonial period on a mass scale, the complicity of the colonial past in creating that present – if not wholly culpable – can in no way be overlooked. The novel hints at this in its portrayal of Somnath's idealization of village life, which, the reader is told, comes from one stricken with memory-loss. Somnath simply does not

remember, or at best, can only remember selectively. The opacity of the past is figured as the inability to recall the actual experiences of one's own youth.

The hero Arjun, unlike his brother, vividly recollects his life in the village. But he refrains from romanticizing it and, with the single exception of the delirium-like outburst in the hospital after he is injured the second time, he does not consider returning there. This is not only because it would be close to impossible, but also becaus, he believes that his life in the city, even as a refugee, has improved qualitatively over that possible in the village. Ties to one's birthplace or ancestral home have been rendered less affective, and are, at best, only ancillary to his desires and ambitions. As Arjun says:

> Judged by any standard, there's no doubt that we are, in many ways, better off here than we had been in our home in East Bengal. … What's there to lament? If Pakistan hadn't been created, if we still lived in the village, then, at the most, I'd be a teacher in the village school. Could I expect more than that? Who would've given me the opportunity to pursue higher studies? My father didn't even have the means to buy my schoolbooks! And if I received a scholarship, I would have had to work in some Calcutta-Delhi like big city. Would I have ever returned to the village?[11]

Partition forced his move to the metropolis in a manner both violent and pitiless. And yet this brought with it life possibilities otherwise inconceivable. It has meant the opportunity to learn science and to see the world for what it is. Further, the memories of his childhood – the loss of his harmonica and the red-blue pencil, the theft of a favorite vest, all of which he was instructed to bear in silence because the miscreants belonged to the majority community (Muslim), and finally, the burning down of his family home – illustrate that his life as a minority Hindu in East Pakistan dominated by fear was by no means enviable.[12] He describes his loss rather hyperbolically, but no less poignantly, seeing it as part of a larger crisis:

> As a result of the Partition, numerous people have lost much. Some their lives, some, their all. If I say that I've lost my pencil and the mouth organ it might sound absurd. But those two were my only riches. I've lost my red-blue-silver childhood dreams.[13]

Arjun's ease with his new surroundings, his talented educational career and consequently, his prospects for upward social mobility, together with his general cosmopolitanism have set him apart from other colony-residents. His difference from them is marked even at the level of speech since he is the only resident of the colony who never uses the dialect of his East Bengal village. Instead, even in his first person narrations, he uses a distinctly Calcutta patois.[14] In a way, although he resides in the immigrant colony, he no longer belongs there. This is taken to a more literal level when towards the end of

the book Arjun discusses with his mother the possibility of moving out of the colony. (Is his leaving Deshopran Colony a precursor to migrating out of India? Trying to forestall the conflict with Singh, his mother suggests that in order to further his education, he journey to England. There is, thus, the possibility that he might move from the formerly colonized margins to the metropolitan center.) If home is "the place where one lives within familiar, safe, protected boundaries"[15] then his residence in the colony is no home. There he faces attempts upon his life. For an identical reason, his village, which he refers to, as is customarily done, as "*desh*" – meaning native land and usually overlaid with sentimentalism – might be his place of birth but is no home. For his part, Arjun's rejection of the provincial idiom and its attendant localisms, in other words his "difference," is a way of consciously separating himself from both his past (the village) and his community (the residents of the colony).[16] Thus through re-education of the self, possibilities may be opened up but these exist for the individual and not for the community as a whole.

Arjun's distancing himself from co-migrants is an area riddled with ambiguity. On the one hand, there is his reaction to Abaneesh's wife Maya's comment on the recent wave of East Pakistani migrants at the railway station in Sealdah. One morning, accompanying Shukla and her family on their way to a picnic in Naihati, Arjun hears Maya say, "Again, so many refugees have arrived!" Arjun reacts with:

> It was as if someone had suddenly punched me hard on the chest. … Looking around I found swarms of refugees crowding the platform – most of them peasants, laborers; a few were awake, most were still asleep. One sleeping woman looked like Amala*di* – whose mutilated body had been found in the jute fields. It was as if Amala*di* had somehow regained her life and fled. Yet, so far I had not even noticed them. At one time, I'd lain on the platform, like them, beside mother. Today I was so absorbed in conversing with a beautiful young woman that I wasn't even aware in the least of the hordes of people like me. They'd had homes, land-holdings now like beggars and orphans they were seeking charity. I'd found shelter, I'd been saved, so I no longer cared about them. And we complain about the indifference of the people of West Bengal![17]

There is an immediate identification with the migrants, and at the same time a recognition that his adjustment to circumstances requires a denial of his past. The reference to Amala, Arjun's young, beautiful, and widowed co-villager, is particularly evocative, since it is the sight of her raped and severed body that set off Somnath's fainting fits marking the general deterioration of his sanity. It had been one of the first signs of the approaching violence that eventually compelled his family to leave forever their village home.

Juxtaposed with the above is Arjun's non-responsiveness to a fellow migrant from the east, Subimal. Owner of an aluminum factory, Subimal

resides in a house befitting a "movie-star"[18] in an affluent neighborhood in South Calcutta, and is clearly prosperous. Arjun's narration nevertheless exposes in Subimal a degree of pretentiousness that extends beyond his expensive living room furnishings.

> In SubimalBabu's house everyone spoke the *bangal* dialect. To outsiders they were punctilious Calcuttans but at home they were hard-core *bangal*. Not all their accents fell at the right places, listening to them it felt like they were learning a new language. In nineteen forty-seven SubimalBabu and his family had ended their connections to eastern Bengal, they were able to bring much of their wealth – and then, their business did well here. But, their attachment to the land they left behind twenty-three years ago was tremendous. … When he heard that I was from Faridpur, he came forth and almost hugged me. … But I couldn't feel close to SubimalBabu and his family – I remained awkward throughout. It was a co-incidence that we had both left behind our homes in Faridpur, but we'd nothing in common – a huge gulf separated us. I was his brother-in-law's friend, a good student at Presidency College, so as his native countryman he wanted to hug me, would he do the same to those sleeping on the platforms of Sealdah Station?[19]

The emotional attachment which Subimal claims he bears to his "native place" is manifestly disingenuous. Needless to say, what separates Subimal from Arjun is the fact of class. It is class that makes Subimal a "foreigner"[20] to the intense struggle for survival Arjun has endured and the reason for the literal impossibility of a dialogue between them. However much Subimal might claim to identify with the people from eastern Bengal by speaking the regional dialect, and reminiscing about physical geography, theirs is a world he cannot enter because he has not participated in the unfolding of its history. Arjun's empathy for the displaced peasants and laborers at Sealdah Station is replaced here with a sharp critical note when he adds that the migrant elite have only sighed over the loss of creature comforts – hilsa and date palm *gur* (treacle) – and not the sufferings of the dispossessed. Further, Arjun's distracted silence while Subimal continues to gush about his homeland itself censors middle-class romanticizing of pre-migration life – "… What's there in West Bengal? Show me a river worth its name! In our East Bengal there were so many expansive rivers. Living next to such vastness, the human heart too grows generous. The thought of the Padma, Meghna still sends shivers in me, just look, I have goose bumps."[21] Yet, despite his alienation from Subimal, and his identification with the squatters at Sealdah Station, Arjun is aware that, ultimately, the railway platform is not a place to which he can, or would even want to, return.

On a literal level Arjun's homelessness is suggested by his repeated changes in living quarters: from his home in the village, to temporary shelters on the way out of East Pakistan, to railway platforms of Bongaon and later Sealdah,

to Deshopran Colony, to someplace outside the colony, and perhaps eventually to England. In Gangopadhyay's novel *Purba-Paschim*[22] (*East-West*, 1988) too Hareet Mandal, an underclass Partition-migrant, is displaced from his native village to Netaji Colony – the forcibly occupied land in Kashipur;[23] from there to Coopers' Camp; and then pushed out of West Bengal to a camp in Charbetia; then to Kurud Camp; to Sonagora Camp; to Subhash Colony; to Marichjhapi in the Sundarbans islands; his destination following the massacre on the island is not mentioned. The Bengali words for displaced peoples, "*chhinnamul*" literally meaning "torn roots," and "*udbastu*" meaning "uprooted" seem inadequate in these contexts because not only has the Partition uprooted Arjun (and Hareet) but it also refuses to allow the displaced to put roots down anywhere else. However, Arjun's restlessness does not stem from the loss of a physical dwelling place. While Somnath could take comfort believing that returning to the village would restore his home and the old life he loved, there is no simple solution for Arjun. His homelessness is altogether different and more intractable. It is an ontological condition. There seems to be a fundamental deficiency within, perhaps an absence of meaning. And in the awareness of this lack, Arjun is radically alone. But, of course, it is this that has brought on the project of subjectivity.

Arjun claims that there is no place for him in the other space that he inhabits – the elite world of Shukla. When she visits him in the hospital towards the end of the novel, he tells her "I am too far-off from your world – that's why I don't want to bother you. You have such a beautiful life, I don't exactly have a place in it – I know that."[24] Shukla's "beautiful life" has less to do with her finances than it does with her general *joie de vivre* (although, undoubtedly it is her family's wealth that makes her lifestyle possible). Her camaraderie seems to be the only diversion from the growing resentments and violence that beleaguer Arjun in the colony. Although both Shukla and Subimal are of the professional class, Arjun's sense of not belonging where Shukla is concerned cannot be compared with his alienation from Subimal. Whereas Arjun's rejection of the parvenu world of Subimal is marked by disdain, his inability to find a place in Shukla's is marked by melancholy. If Arjun remains indifferent to the other spaces of community available to him, it is the distance that Shukla maintains, despite her cordiality, which keeps him apart. Her remoteness is crystallized not only in his mention of her being "a very faraway person"[25] but also in his comparing her with the Taj Mahal (the resonances of beauty and love, as well as the suggestion of the coldness of stone, would be difficult to miss).

On a symbolic level, Shukla represents an ideal, an ideal seemingly within reach, but always eluding his grasp – she escapes Arjun's attempt to hold her hand with a graceful pirouette. And this inaccessibility makes her all the more precious and deepens Arjun's longing for her. (By contrast, his co-migrant Labanya, plain, a mediocre student at best and attracted to him, poses no challenge. She exemplifies the mundane and Arjun disregards her.) Attended by confidence and refinement, Shukla represents a certain fullness of life,

while remaining almost delightfully indifferent to the fact of money. If Arjun's search for a home is a metaphor for a quest for a certain metaphysical something – it is perhaps for this exuberance of life. And Shukla, whose name variously means "light," "bright," "clean," "pure," embodies that unbounded joy of life and is, therefore, the author of meaning.

If there is any antidote to Arjun's crisis, it is, needless to say, Shukla's love. At the end of the novel, immediately after she subtly confides her sentiments towards him, he exultantly asserts:

> Ah, to be alive is such bliss! … Nurse, please help me sit up higher! There's no pain in my chest any more – my head's clear – I'll certainly live! I'll live! I love living. They wanted to kill me, but I'll not die. Since childhood I've had several close brushes with death. I could've died at any point on that unbearable journey out of the village. When the two men in Khulna grabbed mother, or on the Bongaon station platform where some of the boys my age died of cholera in quick succession – or even after coming to the colony … twice they attempted to kill me. They won't succeed, they'll never succeed. I'll live. I'll certainly live.[26]

Just before this Arjun hears of the government's intervention in the problems in the colony, and while he is relieved, the note of joy so prominent in the above passage is absent there. These three paragraphs provide the strongest reaffirmation of life and, in a way, embody the spirit of the difficult struggle of those dislocated and dispossessed by the political division of the subcontinent. Arjun's repetitions of "I'll live" are at one level, forced. And yet, the narrative has demanded this response even as it shows the near impossibility of passing through the ordeals that give it force.

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Gangopadhyay draws upon the epic past to narrate the history of the present. By setting his scene in the aftermath of the Partition he insists that the new is both supremely modern and yet wholly dominated by an unmastered past. Even with its epic backdrop, the social-realist mode of *Arjun* accompanied by Gangopadhyay's minimalist style evokes both the complexity and the harshness of migrant life.

This chapter, following the main plot of the novel, has focused on the story of Arjun. One issue given some acknowledgement in the novel, although not developed with as much detail as the life of Arjun, is the gendered experience of displacement. In addition to the instances of intimate violence that may constitute reasons for emigration (Amala), and those that occur during the process of migration (anonymous young women), Gangopadhyay, through the stories of two young colony-women, Labanya and Purnima, offers an optic into the difficult struggles of dislocated and dispossessed women. As I discussed in Chapter Three, for many Bengali migrant women, Partition

transformed the gendered division of social space by compelling them to become wage earners in order to resuscitate the family economically. Thus, Labanya dreams of securing someday a position as a school teacher, which, she feels, will bestow on her the social esteem for which she craves. But whereas for Arjun, success comes through higher studies, for Labanya power failures and the trauma of rape stand in the way of her graduation and prospects for a better life.[27] Her efforts and resolve ("I must pass this time. I have to")[28] as she prepares to take the B.Sc. examination a second time, are thwarted by Dibya. Psychologically destabilized by the violence to which she has been subjected, her delirium centers around death and, on the destruction of the site of the violent act – her body: "Kill me, kill me, why didn't you just kill me?" and "I am dead, indeed. All around me is Hell. Oh, my body burns! Ma, my body is ablaze!"[29] After she recovers from the initial shock, she refrains from speaking. Both the similarities between Labanya's situation and Arjun's – they strive to rise above their present conditions, both are attacked in the colony – and the contrasts in the respective outcomes – his success/her failure, his loquaciousness/her silence, his celebration of life/her death-wish – are elicited with precision. With the exception of Arjun's scholarly merits, the differences in the way things unfold for Labanya and Arjun are crossed by lines of gender. Purnima, like Arjun, is the provider for her family, but is compelled to keep her work secret, and seems deserving only of Arjun's pity and disgust. She is employed in the flesh trade. Labanya and Purnima must contend with displacement, privation like Arjun and Dibya, and then, some more. By bringing their sufferings into relief Gangopadhyay marks how for Partition's underclass women-victims, the prospect of home – a zone of safety, security, comfort, and happiness – seems much, much farther away.

Notes

1 Sunil Gangopadhyay, *Arjun* (Calcutta: Ananda, 1995; first published 1971). All page numbers refer to this text.
2 In case of the names from the *Mahabharata*, I have retained the Sanskrit spelling using "a" at the end of the name. This is most importantly to distinguish the epic's Arjuna from the novel's Arjun.
3 Georg Lukács, *The Theory of the Novel* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press. 1971), 56.
4 Gangopadhyay, *Arjun*, 53.
5 Ibid., 23.
6 Ibid., 74.
7 Phrase used by Jyotirmoyee Devi in the preface to her novel *Epar Ganga Opar Ganga* to describe partitioned India.
8 Gangopadhyay, *Arjun*, 27.
9 Lukács, *The Theory of the Novel*, 56.
10 On the other hand, the refusal of the state to intercede may be suggested as a positive sign, of the vitality of Indian democracy, instead of its functioning simply as a paternalistic state.
11 Gangopadhyay, *Arjun*, 50–52.
12 Mahasweta Devi's novel *6-i Decemberer Por* (*After December 6*) captures the fears of Muslim minorities in India in the aftermath of the razing of the Babri Mosque

on December 6, 1992, by Hindu fanatics. This novel illustrates the intensified feelings of vulnerability in an underclass Muslim man – Asgar, a carpenter – who takes shelter in the house of a Hindu widow, Ketaki. The narrative examines his panic which divests him of control even over his bodily functions – a metonymy for the total loss of self-control. Asgar is eager to remain invisible to the public eye and stays concealed in a room on the terrace and uses the living space of the house only after dark. Also, in this novel, a Muslim woman, Shabina, takes refuge in the house of her friend and Ketaki's neighbor, the young radical Ruchira. Mahasweta Devi, *6-i Decemberer Por* (Calcutta: Karuna Prakashani, 1994).

13 Gangopadhyay, *Arjun*, 17.
14 While the narration is mostly in standard Bengali, Gangopadhyay navigates between multiple linguistic registers deploying the differences in *ghoti* (people from West Bengal) and *bangal* (originally from East Bengal) speech, as well as those between different economic classes.
15 Biddy Martin and Chandra Talpade Mohanty, "What's Home Got to Do with it?" in Mohanty's *Feminism without Borders* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003), 90.
16 Community is later identified with "national community" when Arjun, pondering whether it would be ethical to attack his opponents, extends a feeling of kinship towards Kewal Singh because he like Arjun himself "is from the same country" (103).
17 Gangopadhyay, *Arjun*, 58.
18 Ibid.
19 Ibid., 58–59.
20 Ibid. 59.
21 Ibid.
22 Sunil Gangopadhyay, *Purba-Paschim* (Calcutta: Ananda, 1988–89).
23 The story of Hareet Mandal and his cohorts' forcible occupation, or *jabardakhal*, of a vacant plot of land in Kashipur owned by the Sarkars bears resemblance with the story of the Deshopran Colony residents in *Arjun*. Like the Dattas in *Arjun*, the Sarkars too are in the process of conducting negotiations with a Punjabi cardboard factory owner for sale of the land when the refugees settle there.
24 Gangopadhyay, *Arjun*, 108.
25 Ibid., 71.
26 Ibid., 109–10.
27 While educated elite women like Amala's sister, Kamala, have found employment as college professors, there are very few choices for underclass women.
28 Gangopadhyay, *Arjun*, 2.
29 Ibid., 91.

5 Geographies of belonging
Home and the persistence of memory

In Ritwik Ghatak's film *Komal Gandhar* (*E-Flat*; 1961), set in the post-Partition period, theater troupe performers Anasuya and Bhrigu arrive in an Indian border-town situated on the banks of the River Padma. In a sequence set on the riverbank, Anasuya and Bhrigu pause at a set of stopped train tracks and gaze meditatively across the waters. Then, Anasuya says:

> Do you know the other side is East Bengal! This is the Padma, I didn't realize that earlier. Somewhere on that bank is my ancestral home [*desher bari*]. … The word, I think, is tranquility, that's what my gran'ma used to say, and that tranquility, it seems, is something we'll never get back. It feels like we have become people of the river bank. … Whenever I think of home, the waters and the little crossings come to mind. …

After a long pause, Bhrigu replies:

> My ancestral home is also on that side. There, you can see the houses. So close and, yet, I'll never be able to reach them again – it's a foreign country [*bidesh*]. Do you know what I was doing when you said that somewhere on that side is your ancestral home? I was looking for my own home because my home is nowhere else but there. On the train tracks where we were standing, just there I would get off the train from Calcutta, a steamboat would wait to take me to the other side, where Ma would be waiting. Standing there something amusing occurred to me – at that time, the train tracks had been a plus sign, but now they're a minus sign. There the land has been cleaved in two.

For the displaced, the ancestral homeland, their *desh*, has become a place of memories of childhood, a place of tranquility, of an accustomed way of life, a topography and ecology which were theirs. *Desh*, one's own land, is set in contrast with *bidesh*, a foreign country. Wistfulness over the lost home/homeland suffuses the cinema of Ritwik Ghatak,[1] novels and short stories on the Partition, and the memoirs of East Bengali migrants – in short, much of the artistic productions in the post-Independence years.

Like Anasuya and Bhrigu, for millions in the Indian subcontinent, the Partition definitively severed their birthplace from their homeland (and nationality). This severing of the two was further exacerbated by inter-community violence and forced evictions. In Partition fiction the agonizing experience of leaving home is frequently explored through women's attachment to the home.[2] The loss of family, possessions, and of a way of life, is presented compellingly in Jhumpa Lahiri's short story, "A Real Durwan,"[3] included in her collection, *Interpreter of Maladies* (1999). The tale of Boori Ma ("old mother" or "old woman") is one of unending loss. Among Partition's many displaced, Boori Ma takes refuge under the stairwell of an apartment building in Calcutta and serves as its gatekeeper. A homeless woman herself, she protects the homes of others – the irony is conspicuous. In a voice "brittle with sorrows,"[4] and an accent that marks her as East Bengali, Boori Ma regularly narrates to the tenants living in the building, "the details of her plight and losses suffered since her deportation to Calcutta after Partition."[5] The displacement to Calcutta has stripped her of her family – a husband and four daughters – and of property – a brick house, an expensive armoire, and "a number of coffer boxes."[6] Having lost everything she held precious, Boori Ma refuses to let go of her keys to her coffer boxes, the last vestige of her past. The set of keys is a fond reminder of her authority over her home and of more comfortable times. Her past affluence stands in sharp contrast to her present helplessness and she relishes reminiscing about her life "there," even exaggerating it as a way to compensate for losses she endured:

> "At our house, we ate goat twice a week. We had a pond on our property, full of fish." … "A man came to pick our dates and guavas. Another clipped hibiscus. Yes, there I tasted life. Here I eat my dinner from a rice pot." … "Have I mentioned that I crossed the border with just two bracelets on my wrist? Yet, there was a day when my feet touched nothing but marble. Believe me, don't believe me, such comforts you cannot even dream them."[7]

Endlessly re-telling her tale, Boori Ma re-lives her past every day. Her memory, however, is shaky. She offers diverse accounts of her migration, sometimes describing "how she had crossed the East Bengal border, with the thousands of others on the back of a truck between sacks of hemp," and at others, she "insisted that she had come to Calcutta on a bullock cart."[8] Post-traumatic stress has divested her of her memory. But for Boori Ma, the dispossessions and displacements occasioned by Partition continue in Calcutta where she is robbed of her keys and her savings, and accused of conspiring to rob the tenants in the building, she is evicted from her "home" under the stairwell. Her loquaciousness is replaced by her entreaty, "Believe me, believe me." Repeatedly displaced, she walks away carrying only her broom. This is evocative of a desire to sweep away the footfalls of a history that has robbed

her of her past, her home, her family, her possessions, and her community. She has been rendered placeless, again.

Boori Ma lost in the midst of a big city, cuts a wretched figure. Like Boori Ma, Kalyani, in Taslima Nasreen's *Phera*[9] (*The Return*, 1993), is uprooted from her home in East Pakistan, and banished for her "safety" from the life she expected to live. But unlike Boori Ma who passively mourns her loss, Kalyani refuses to accept her exile as final and, thirty years after she was sent away, she attempts to reclaim her home and homeland by journeying back to her hometown Mymensingh, in Bangladesh. Like Kalyani, the unnamed narrator of Hasan Azizul Huq's *Agunpakhi*[10] (lit. *Firebird*, or *Phoenix*; 2006) fights back. But her fight begins even earlier: she refuses to emigrate from her homeland. *Agunpakhi* tells the story of a woman who rejects the creation of the new Muslim "homeland" as political chicanery, and, like Amma in Ismat Chughtai's Urdu story "*Jadein*" ("Roots"), she refuses to simply pack up and leave. This middle-aged Muslim woman settled in rural West Bengal, India, defies patriarchal mandates regarding wifely duty, going so far as to detach herself (unwillingly) from the marital bond.

The first section of this chapter, "Dwelling in loss," treats Kalyani's detailed recollections of her home and homeland, in other words, her "hyperremembering," as a response to the trauma of displacement.[11] But Kalyani, like Boori Ma, embellishes, even distorts. This section examines how – in chronicling Kalyani's fixation with the past, her psychological refashioning of her hometown into a lost paradise, through to the eventual shattering of the illusion of home and homeland upon her "return" – the novel illuminates memory as a site of imprisonment. The second section, "The sky's no different there," examines the home as a place for the staging of the self, a place for transformations, a place where the biographical blends into the historical. It is a place of memory, but of a different kind of memory from those in *Phera*. It explores how the narrator's refusal to relocate to East Pakistan challenges the idea of religiously defined nationhood, rejecting the demands made on women both by the patriarchal family and national-religious patriarchy. Through the two protagonists, Kalyani and the unnamed narrator, the two sections map the home as a place of memory and the refusal to let home become a memory.

Dwelling in loss

In *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, Hannah Arendt writes of displaced peoples that:

> The first loss which the rightless suffered was the loss of their homes, and this meant the loss of the entire social texture into which they were born and in which they established for themselves a distinct place in the world. This calamity is far from unprecedented; in the long memory of history, forced migrations of individuals or whole groups of people for political or

> economic reasons look like everyday occurrences. What is unprecedented is not the loss of a home but the impossibility of finding a new one.[12]

The passage captures the protagonist Kalyani's condition in Nasreen's *Phera* (*The Return*). On account of her young age, her female gender, her dependent status, and as a member of the minority community in East Pakistan, she is among the "rightless." But did Kalyani have a home, in the first place? The architects of her uprooting, her parents, rationalize their decision to send her to India as an act of love – a way of protecting her from possible bodily violation by preempting it altogether. It is an acknowledgement of their minority anxieties as Hindus in Muslim-majority Pakistan. Her parents fear that they will be subject to persecution and without recourse to justice. This forcible removal from her birthplace, her hometown, or the loss of what Arendt calls "a distinct place" within the social fabric, is the origin of Kalyani's trauma. For her, "the impossibility of finding a new [home]" arises from an incapacity to re-engage with, or a willful turning away from, the present, and this is rooted in her all-consuming fixation with the past. (Kalyani's connection to the home/homeland hovers somewhere between a traditional attachment to locality and a romanticized attachment to the *heimat*. Unlike so many literary protagonists – V.S. Naipaul's Santosh ("One out of Many"), or Bobby (*In a Free State*), or Bharati Mukherjee's Jyoti (*Jasmine*), to name a few – for whom the departure from the home/homeland is frequently associated with the freedom and opportunity to shape one's destiny, for Kalyani leaving home is an irredeemable loss.)

Dedicated "To Exiles," *Phera* captures the insecurity and homesickness of the migrant, in this case, the woman migrant. While set mostly during Kalyani's return to Mymensingh, the narrative moves between Mymensingh and Calcutta, and covers the period from the 1960s through the early 1990s.[13] (As mentioned in the Introduction, the patterns of Bengali Hindu migrations from East Pakistan/Bangladesh into India happened over many years, in small and large numbers, a process determined by political developments and periodic eruption of communal hostilities. These cross-border movements over an extended period of time constitute what Vazira Zamindar calls "the long Partition."[14]) A schematic of Kalyani's movements is as follows: Mymensingh (long ago past) = Happiness → Calcutta (recent past) = Unhappiness → Mymensingh (present) = Unhappiness → Calcutta (future). Within these larger movements, there are also micro-movements in Calcutta.

Phera offers an extended meditation on the (im)possibility of returning home. In 1962 when Kalyani is a young woman living in Mymensingh, East Pakistan, her parents, concerned about their daughter's safety, decide to send her and her two brothers to Calcutta to live with their uncle and his family. Having recently commenced her college studies and met her first love, Badal, Kalyani is reluctant to leave, but her protests are to no avail. Her life in Calcutta is lonely. But despite the difficulties at her relatives' home, she acquires a college education, finds employment as a school teacher, marries

Anirban, and settles down. But through the years she nurtures the hope of returning to Mymensingh, and thirty years after she left home, she keeps the promise she made to her friends and to Badal to return to them. Arriving in her hometown with her son Deepan, Kalyani is bewildered by the changes. The landscape is unrecognizable: her childhood home has been demolished and the local temple has been replaced by a mosque; the people too have changed: the cold reception she receives from her former best friend Sharifa dismays her; and even the geography has altered: the Brahmaputra River's wide expanse has shrunk to a thin stream. Her childhood home and friendships destroyed, the only memento from her past is the black plum tree (*Syzygium cumini*) her grandfather planted, and its presence rouses a torrent of emotions.

To set Kalyani's condition against a wider history of forced homelessness, migration, and "rightless"-ness, Nasreen aligns Kalyani's pain with that of the narrator in Rabindranath Tagore's poem "*Dui Bigha Jomi*" ("*Two Bighas of Land*").[15] Indeed, the poem operates as a subtext for the entire novel. In Tagore's poem, the first-person narrator, Upen, is evicted from his ancestral home when his two-bigha piece of land is usurped by the local landlord. Homeless, Upen joins a holy man's band of followers and drifts around the country for over fifteen years, but feeling homesick, he eventually returns to his ancestral village. His quarters are gone and the only vestige of his past is a mango tree, beneath which he sits and weeps recollecting his boyhood days. Upen is subsequently accused of theft by the landlord when he picks up two mangoes that have fallen off the tree. In *Phera*, the correspondence with Tagore's poem, in addition to thematic similarities, is plainly evoked through Kalyani's repeated recalling of her ancestral home as occupying two bighas of land and in the episode where Kalyani, sitting under the black plum tree her grandfather planted, is rudely accosted by the residents of the block of apartments that has replaced her home. As with Upen, the original owner has become a trespasser. For Upen and Kalyani, with their dwellings destroyed, the tree is a signpost of their lost past, a reminder of happier times. The mango tree and the black plum tree have set down their roots and remained. The two humans, on the other hand, have been uprooted and rendered homeless.

In Calcutta, Kalyani is out of her element. To shield herself from her trials in Calcutta – persistent ridicule by her kin on account of her East Bengali accent, her feeling of isolation, the unwanted fondling by her male cousin – she constructs Mymensingh as a place of safety and security, friendship and romance, the one place where she belongs. Over the years she constructs a fantasy whereby East Pakistan/Bangladesh in its beauty, bounteousness, and harmony is nothing short of utopian, and a happy escape from the present. (The rhetoric of utopia is particularly germane both as a place of perfection and, given the word's etymological derivation from Greek οὖ/*ou* (no, not) and τόπος/*topos* (place) meaning "no place," or a place that does not exist. In other words, Kalyani's East Pakistan/Bangladesh has no actual correlative in the present.) The here/there binary that sustains Kalyani's fantasy life, piles

the positives on one side – the meager waters of the River Bhagirathi-Hooghly do not compare with the plenitude of the Brahmaputra; the riverside in Calcutta reeks of marijuana whereas the breeze off the Brahmaputra is fresh and fragrant; the Calcutta *rasogolla* fails in taste when compared with the *monda* from Muktagachha; Western Bengalis (*ghoti*) are self-absorbed and stingy, but the Eastern Bengalis (*bangal*) are compassionate and generous; here she is a school teacher, but there she would have been a barrister; her husband Anirban's affections cannot match the love and passion of her college sweetheart Badal. Kalyani absurdly imagines re-inhabiting her space of comfortable familiarity by designing her Calcutta residence to resemble her family's sprawling home in Mymensingh.

Kalyani chooses to remain deaf to any criticism of East Pakistan, so much so that she calls her younger brother, Parimal, a liar rather than accept that Hindu–Muslim relations in East Pakistan/Bangladesh had degenerated significantly. When she fulsomely praises East Pakistanis with "never seen people so humble, so honest, and good-hearted as in my country,"[16] her husband Anirban checks her rhetorical extravagance with a reminder of strained relations between Hindus and Muslims:

– People filched guavas from your trees.
– That was just during Lakshmi puja!
– Parimal says some people even pelted stones at your house
– Rubbish. Why would they?
  Kalyani frowns as she answers.
– Weren't they people from your neighborhood?
  Anirban asks again.
– Parimal tells egregious lies. Our neighbors would throw stones? They would give up their lives if possible.
– Nothing happened to your family in the '64 riots?
– Those were between Bengalis and Biharis, not amongst Bengalis. Maybe a few incidents occurred in rural areas, but we didn't experience anything.
– But weren't you in Calcutta already?[17]

Kalyani either remembers selectively or simply goes into denial when witnesses and other migrants' accounts threaten to undo her vision of happy neighborly harmony. In fact, as her waffling response suggests, her characterization of the communal riots of 1964 is plainly false.[18] And this raises the question: does Kalyani really remember or has time gilded the rough edges of truth, and nostalgia rendered the lost object into an *idée fixe*? While it is an unconscious process, for Kalyani "memory is no longer a recovery or repetition of physical traces, but a reconstruction of the past under conditions determined by the present."[19] It "is no longer related to the past as a form of truth but as a form of desire."[20] (It is precisely this "difference between history and memory" in the personal reflections of Hindu Bengali migrants from Pakistan in the anthology entitled *Chhere Asha Gram* (*The Village Left Behind*, 1975) that is

the subject of Dipesh Chakrabarty's essay "Remembered Villages."[21]) Her recollections construct a narrative whose "meaning is constituted retroactively and repeatedly, and forgetting is embedded as an integral principle, for the activity of ceaseless interpretation involves both selection and rejection."[22] Her constant, and selective, reminiscing has taken the place of reality both in the past and the present.[23] Her account is more a refraction than a reflection of the past, and sometimes even an outright distortion. Kalyani's memory is "unconscious of its successive deformations, vulnerable to manipulation and appropriation."[24] "Insofar as it is affective and magical, [it] only accommodates those facts that suit it."[25] When history and present circumstances conflict with her memory, as in the case of the harassment of minorities in East Pakistan, she rejects the facts out of hand. Almost reflexively, she creates a distortion, something that she can live with. She creates a "fantastic memory" but her pathology is rooted in a pathological history. It is a history that has forced her, and many others like her, into unbearable situations, forcing them to give up their homes, communities, and everything that was familiar to them and transplant themselves in new settings.[26]

Kalyani's denial of communal disharmony is essential to her romantic reconstruction of the Mymensingh of her youth. For one thing, it offers her the possibility of imagining that, had she not been sent away to Calcutta, she might have had the opportunity to make a life with Badal. And it is the unlimited promises of that un-lived past – especially, her interrupted romance with him, which she mourns for thirty years. Since communal concord is essential for her inter-community romance with Badal (a Muslim)[27] to thrive socially, she refuses to recognize the situation that comes to prevail in East Pakistan. Given that Kalyani places so much faith in inter-community harmony, the narrative uses it to create tension between remembrance and the reality, a tension due to which both memory and reality are ultimately defeated. Her romanticization of Hindu–Muslim relations receives a shock when she hears of the game her friend Sharifa's children play, a game called "Ants." In it, the children kill red ants (fire ants) which the children regard as Hindu while protecting the non-stinging black ants which they consider Muslim. Beginning with the children's game, the tension between the two escalates further when she sits under the black plum tree and weeps while the crowd gathered around her speculates loudly, and resentfully, about her motives. Finally, the very connection between the past and the present snaps when her friend Sharifa's husband Atahar's dinner conversation about the violence around the Babri Mosque in India consciously estranges Kalyani. He tells her:

> Give us some updates on the Babri Mosque. You all are slaughtering us to bits over there.
>
> – What do you mean us? Kalyani asked.
>
> – Us meaning Muslims, what else.
>
> Kalyani's fingers moving through her plate of fried rice and curried meat stopped.[28]

For Atahar, anonymous and alien Indian Muslims living across international borders are still part of his imagined community of "us," whereas Hindu Kalyani, Mymensingh-born and his wife's childhood friend, is part of the massacring other.[29] Recognizing her placelessness in the land of her birth Kalyani refrains from putting vermilion in the parting of her hair the following day because its use will identify her as Hindu at first glance. This act is, in fact, her acknowledgement to herself that she cannot have a home in contemporary Bangladesh under the prevailing social and political circumstances. Both her house in Mymensingh and her psychological home there are demolished.

***

Sympathetic to the migrant's loss but not to her nostalgia, *Phera* serves as a cautionary tale against allowing the past to overshadow the present. In obsessing over the past, Kalyani moves beyond what Sigmund Freud describes as mourning, towards melancholia.[30] Mourning, according to Freud, is "the reaction to the loss of a loved person, or to the loss of some abstraction which has taken the place of one, such as one's country, liberty, an ideal, and so on." However, in some people it produces a deeper malaise, "In some people the same influences produce melancholia instead of mourning and we consequently suspect them of a pathological disposition."[31] "Melancholia" he says:

> borrows some of its features from mourning, and the others from the process of regression from narcissistic object-choice to narcissism. It is on the one hand, like mourning, a reaction to the real loss of a loved object; but over and above this, it is marked by a determinant which is absent in normal mourning or which, if it is present, transforms the latter into pathological mourning. The loss of a love-object is an excellent opportunity for the ambivalence in love-relationships to make itself effective and come into the open. Where there is a disposition to obsessional neurosis the conflict due to ambivalence gives a pathological cast to mourning.[32]

Freud's description of psychological responses prompted by the loss of a beloved person or object illuminates Kalyani's fixation in *Phera*. (Her conflation of the loss of people and places with the loss of her "nation" is nothing short of pathological.) That she feels the need to "fantasize" a past suggests that she is, actually, unaware of what she has lost, consequently, she never really mourns its loss. Her non-communicativeness, her insomnia, and depression – "'To me life feels much too long. It stagnates, the days just dawdle. I'll be relieved when it's all over somehow'"[33] – are symptomatic of her melancholic condition. Kalyani's "obsessional neurosis" is accurately captured in Jonathan Safran Foer's novel *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close* (2005), where an unrelenting preoccupation with the past is described as "the cancer of never letting go."[34] Like Thomas Schell Sr. in Foer's novel, Kalyani cannot let go.

She retains detailed, yet delusional, "memories" of occurrences from three decades ago. She is obsessed with the past which consumes her waking moments and leaves her sleepless at night. Her memory obsession bears shades of the masochistic because her memories are simultaneously the fount of both pain and pleasure – the content of the memories and the renewed realization of her loss cause her pain, but the act of recalling events from her past is pleasurable. Of course, given that her "memories" are actually fantasies, she is precisely *not* re-living the true nature of her loss. However, her memories overwhelm her such that she refuses to engage with, or even recognize the distinctiveness of, her present which, to her, is always the not-past, always an absence, always a "minus sign": her new place of residence Calcutta is no more than not-Mymensingh, her birthplace; and her husband Anirban is simply not-Badal, her first love. Her wide-ranging apathy, what Freud describes as narcissism, slowly corrodes her marriage. For thirty years she willfully immerses herself in grief over the loss of home and homeland, allowing her past to hijack her present. Not until her visit to Mymensingh is she forced to encounter some uncomfortable truths. Only then does she finally start chipping away at her illusions regarding the "perfect" life she might have had.

For thirty years Kalyani has immersed herself in memories of her Mymensingh girlhood. Thus it wounds her to find that her absence has not been felt, not even by her best friend Sharifa. (Whereas Kalyani has described their camaraderie in detail to her husband and children, Sharifa has never mentioned Kalyani to her family.) When Kalyani arrives at her friend's home, Sharifa fails to recognize her at first, and when she does so after some goading from Kalyani, her frown disappears but she still addresses her friend using the Bengali formal second person pronoun "*apni*" rather than the informal "*tui*" that Kalyani uses, thereby reinforcing the distance between them. Kalyani repeatedly reminds Sharifa of events (and non-events) they experienced together, prompting her to acknowledge Kalyani's presence in her life and in Mymensingh. This is why Sharifa's forgetfulness dismays her:

> [Kalyani] moves closer to Sharifa. Anxiously she asks again – how's Ruksana? Salim? Makhan? Soumen? Where are they? Any news of Anil Kaka?
>
> – There's so much to do at home, I don't get to go over to that side of town.
>
> – How's Munni [Sharifa's younger sister]? I heard she's living in Dhaka. That tiny girl's running her own household now? Remember the time she slipped and fell at the spigot? She was wearing yellow half pants.
>
> Sharifa looks at her in amazement. Who knows when Munni had tripped in her childhood, or what color her knickers she had on? Who remembers such paltry things?
>
> – She got a gash on her forehead the time Sahana [Sharifa's youngest sister] flung a flower vase at her. Did Munni's scar ultimately fade?
>
> – Who knows? I don't know.[35]

Kalyani has held fast to these trivialities because they have been the scaffolding for the imaginative life she has lived. Sent away, against her will, to live with strangers in a strange city in another country, she remembers vividly "spaces, gestures, images and objects."[36] Her infinite recollection of detail borders on madness. Even in the face of Sharifa's obvious apathy, Kalyani's long list of do-you-remembers never hits pause. Kalyani remembers people and even daily minutiae – like playing by the riverside, drifting off to sleep on the rooftop under the night sky, the sight of fallen sweet briar roses floating on her family's fishpond, the scent of Murraya flowers growing outside her bedroom window – and with these memories she has created a rich dreamscape which then serves as a refuge/an escape from the torment of the everyday. Unlike Kalyani, Sharifa has not been forced to renegotiate her place in the world, but only in her husband's home. While there are signs of problems in her marriage, Sharifa never expresses these to Kalyani. Kalyani faults her friend with memory loss, but for Sharifa the past holds no special significance. Because she is not tortured by a feeling of "elsewhere, another time, another life," trivia from her childhood and early youth are not seared into her memory, nor does she feel the need to construct a compensatory narrative/fantasy about the past. Sharifa's trials may have been of a different kind, causing her to change from a sprightly adolescent to a taciturn, domestically subjugated, and religiously preoccupied housewife who cannot step outside the home without her husband's permission.

Roya Hakakian, in her memoir *Journey from the Land of No: A Girlhood Caught in Revolutionary Iran*, captures something essential about Kalyani's refugee experience. Herself a Jewish woman from Iran, Hakakian left her country following the escalation of the Iran–Iraq war and the consolidation of the Islamic regime in Iran, seeking refuge in the United States. About the refugee condition, she writes:

> When you have been a refugee, abandoned all your loves and belongings, your memories become your belongings. Images of the past, snippets of old conversations, furnish the world within your mind. When you have nothing left to guard, you guard your memories. … Remembering becomes, not simply a preoccupation, but a full-time occupation.[37]

That the displaced or exile retains detailed memories of the home/homeland, a retention that threatens to become an overwhelming burden, is likewise suggested in Amitav Ghosh's *The Shadow Lines* (1988). There the narrator – speaking about his migrant grandmother, a victim of Partition – notes that people "who have no home but in memory, learn to be very skilled in the art of recollection."[38] Both, the narrator's grandmother in Ghosh's novel and Kalyani, are mourners and "the work of mourning," according to Freud, "entails a kind of hyperremembering, a process of obsessive recollection during which the survivor resuscitates the existence of the lost other in the space of the psyche, replacing an actual absence with an imaginary

presence."[39] The Mymensingh of Kalyani's memories has no actual spatial or temporal coordinates whatsoever, but it has a full life in her imagination, a life that can only thrive at the expense of the actual life she is living. In Ghosh's phrase, Kalyani never mastered the migrant's art, she never grew "*skilled* in the art of recollection" (italics mine). The factual or historical character of memory is lost in Kalyani's fantasy.

Transplanted from her parent's home in East Pakistan to her uncle's residence in Tiljala, Calcutta and then, from the latter's home to marital homes in other neighborhoods in the city – first Gariahat, then Kankurgachhi, then Tollygunge, then finally, Salt Lake – Kalyani is constantly in kinesis. What she covets is stasis/permanence. Indeed, that is what she seeks in Mymensingh. Her desire for stasis is inspired not only by her belief that the past is the place of happiness, but also because, unlike the vicissitudes of her present, there is a certainty to the past, a definite and unalterable shape which her "memory" has bestowed upon it. The past is time congealed, shaped, and rendered coherent. Hakakian describes such memory as "the membrane in which the past is sealed."[40] Kalyani returns to Mymensingh expecting that she will find her hometown and its people just as they had been, or as she "remembers" they had been thirty years ago, as if preserved in formaldehyde – where Sharifa's sister Munni will still be a little girl and Sharifa "not a woman with a married daughter but a girl of sixteen or seventeen."[41] She imagines that, upon arrival, she will simply reoccupy the space she had vacated and fit right in, like a missing jigsaw piece. (In this sense, the locals are right to suspect her of returning to make some illegitimate claim upon them.) But, this is no fairy tale where, along with the princess, the inhabitants of the palace fall asleep only to resume their lives after a long hiatus. In the thirty years Kalyani has been away life in Mymensingh has moved on without her, and she finds this unsettling. She is searching for a zone of familiarity, but such a narcissistic quest can only encounter failure, the first of which is her inability to rekindle the relationship with her former best friend. Sharifa's withdrawing of her hand every time Kalyani tries to touch her is a metaphor for Kalyani's unreachable, irretrievable past. For Kalyani, no Penelope waits – her parents have passed away, Badal's whereabouts are unknown, and even her friend Sharifa has forgotten her.

Kalyani's sentimentalism is set in contrast with the casual indifference on the part of her younger brother Parimal towards their past life in East Pakistan. While Parimal is not a major character, and his response to the family's displacement is not laid out in detail, it is clear that he has adapted much better to life in Calcutta. He befriends his female cousins, thereby circumventing the taunts his maladjusted sister endures. Moreover, Parimal, aware of the harassment Hindu minorities in East Pakistan often endure, shares no part of his sister's rosy vision of unending communal cordiality. It is, therefore, not surprising that, when she requests him to accompany her to Bangladesh, he refuses. The difference lies in how they view their migrant condition. Parimal considers himself a settler and works towards establishing

himself in the new country, whereas Kalyani is an exile who can only find solace in nostalgia and "hyperremembering." In the previous chapter, a similar dyad – "hyperremembering" versus acceptance (not forgetfulness) – was presented through Somnath and Arjun in Gangopadhyay's novel, *Arjun*. Somnath and Kalyani imprison themselves in the memories of the past and shun the present. For them, the past is a suppurating wound that will not heal (the word "trauma" is derived from the Greek word τραῦμα meaning "wound"). Longing for things as they had once been, and will never again be, both Somnath and Kalyani continuously re-enact being wrenched away from their past and forcibly propelled into the future. For Arjun and Parimal, on the other hand, displacement to a big city opens up new avenues of opportunity, scope for new relationships and communities. They are able to integrate their past into their present, and they thrive in their new environments. Somnath-Arjun and Kalyani-Parimal pulled between the past and the future, divided between despair and hope are embodiments of Benjamin's "Angel of History":

> His face is turned towards the past. Where we see the appearance of a chain of events, he sees one single catastrophe, which unceasingly piles rubble on top of rubble and hurls it before his feet. He would like to pause for a moment … But a storm is blowing from Paradise … The storm drives him irresistibly into the future, to which his back is turned, while the rubble-heap before him grows sky-high.[42]

Except in failing to resolve their discontent with the present, Kalyani and Somnath are Partition's "collateral damage." They are both the angel of history and the refuse-heap gathering at the angel's feet.

Kalyani's depression, Boori Ma's loquacity, and Somnath's madness are products of post-traumatic stress.[43] Psychosis, the inability to experience reality in the present, is a common trope in this body of writing, whether it is Manto's popular Urdu story, "Toba Tek Singh" (1955), or East Pakistani writer Syed Waliullah's short story "The Escape"[44] (1950) composed in the English language. In "The Escape," a "mad" man, a man unhinged by what he has witnessed, endeavors to tell "a nice thrilling story"[45] to a little girl on a train carrying Muslim refugees. But his memories of unspeakable violence render his narrative incoherent and fractured (reflecting the unnarratable character of the trauma triggered by Partition's violence, except in fragmentary form). Chillingly, he reassures the girl that if the monsters in the story frighten her, he can "make them behave like decent, well-meaning persons."[46] His distress deepens even further when he catches a glimpse of a corpse. His terrified co-passenger wants to get away from him, but the madman, believing that a demon is the cause of her panic, starts to search the compartment, and, then, "he thought maybe [the demon] was outside and so, opening the door, he stepped outside the running train."[47] Death serves as the only escape from memory. The unnamed man's madness and suicide, together with Somnath's

insanity and early death, are awful prophecies of the fate of those consumed by memory.

But Kalyani, ultimately, escapes this fate. She completes the grieving process. Her eventual transcendence of her intense attachment to the past is illuminated in Tammy Clewell's reading of Freud in her essay, "Mourning Beyond Melancholia: Freud's Psychoanalysis of Loss." Clewell notes that:

> [P]rolonging the existence of the lost object at the center of grief work (*Trauerarbeit*) does not persist indefinitely. … [B]y comparing the memories of the other with actual reality, [the mourner] comes to an objective determination that the lost object no longer exists. With a very specific task to perform … grief work seeks, then, to convert loving remembrances into a futureless memory. Mourning comes to a decisive and "spontaneous end" … when the survivor has detached his or her emotional tie to the lost object and reattached the free libido to a new object, thus accepting consolation in the form of a substitute for what has been lost.[48]

For Kalyani, the longing for the past ends somewhat abruptly. In the two days she spends in Mymensingh, her "emotional tie to the lost object" is broken through a series of rejections and her recognition that she no longer belongs in the place that was once her *desh* (homeland). In other words, "comparing the memories of the other with actual reality" she begins to realize "that the lost object no longer exists." Her presence on the cremation ground in Mymensingh, ostensibly to pay homage to her parents, is a metaphor for the burning down of the narrative she has meticulously constructed for thirty years, an attempt to exorcize the ghosts of her past. There, she grieves for the passing of the illusions of home and homeland. Her unplanned and speedy departure from Mymensingh the following day, cutting short her two-week vacation by twelve days, signals a decisive turning away from the past. The detachment of "her emotional tie" prompts her to acknowledge for the first time that she "had everything one could wish for – a husband, domestic life, children, affluence, happiness … yes, perhaps happiness too."[49] With the vanishing of the mirage that was her past and the acknowledgement of happiness in the present, she can finally begin to embrace the life and relationships she has scorned, or at least underappreciated, for thirty years.

In her discussion of *Phera*, Niaz Zaman writes, "it is interesting to note that it is the Hindu woman whose nostalgia makes her remember all the incidents of the past … What about the Muslim migrants who had left West Bengal. Were their feelings as acute? Strangely enough, even when there is nostalgia in real life, no writer has portrayed this nostalgia in fiction."[50] The literary archive offers ample evidence to substantiate Zaman's claim. Creative work from East Pakistan, composed most frequently by middle-class Bengali Muslims, has largely celebrated the enterprising spirit of the middle-class Partition migrant settler in the new country, rather than dwell on the memory of the land left behind.[51] Kamal, in *Nongor*, misses Calcutta, but more so his

family, when he leaves for Dhaka. He misses the conveniences of Calcutta life, but at no time does he allow this to approach the intensity of Kalyani's nostalgia. Like Parimal, Kamal is a settler. He experiences no psychological exile.

Writings about Hindu migrants leaving East Pakistan are far less celebratory.[52] They focus on a feeling of loss and, as we have seen, are commonly saturated in nostalgia. When writers from East Pakistan/Bangladesh write about nostalgia and the loss of home, as in the case of *Phera*, this is associated with Hindu migration. And *Phera* is not the only example. The pathos of Partition's displaced forced out of their homes is sensitively captured in Syed Waliullah's "*Ekti Tulsi Gachher Kahini*"[53] (1964) or "The Tale of a Tulsi Plant." The story apprehends metonymically the disruption in the everyday lives of the displaced via the break in continuity of the Hindu ritual of lighting a small earthen lamp after sundown at the *tulsi mancha* (a small podium with a wild basil plant) to usher in the evening. In this story, a group of Muslim refugees from Calcutta looking to settle in Dhaka occupy an abandoned house. Their relief at finding a home is interrupted by the sighting of a *tulsi mancha* at the edge of the courtyard, which forces a renewed recognition that the house's former residents were Hindus. While one of the new occupants wants to destroy all remnants of the house's Hindu past, others are less willing to uproot the plant. Among them is Matin, who wonders, "Today, where was the mistress of the house who had lit the lamp under this *tulsi* plant? … Possibly [she] had found refuge with a relative in a railway colony in Asansol, Baidyabati, Lilua, or Howrah."[54] Or perhaps, Matin thinks, she has not found a refuge yet, and he imagines her:

> sitting near the window of a moving train, looking out as if she were searching for something in the distance, beyond the horizon. … But wherever she was, when the shadows of dusk thickened in the sky, she would remember the spot under the *tulsi* plant and her eyes would fill with tears.[55]

Here, a Muslim man imagines a Hindu woman remembering her home, acknowledging the agony of the former owners of the house who "left [their] home and fled the country in two days"[56] and who, like the group from Calcutta, are refugees elsewhere. His is a recognition of their shared crises. Unknown to Matin and the other men at this point, their search for home has not ended. Soon they too will be evicted from the premises of their new home on orders of the Pakistani government.

"The sky's no different there": rejecting Partition

For the anonymous grandmother who narrates Hasan Azizul Huq's award-winning debut novel *Agunpakhi*, the most painful aspect of Partition and the creation of Pakistan is parting with her children, all of whom relocate to Pakistan in the hope of better employment opportunities. They return to their

village only for brief visits. She sees even less of them when passport requirements are instituted. Her heartbreak and anger both on the rise, she interrogates one of her brothers-in-law who had been a Muslim League activist:

> One day I called my fourth brother-in-law and said to him, You got your Pakistan with all that *larke lenge* ("we'll fight to take [Pakistan]"), but do you know what that place is like, or where it is? And after stomaching so much, and fighting so hard for it, won't you now go live there?
>
> Are you crazy?
>
> Why, what makes me crazy? Where's all that eagerness now?
>
> Oh bother! Go to Pakistan? And leave my country?
>
> Then for whom did you make that country? For whom did you all feel so much compassion?[57]

The brother-in-law, aware of her escalating fury, quickly withdraws, but the narrator demands answers. Ultimately, the founding of Pakistan not only separates her from her children, it estranges her from her husband, who also decides to relocate.

Narrated in the first person by an anonymous Bengali Muslim woman (her mother-in-law, on one occasion, calls her "*Metar Bou*"),[58] *Agunpakhi* opens with descriptions of the narrator's early adolescence at home, her marriage, childbirth, her acquisition of literacy, and so on; stretching from the early years of the twentieth century through the mid-1950s. Presented in the form of a *bildungsroman*, the novel splices the narrator's personal story of her evolution – from uncomplaining docility to uncompromising resolve – with developments in contemporary global and local, political and social history – the two world wars; the Khilafat Movement; the Indian independence struggle; the outbreak of a cholera epidemic in the village; the Bengal Famine in 1943; the intensification of religious prejudice and communal politics in her village; the Great Calcutta Killing; and, finally, the Partition and its aftermath. The novel also elucidates a distinct aspect of the predicament Bengali Muslim women faced at the time of Partition: her place within the family, within the national community, and the connected issue of selfhood. The title of the novel, which translates to "firebird" or "the phoenix," captures the narrator's fiery spirit and her confidence to rise from the ashes of the devastation wrought upon her by the Partition. The novel's freshness lies in its departures from routine within the Partition genre.

Discussing the role of women's history, Joan Kelly writes that one of its goals is "to restore women to history."[59] *Agunpakhi* works in a literary mode towards a comparable objective, to restore Bengali Muslim women to Partition literature. The narrative performs this by undermining the prevailing gender bias in writings on the Partition from East Pakistan/Bangladesh which typically focus on the experiences of Bengali Muslim men. When Bengali Muslim women are presented in Partition literature, they are mostly mothers, wives, or sisters of a male protagonist. As mentioned in Chapter Two,

narratives on Muslim life and displacement are centered around the male migrant, and women are simply bit-role players in the unfolding drama of their men's dilemmas. They are mostly present in their interaction with men. Huq's *Agunpakhi* breaks this template. The novel centers around a woman's crisis, it is *her* story, told from her point of view, and about her dilemmas: Should she accompany her husband to the new homeland? And then, is it really her homeland?

Bengali-language writings on the impact of the Partition on women have come mostly from West Bengal, and have centered around Hindu women. Prior to the publication of *Agunpakhi*, Bengali Muslim women have had little presence in Bengali Partition fiction as a whole,[60] with the exception of the title character in Prabodh Kumar Sanyal's novel *Hashubanu* (1952).[61] Writings on Hindu women have tended to focus on three areas: the social rejection abducted/violated women suffered within their families, middle-class women's emergence as wage earners in an attempt to stave off the economic devastation caused by dispossession and relocation, and the pain of displacement. *Agunpakhi* has a very different story to tell, one of a woman who rejects the usual rationales offered in support of the Partition and the need for Pakistan, a woman who chooses to stay put in her village. In telling such a story, *Agunpakhi* offers a bold foray into unexplored possibilities of the Partition genre. This novel and Sanyal's *Hashubanu*, both centered around the Bengali Muslim woman, challenge the idea of a religion-based national identity.[62] While *Hashubanu* presents the views of an educated, politically enlightened secular-humanist who defies borders of class, religion, and nation, *Agunpakhi* moves beyond the educated, urban elite to a rural Bengali setting.

Rejecting the view that the subcontinent had to be partitioned to create a separate homeland for Muslims, the narrator of *Agunpakhi* refuses to relocate with her family. For the narrator, the Pakistan demand is unrealistic. As the questioning of her brother-in-law, cited above, demonstrates, for whom were the League activists exactly making the Pakistan demand, if not themselves? She persists in her resolve to remain in India, and succeeds. Her family, unable to convince her to leave with them, eventually abandons her. On the eve of their departure, she spiritedly interrogates the "unnaturalness" of the new borders established by Partition in a conversation with her son:

> To tell you the truth, dear, no one has been able to explain to me why I must leave my homeland with the rest of you. First of all, I can't accept that a different country has been made for you. It's the same land, the same people, the same language, now because of differences in religion a land that has always been one, at some point suddenly splits and becomes another country! Can that ever happen? It's the same inseparable earth, here's a mango tree and a date palm, over there too is a mango tree and a date palm! And suddenly they're in two different countries? Say what? The sky's no different there! Don't tell me it's only religion, son, because in that case man won't be able to live in any country on earth.[63]

To her, Partition is an affront to experience, a deliberate cleaving of something "that has always been one." Home-spun comparisons such as "here's a mango tree and a date palm, over there too is a mango tree and a date palm" animate the rural world the narrator inhabits. The many repetitions of the word "same" in the above passage – "the same land, the same people, the same language … the same inseparable soil" – undermines the rhetoric of Hindu–Muslim difference, emphasizing the arbitrary nature of the new borders. The invocation of nature here suggests that migration has forced man into alien environs of his own making. In *Phera* Kalyani also refers to the landscape in insisting upon Bengal's natural and cultural oneness. When her husband's refers to Bangladesh as a foreign country, Kalyani retorts indignantly with "Is the earth of another shade there? The grass? Is the language different? People's clothes? You said yourself that flowers from this side blow over to that side, birds from that side fly to this, the cattle and goats graze freely. … Objections arise only when it comes to humans."[64] Yet, as Kalyani shows, this insistence upon counterposing nature to history cannot be sustained. This is the problem that the narrator of *Agunpakhi* faces, albeit more "skillfully"!

As the discussion in Chapter Two illustrates, in literary writings on Partition from East Pakistan/Bangladesh the birth of a son in the new homeland is an especially momentous occasion in the life of the (male) migrant. The child's birth enables the displaced Muslim man to develop a sense of psychological attachment to the new land which is no longer alien but is now the birthplace of his son, a place where the new migrant can more fully belong. *Agunpakhi* represents an implicit critique of this trope. Rather than the promise of a new beginning through birth, it is the narrator's loss through the death of her child upon which her emotional attachment to the ground beneath her feet is largely founded. Upon her family's departure the narrator recalls the death of her first-born with, "They are all going away. The one who didn't go sleeps in his grave on the slopes of that pond. He'll never go. And one day, right next to him, I too will sleep eternally."[65] Braving the dangers and difficulties of living alone, she chooses to stay back in the land that holds her child's grave. For her, relocation would be tantamount to a disavowal of her maternal role both as life giver and the receiver of life lost.

Memory, in *Agunpakhi*, becomes a way of attaching the self to space and time – memories of childhood, of loves and losses, of the experience of social and political history. For the narrator, in the words of Debjani Sengupta, "to belong to a place is not only to be embedded in the geography but also to be immersed in the linguistic, cultural and social practices that emerge in relation to the place."[66] The home and the village community (and by extension, the homeland) are where the narrator's selfhood is entrenched, and constitute what Arendt describes as, "a distinct place in the world." And that place remains for her, because she resists the interruption displacement will obviously cause. The novel is her memoir. Beginning in her girlhood and ending on the day her husband and children leave for Pakistan, it tracks how her present grows out of her past and blends into her future. Nostalgia in this novel is subtle

and not drenched in sentimentalism as in the case of Kalyani. Also, unlike Kalyani's, the narrator's memories are neither fantasies nor an endless regurgitation of detail.

In Amitav Ghosh's novel *The Hungry Tide* (2005), Nirmal, watching the resolve of Hindu refugees to remain on the island of Marichjhapi in the Sunderbans, in the face of the West Bengal government's attempts in 1979 to forcibly evacuate them, notes in his journal, "Where else could you belong, except the place you refused to leave?"[67] This is likewise the situation of *Agunpakhi*'s narrator.

***

Beginning with her departure from her natal home after her wedding, relocation has been a way of life for *Agunpakhi*'s narrator. Following custom in this patrilocal society, she leaves her natal home to travel to a distant village where her husband's family lives. The ruptured relationships with her birth-family and nature are evoked with, "I am leaving forever my mother, my brother, this home, these waters, this earth and sky … I said my final goodbyes to my birthplace."[68] This is her first uprooting. Some years later, in a prefiguration of Partition, she is compelled to leave the home she had entered as a bride after the discord between her husband's brothers splits the joint family. She wants to halt the rift within the family, but eventually remains silent and follows her husband out of the family home to a new home. Her opposition to the Partition itself is, of course, ineffective; still, on the question of relocating to Pakistan, she stands firm. She refuses to meekly move out of her settled home to a new homeland. Instead, she tells her husband, "Maybe, a sapling will grow if it's transplanted from one place to another, perhaps even to a different country, but once a tree is mature, it never survives in another soil."[69] For her, the Partition is the latest in a long line of patriarchal oppressions that conspire to uproot her. In her refusal to relocate to her new homeland lies the narrator's quiet denunciation of the founding logic of Pakistan as a Muslim homeland. She refuses to allow so monumental a political failure to shape her personal destiny:

> No one's been able to explain to me why a new country has been cooked up in which only Muslims will live, but where Hindus and Christians can also live, then where's the difference? No one's been able to explain to me why just because I'm Muslim that country is mine, and this one isn't. Nor has anyone been able to explain why I must go there just because my children have settled there. Can I help it if my husband chooses to go there as well? He and I aren't the same person, we are different. Very close, deeply cherished but different human beings.[70]

The use of "cook up" to describe the creation of Pakistan rejects the claims made by the Muslim League.[71] It underscores the fantastic character of the

Pakistan demand. Elite urban Muslims have cooked up this fantasy, with the acquiescence of their elite Hindu counterparts. The realization of this fantasy of the few provokes a kind of psychological trauma in the many because it is divorced from, and divorces people from, more genuine, palpable realities. (Kalyani, too, "cooks up" a new country, hers is thus a fantastic denial of a fantastic reality.)

The narrator's thwarted demand for an explanation for Partition/Pakistan in three consecutive questions, questions that demand answers, evokes the bewildering nature of 1947's political division. The failure of those around her to clarify matters to her satisfaction suggests that there is no more to relocation to Pakistan than better employment opportunities. The sentiments expressed above are in the spirit of those of Amma, in Chughtai's "*Jadein*"[72] ("Roots"), who withdraws into silence to protest the escalation of identitarian politics in her locality:

> What is this strange bird called, our country? Tell me, where is that country? This is the land where you were born, which gave birth to you; this is the earth on which you grew up; if this is not your country, how can some distant land where you merely go and settle for a few days become your country? Besides who knows if you won't be driven, pushed out of there too? Who knows if you won't be told to go and settle in some other place? I sit here like a flickering lamp. A small gust of wind will extinguish me, and put an end to all this turmoil about choosing one's country. This game of destroying an old country and founding a new nation is not very interesting. There was a time when the Mughals left their own country to establish a new empire here; now we plan to go elsewhere to find a land of our own. A nation seems to be no better than a shoe! If it becomes a little tight, discard it for a new one.[73]

And when Amma's children leave, she refuses to join them. Both Amma and the narrator of *Agunpakhi* agree to part, although the parting is painful, from their children and family, but not from their home. (Botanical imagery is used both in the title of Chughtai's story, "Roots," and the sapling/mature tree metaphor used in *Agunpakhi* to suggest the protagonists' fixedness to the place.)

In both *Agunpakhi* and "*Jadein*" questions concerning the creation of Pakistan are raised, and resistance to migration is articulated, by Muslim women, more accurately, ageing grandmothers (younger women living under the control of fathers, brothers, or husbands are less likely to articulate opposition). Their forthrightness is the privilege of their age and elevated status within the family. Paradoxically, in refusing change, the women reject the stereotype of the tradition-bound Muslim woman. This contrasts sharply with the helplessness of older Hindu women like Bindubashini in Pratibha Basu's Bengali story "*Dukulhara*" ("Adrift"), who relocates to forestall violence to her person and her family comprised of her widowed daughter-in-law and two granddaughters. Similarly, Shahni, in Krishna Sobti's Hindi story "*Sikka Badal Gaya*" ("The

Tables Turned"), is taken to a refugee camp by a concerned Superintendent of Police; and widows Suhashini, in Sunil Gangopadhyay's novel *Purba-Paschim* (*East-West*), and Bebe, in Joginder Paul's Urdu story "*Dariyaon Pyas*" ("Thirst of Rivers"), both move at the behest of their sons. In fiction and in historical reality, despite their desire to remain in their original homes, Hindu women, both young and old, have no choice in the matter. Young Muslim men, in this body of work, willingly embrace the change of location – Kamal in *Nongor*, or the narrator's sons and son-in-law in *Agunpakhi* – while older Muslim men are divided on the issue. The narrator's husband in *Agunpakhi* eventually relocates, but her brothers-in-law do not, nor do Kamal's father and brother. Insofar as literary writings are concerned, it seems that opposition to migration is articulated most vociferously, and fruitfully, by older Muslim women and older Hindu men – Rajmohan, in Narendranath Mitra's story "*Palanka*" ("The Bedstead"), or the narrator's grandmother's uncle in Amitav Ghosh's *The Shadow Lines*.[74]

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In *Agunpakhi*, the narrator's firm refusal to relocate is a metaphor for her rejection of the destiny planned for her by the family and national-religious patriarchy. Whether it is her husband's insistence on leaving or it is her refusal to accompany him, the husband–wife core of the patriarchal family splits apart. Reflecting upon her early life as a young bride in the home of her in-laws she says:

> When they told me to go right, I went right, they said left, I turned left. All I did was follow instructions. Now that I think about it, I've never done anything on my own in my entire life. I've never known how to get *my* wishes fulfilled. Am I person, or just the shadow of a person? And even then, is it my own shadow?[75] [italics mine]

Later, towards the end of the novel, her uncertainty on questions of the moral and ethical dimensions of her action, described as "stepping outside the circle," gives way to her realization that it is about personal fulfillment:

> Did I do the right thing? Did I understand things correctly? I didn't listen to my husband, or to my son, or to my daughter. Isn't all this stepping over the line? People give up something, in order to gain something. What did I gain and what did I give up? I thought about it a lot. Finally, it came to me, I left so much in order to find myself. I wasn't being obstinate, nor was I disobedient; all I wanted to do was understand everything for myself.[76]

The two excerpts above map the development of individualism and the acknowledgement of selfhood in this village woman. They mark her journey, as I mentioned earlier, from unhesitating compliance to unbending resolve.

Her non-compliance with her husband's wishes regarding relocation to Pakistan is a source of release from the bonds of domestic patriarchy. (The twentieth century refashioning of patriarchy takes place through the catastrophe of Partition. This is true not only in her case but also in the way in which displacement leads to a breakdown/rejection of patriarchy in the case of middle-class women joining the work force after Partition.) On the other hand, it entails a necessary separation from her family. This last is particularly marked by the word "alone," the last word in the novel. From living with her extended family in her natal home, then with her husband's large joint family, and subsequently, in a nuclear family, she is eventually abandoned and alone – a series of partitions, the last of which is her own doing, have altered the original content of her world. The only space that allows for the self is tragically empty, precisely at the time of life when it should be rich with intimate connections. *Agunpakhi* presents in the narrator an inquiring, defiant, but ultimately tragic individual. Her surging emotions, her transport at the moment of individual self-assertion is poignantly captured in the following: "The home, the whole world rose and fell. Inside me winds, fires, lights, shadows all swelled up and rose to my throat and then receded away again."[77]

The question of homeland grows more complicated in light of the change in the narrator's speech idiom. At the start of *Agunpakhi*, the narrator is a young, illiterate, Muslim woman living in rural Bengal. The first-person narration is largely in her native dialect, the vernacular of Bardhaman district in West Bengal. But her speech is not just in a regional dialect, she uses *dobhashi*, which is a form of spoken Bengali that freely adopts Perso-Arabic vocabulary. Derisively designated as "Musalman-Bengali" by James Long in the nineteenth century,[78] and usually called "*musalmani* Bengali," it "was not considered to be part of the mainstream"[79] and during the process of the standardization of Bengali from the late-eighteenth through the mid-nineteenth centuries "*dobhashi* or *musalmani* Bengali remained unrecognized and outside the fold of modernization."[80] (The use of the regional dialect with *musalmani* registers adds extra layers of complexity to any attempt to translate into English.) The narrator's use of *dobhashi* Bengali contrasts with the standard Bengali spoken by her husband,[81] which the narrator herself recognizes as *poshkar* (standard form: *parishkar*) meaning clean or refined, while she regards her own speech as *gneyo*, meaning rustic or vulgar. The narrator's vocabulary at the beginning of the novel contains Perso-Arabic words such as *asman* (sky), *begana* (strange/alien), *buzurg* (an elderly and venerable man), *gosht* (meat), *hargiz* (ever), *intezar* (wait), *jaan* (life), *jayez* (permissible), *mawt* (death), *mazaak* (to joke/to tease/to jest), *musibat* (trouble), *natija* (result), *pareshan* (nervous), *zamin* (land), and others. But through a gradual acquisition of literacy her use of these Perso-Arabic words, and, indeed, non-standard usages of all sorts steadily diminish. This is not to say that she stops using them altogether, but they noticeably decline as they come to be replaced with Bengali equivalents. Thus, the narrator replaces *entejar* (*intezar*) with *apikkhe* (derived from the standard Bengali word *apeksha* – pronounced *apekkha* – a *tatsama* word or

Sanskrit loan-word). Similarly, she replaces *musibat* with *bepad* (*bipad*); and *mazaak* with *thatta*. Also, while she uses *mawt* and *mityu* (*mrityu*) interchangeably at the beginning of the novel, the latter occurs more frequently towards the end; and, a similar case could be made with *duniya* (the world) and *pithimi* (*prithibi*).

The switch to a more standardized register of Bengali results from the narrator's recently acquired habit of reading newspapers, itself, of course, a result of her growing literacy. But the shift from regional *musalmani* Bengali diction to the standard form of spoken Bengali is more than just a matter of her acquiring literacy, or of her modernization. It signals her unconscious acceptance of her identity as Bengali. This shift can be accounted for in two ways: first, it could be read as an instance of the "myriad ways" that "Muslims who stayed on in West Bengal after partition were gradually coerced or persuaded to surrender."[82] It is the spoken word that the narrator gradually surrenders and, in surrendering *musalmani* Bengali and adopting a less religiously marked idiom, she is effacing her religious identity, at least insofar as this is expressed in this way, through speech patterns. But the text treats it as part of her self-development. Second, it reveals the cultural unity of the Bengal region by way of replicating in Indian West Bengal, the rise of linguistic nationalism that was occurring simultaneously across the border in East Pakistan. In other words, the novel, although set at a distance from the epicenter of the *Bhasha Andolan* or Language Movement, nevertheless preserves its seismic tremors by emphasizing the evolving linguistic and cultural identity of Bengalis as Bengalis. It is in congruence with the ethos of the movement and enacts a reversal of the Pakistani government's (abortive) attempt "to purge the Bengali language of Sanskrit/Hindu elements and purify it with Arabic, Persian and Urdu."[83] *Agunpakhi*'s narrator replaces non-Bengali words with Bengali-Sanskrit equivalents, not as a process of abandoning her culture, much less her religion, but as an unconscious, but uncomplaining, participant within a regional sub-nationalist process.

The prioritizing of the narrator's cultural identity as a Bengali is accompanied by an unsettling of her religion. Although she is not presented in the novel as non-religious (she makes one mention of performing the *namaaz* early in her marriage), by its end there seems to be a literal turning away from religion. After she watches her husband and children disappear over the horizon, the narrator says, "Let morning come, let the dawn bring light, then I'll sit facing the East. Turning my face to the sunshine, I'll stand up again."[84] In turning eastwards, on the one hand, she is facing East Pakistan where her entire family will henceforth reside. Thus, it is her acknowledgement of her deep attachment to them. At the same time, she is explicitly turning away from Mecca, which is, of course, in the opposite direction. Also, the absence of any mention of the *fajr* prayers that are offered at dawn by practicing Muslims (or of any other prayers, for that matter) is noteworthy, though in keeping with the development of a modern, self-actuated individual that has

been a running theme in the novel. God or religion are not viewed as sources of comfort or inspiration. Instead, it is nature, the Sun.

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The search for home is unending. Beyond the realm of literature, developments in the political sphere, the progress in Indo-Bangladesh relations have opened up the possibility of re-visiting the homeland. With the launch of the Maitree (friendship) Express on April 14, 2008, Bengali New Year's Day (1415), train service between Calcutta and Dhaka was restored after a hiatus of more than forty years. While air travel and bus service between the two cities had resumed much earlier, travel on the friendship train carried a special significance given the violent associations of train journeys dating from 1947. Excitement and emotions ran high, particularly among "elderly passengers who were able to avail themselves of the service after four decades." Traveling on the train's inaugural run from Dhaka to Calcutta was seventy-eight-year-old Mr. K.S. Zaman "who was forced to migrate from Calcutta to East Pakistan during the post-Partition riots in 1947." On this, his third trip to the city, Zaman told the press that "he was going to visit his relatives living in a village near Calcutta where he was born." Also traveling on the Maitree Express but in the other direction (Calcutta to Dhaka) was Janatosh Pal, whose family migrated to Calcutta in 1946. In a "voice choked with emotion," Pal said, "I came to India as a refugee when I was six year[s] old but for me Kalindi in Bangladesh, the village I was born, remains my motherland."

In the mainstream press, the Maitree Express is portrayed as the actualization of Bhrigu's dream of return, in *Komal Gandhar*, to his home on the banks of the Padma.[85] Inevitably, the attempt is made to undo or ideologically deny the violent uprootings of Partition. But what stories like *Phera* and *Agunpakhi* reveal is 1947's finality. Whether like Kalyani in *Phera* or Janatosh Pal in real life, people relocated with their families, or, whether like *Agunpakhi*'s narrator they refused to do so, history cannot be wished away. Indeed, as *Agunpakhi*'s narrator insists, the politics that resulted in the Partition, while it may have been irresponsible, was nevertheless unalterably consequential. Kalyani failed to live the life for which she left East Pakistan, because she could not overcome the trauma of displacement. While *Agunpakhi*'s narrator faces her circumstances with greater clarity, nevertheless, life is stolen from her too as her children and even her husband gradually leave her so that in the end she is left alone.

Where there was one country now there was two. Yet even as the lives that actually straddled the Partition gradually expire, as the events themselves recede into the distant past, the literature (and in important ways, the literature alone) allows us to grapple with the *historical* separations (and enduring connections) of India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh. Because literature allows in a way public sphere discussion and debate have not the recognition that the trauma in question, while, of course, experienced by individuals, is

nevertheless ultimately historical. It is a trauma, in other words, that mere biological death and forgetting will not on their own erase, nor even friendship trains, necessary as these are.

Notes

1 Erin O'Donnell, "'Woman' and 'homeland' in Ritwik Ghatak's films: Constructing post-Independence Bengali cultural identity," *Jump Cut* 47, 2004. Anindya Raychaudhuri, "Resisting the Resistible: Re-Writing Myths of Partition in the Works of Ritwik Ghatak," *Social Semiotics*, 19:4 (December 2009). Bhaskar Sarkar, *Mourning the Nation: Indian Cinema in the Wake of Partition* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2009).
2 Elderly women such as Suhashini in Sunil Gangopadhyay's Bengali novel *Purba-Paschim* (*East-West*); Amma in Ismat Chughtai's "*Jadein*" ("Roots") and Bebe in Joginder Paul's "*Dariyaon Pyas*" ("Thirst of Rivers") both in Urdu; and Shahni in Krishna Sobti's Hindi story "*Sikka Badal Gaya*" ("The Tables Turned") cherish the home where they arrived as brides, raised families, established friendships, and led productive lives. The home is the place of their past, and for the women, all of them widows, filled with memories of conjugal companionship, leaving is viewed as a disavowal of the past. The pathos of parting is steeped in their sorrow and profound disbelief at being forced out of their home of many years.
3 Jhumpa Lahiri, "A Real Durwan," in *Interpreter of Maladies* (New York: Mariner Books, 1999).
4 Ibid., 70.
5 Ibid., 70–71.
6 Ibid., 71.
7 Ibid.
8 Ibid., 72.
9 Taslima Nasreen, *Phera* (Calcutta: Ananda, 1993).
10 Hasan Azizul Huq, *Agunpakhi* (Calcutta: Dey's Publishing, 2008; first published in Dhaka in 2006). All page numbers are from this text.
11 See essays in Paul Antze and Michael Lambek, eds., *Tense Past: Cultural Essays in Trauma and Memory* (London: Routledge, 1996).
12 Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (San Diego, CA: Harvest Books, 1973), 293.
13 Kalyani's journey to Mymensingh is most accurately dated to the summer of 1993.
14 Vazira Zamindar, *The Long Partition and the Making of Modern South Asia: Refugees, Boundaries, Histories* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007).
15 Bigha is a unit of measure of land; a bigha is one-third of an acre.
16 Nasreen, *Phera*, 25.
17 Ibid.
18 Her claim regarding "[m]aybe a few incidents … in rural areas" is incorrect since, as the evidence reveals, Hindu minorities in East Pakistan were severely impacted during the riots of January 1964. See Sachi Ghosh Dastidar's *Empire's Last Casualty: Indian Subcontinent's Vanishing Hindu and Other Minorities* (Calcutta: Firma, 2008).
19 Anne Whitehead, *Memory* (London: Routledge, 2009), 49.
20 Ibid.
21 Dipesh Chakrabarty, "Remembered Villages: Representations of Hindu-Bengali Memories in the Aftermath of the Partition," in *Inventing Boundaries: Gender, Politics and the Partition of India*, ed. Mushirul Hasan (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2000), 318. These reflections were published in the pages of the Calcutta daily *Jugantar* beginning in the early 1950s and later compiled in book-form

as *Chhere Asha Gram*. *Chhere Asha Gram* presents a series of sketches mostly of pastoral life in eastern Bengal. The writers nostalgically ruminate upon a variety of topics ranging from the region's natural beauty, their idyllic childhood, to contributions of East Bengalis to the movement for national independence, while some challenge the two-nation theory, often placing emphasis on the harmonious relationship between Hindus and Muslims. The collection also contains fantastic village tales; one, for instance, narrates the loss of someone's hand when dipping into a pot of gold *mohur*s. Notably, mentions of caste prejudice is absent in the recollections, also Hindu landlords, when mentioned, are presented as generous to the Muslim peasants. The book was banned in Pakistan. Dakshinaranjan Basu, ed., *Chhere Asha Gram* (Calcutta: Jignasa, 1975).

22 Whitehead, *Memory*, 49.

23 As Saleem Sinai in *Midnight's Children* puts it, "Memory's truth because memory has its own special kind. It selects, eliminates, alters, exaggerates, minimizes, glorifies, and vilifies also; but in the end it creates its own reality, its heterogeneous but usually coherent version of events; and no sane human being ever trusts someone else's version more than his own" (242). Salman Rushdie, *The Midnight's Children* (New York: Random House, 2006; first published 1981).

24 Whitehead, *Memory*, 49.

25 Pierre Nora, "Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Mémoire," *Representations* 26 (1989), 8.

26 See also the discussion of memory in Ananya Jahanara Kabir, *Partition's Post-Amnesias: 1947, 1971 and Modern South Asia* (New Delhi: Woman Unlimited, 2013).

27 Badal's name, meaning "rain" or "cloud," carries no religious markers, however, there is a small linguistic clue which reveals that he is Muslim: it is Badal's use of the word "*gosal*" (54), for bath, when he narrates, to Kalyani, an anecdote about a local landlord. The word "*gosal*" is derived from the Arabic "*ghusl*" which refers to ritual full-body ablution, required in Islam before prayer, particularly, if the body is deemed impure. "*Gosal*" is used by Bengali Muslims to refer to taking a bath or a shower, while Hindu Bengalis refer to the same activity as "*snan*" (derived from Sanskrit), or the colloquial "*chan*" – a word Kalyani uses. Badal's use of "*gosal*" indicates that he is, most likely, Muslim.

28 Nasreen, *Phera*, 75.

29 Mahasweta Devi's novella *6-i Decemberer Por* (*After December 6*) examines the condition of Muslim minorities in India during the post-Babri Mosque-demolition riots in 1992. Mahasweta Devi, *6-i Decemberer Por* (Calcutta: Karuna Prakashani, 1994).

30 Sigmund Freud "Mourning and Melancholia," in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Volume XIV (1914–1916): On the History of the Psycho-Analytic Movement, Papers on Metapsychology and Other Works*, ed. James Strachey (London: Hogarth Press, 1917). See also Freud, "On Narcissism," 67–102.

31 Ibid., 243.

32 Ibid., 250–51.

33 Nasreen, *Phera*, 17.

34 Jonathan Safran Foer, *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close* (New York: Mariner Books, 2005), 17.

35 Nasreen, *Phera*, 50.

36 Nora, "Between Memory and History," 9.

37 Roya Hakakian, *Journey from the Land of No: A Girlhood Caught in Revolutionary Iran* (New York: Three Rivers, 2004), 14.

38 Amitav Ghosh, *The Shadow Lines* (New Delhi: Ravi Dayal and Permanent Black, 1998; originally published in 1988), 194.

39 Tammy Clewell, "Mourning Beyond Melancholia: Freud's Psychoanalysis of Loss,"*Journal of American Psychoanalytic Association* 52:1 (March 2004), 44.

40 Hakakian, *Journey from the Land of No*, 14.
41 Nasreen, *Phera*, 75.
42 Walter Benjamin, "Ninth Thesis on the Philosophy of History," in *Illuminations* (New York: Knopf, 1969), 257–58.
43 Another example is offered in Bebe's slow regression into madness, in Joginder Paul's Urdu story "*Dariyaon Pyas*" or "Thirst of Rivers." In "*Dariyaon Pyas*," Bebe (Mother), on whose face "the contours of the haveli [her former home] are fully etched," "fails to see anything" because "a veil of the past perpetually hangs over [her] eyes" (80); moreover, her grip on reality starts to slip as her long-ago past becomes "as living, real and immediate as the present" (Prakash, 72). Conversing with her dead husband, she "gently caresses the bunch of keys" (84) but, when she "tries all of the keys of the haveli on the lock [in the new residence], in quick succession. The lock … refuses to open" (86) because her past is permanently locked away. Joginder Paul, "*Dariyaon Pyas*," in Tarun K. Saint ed., *Translating Partition: Essays, Stories, Criticism* (New Delhi: Katha, 2001); Bodh Prakash, *Writing Partition: Aesthetics and Ideology in Hindi and Urdu Literature* (Delhi: Pearson Longman, 2008).
44 Syed Waliullah, "The Escape," in Niaz Zaman, ed., *The Escape and Other Stories of 1947* (Dhaka: University Press, 2000). All citations are from this text.
45 Ibid., 8.
46 Ibid., 10.
47 Ibid., 16.
48 Clewell, "Mourning Beyond Melancholia," 44.
49 Nasreen, *Phera*, 71.
50 Niaz Zaman, *A Divided Legacy*: The Partition in Selected Novels of India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh (Dhaka: University Press, 1999), 310.
51 A note of wistfulness for the land and life left behind is noticeable in the interviews conducted by Debjani Dutta of displaced Muslim women currently settled in Bangladesh: one of the interviewees, Sultana Farooq Sobhan, says that she "resented this drastic dislocation," and "felt like returning to [her] old city" (158–59). However, she also speaks of being "terribly afraid" and feeling "nervous and frightened while passing the Sealdah area" (158). But there is more than just nostalgia: another interviewee, Taiyeba Ahmed states, "We could easily have stayed back, but my father cherished different dreams. He wanted to contribute to the building of the new nation, Pakistan" (162). It is the idea of building the new nation that perhaps inspired many to migrate to the new country, and creative writings have often paid more attention to that. See Jashodhara Bagchi and Subhoranjan Dasgupta, eds., with Subhasri Ghosh. *The Trauma and the Triumph: Gender and Partition in Eastern India* v. 2 (Calcutta: Stree, 2009).
52 See Chakrabarty, "Remembered Villages."
53 Syed Waliullah, "*Ekti Tulsi Gachher Kahini*," originally published in *Dui Teer* (*The Two Banks*) (Dhaka: Nawroze Kitabistan, 1964). Translated from Bengali by the author. I have used the translation included in Zaman's *The Escape and Other Stories of 1947*. All page numbers are from this text.
54 Ibid., 22.
55 Ibid.
56 Ibid., 19.
57 Huq, *Agunpakhi*, 235–36.
58 Given that she is the wife of the second son of the family, "metar bou" could be *mejor bou*, meaning wife of the second one, or *mejo bou* meaning the second daughter-in-law.
59 Joan Kelly writes "Women's history has a dual goal: to restore women to history and to restore our history to women." Kelly, *Women, History, and Theory* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 1.

60 In Umm-E-Ummara's story "*Ba gunah-e-be-gunahi*" ("More Sinned Against that Sinning"), Pakhi, the narrator's sister-in-law is a Bengali Muslim woman from East Pakistan, but she plays a very small part in the story. And the story does not present her as someone affected by the Partition. "*Ba gunah-e-be-gunahi*," *Funun* (January–February, 1973). I thank Sean Pue for the citation details.

61 Prabodh K. Sanyal, *Hashubanu* (Calcutta: Bengal Publishers, 1952). An orphan by the age of five, Hashubanu, a Bengali Muslim woman, is raised by her father's employer, the wealthy Hindu landlord Jibendranarayan Chaudhuri in his home in Hajipur in East Bengal, and grows up with Chaudhuri's daughter Meera, and her husband-to-be Hiran. Hashubanu acquires an education in Calcutta, and after two failed marriages, returns to live with the Chaudhuris, and is put in charge of the estate's treasury. She helps the family escape from the village when on the night of Meera and Hiran's wedding Muslim villagers set the house on fire. The Chaudhuris arrive in Calcutta penniless, and reconnect with Hiran, and with Hashubanu who rescues them from their squalid surroundings and shelters them in the home of a relative. Meera disavows her half-completed marriage to Hiran, and hopes to find employment in order to support herself. Hiran and Hashubanu travel around the country and eventually arrive in East Pakistan where they disguise themselves as a Muslim couple and become local performers until they are captured as spies. Hiran is deported to India, but Hashubanu, because of her activism and popularity among the peasants, is regarded as both an asset and a traitor to Pakistan and kept under house arrest. The police inspector administers small doses of poison with her food, and after she falls gravely ill, she is freed. On her deathbed, Hashubanu makes Meera and Hiran promise to work for the downtrodden.

62 *Hashubanu* was proscribed in Pakistan in 1971 because of the novel's trenchant criticism of the Pakistani state. On June 16, 1971, *The Daily Morning News* reported that, "The authorities have also released a list of books already prescribed [*sic*.] by the Government of East Pakistan." The list contained sixty-nine "objectionable books, pamphlet, poster or leaflet" whose "publishing, printing, circulation or possession" was considered "a punishable offence under MLR-51" with a "maximum punishment of seven years rigorous imprisonment." The article also reported that, "All concerned have been advised, in their own interest, to deposit such books etc., with nearest military authorities," http://profilebengal.com/mnnews/page121.html.

63 Huq, *Agunpakhi*, 249.

64 Nasreen, *Phera*, 28.

65 Huq, *Agunpakhi*, 251.

66 Debjani Sengupta, *The Partition of Bengal: Fragile Borders and New Identities* (Delhi: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 227.

67 Amitav Ghosh, *The Hungry Tide* (Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin, 2005), 211.

68 Huq, *Agunpakhi*, 23.

69 Ibid., 245.

70 Ibid., 252.

71 The criticism of the rise in religious nationalism and the creation of Pakistan hits a much more strident note in the political views expressed by the narrator's educated husband, who is favorably inclined towards Gandhi, and critical of the British for engineering rifts between Hindus and Muslims. *Agunpakhi* censures the Hinduist politics of Vallabhbhai Patel and Shyama Prasad Mukherjee; but some of book's harshest criticism is reserved for Jinnah.

72 Ismat Chughtai, "*Jadein*," translated from Urdu by Vishwamitter Adil and Alok Bhalla as "Roots" in *Stories About the Partition of India*, ed. Alok Bhalla (New Delhi: Harper Collins, 1999; originally published in 1994).

73 Ibid., 583.

74 Thamma's Jethamoshai in Ghosh's *The Shadow Lines* echoes Amma's ruminations when upon Thamma's arrival in Dhaka to "rescue" him, he tells her:

> Once you start moving, you never stop. That's what I told my sons when they took the trains. I don't believe in this India- Shindia. It's all very well, you are going away now, but suppose when you get there they decide to draw another line somewhere? What will you do then? Where will you move to? No one will have you anywhere. As for me, I was born here, and will die here.
>
> (Ghosh, *The Shadow Lines*, 211)

75 Huq, *Agunpakhi*, 29.
76 Ibid., 251–52.
77 Ibid., 251.
78 In her study of power and the politics of language in colonial Bengal in the late-eighteenth through the early-twentieth century, historian Anindita Ghosh notes that:

> It was the vernacular reformist, Reverend James Long, who first coined the term "Musalman-Bengali" in 1855, and fixed its social status. He regarded it as chiefly the language of fictional works lacking in taste, and read by Muslim boatmen. The dislike of the Persian influence in Bengali by British colonial authorities and missionaries alike became obvious early on in their project for linguistic reform. In his preface to the Grammar in 1778, Halhed had called the variety of Bengali with Perso-Arabic words in it "debased". In 1821, the *Friend of India* argued passionately in its columns for replacing Persian as the language of courts, to deliver the Hindus "from the haughty domination of their Mussalman conquerors". The substitute suggested was Bengali, as the "common language of the people". Even as late as 1879, this attitude had not changed among the official community. In his report on vernacular publications, C. W. Bolton even hesitated "to call (it) a language", for it possessed "neither grammar nor a vocabulary, being but a mongrel of Bengali and Urdu".
>
> (Anindita Ghosh, *Power in Print: Popular Publishing and the Politics of Language and Culture in a Colonial Society, 1778–1905* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006, 61–62)

79 Firdous Azeem and Perween Hasan, "Historical Construction of Gender in the Late Nineteenth and the Early Twentieth Century in Muslim Bengal," in the *Routledge Handbook of Gender in South Asia*, ed. Leela Fernandes (London: Routledge, 2014), 31.
80 Ibid.
81 KattaMa, an elderly woman belonging to an upper-class Hindu family closely acquainted with the narrator's family, also speaks standard Bengali.
82 Joya Chatterji, *The Spoils of Partition*: Bengal and India, 1947–1967 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 180.
83 Naila Kabeer, "The Quest for National Identity: Women, Islam and the State in Bangladesh,"*Feminist Review* 37 (Spring 1991), 40.
84 Huq, *Agunpakhi*, 252.
85 *The Times of India* published on April 15, 2008, the day after the Maitree Express ran its maiden journey, reported on the event with the following:

> A rail track snapped in half along the India–Bangladesh border. And, the protagonist's lament: "That is my country … How near is it. Still, I can never reach there." Ritwik Ghatak's immortal scene from Komal Gandhar had captured the grief of a generation torn asunder by Partition and war. But, had his protagonist Bhrigu lived now, his dream of reaching there wouldn't have remained just a dream. For, Bengalis on either side of the international border got a gift to cherish this Poila Baisakh.
>
> (*The Times of India*, April 15, 2008. Internet edition)

6 Recasting men

Constructing the heroic national masculine

Preceding chapters in this book have tracked the Partition experiences of the displaced; this chapter studies how the work around refugee welfare opened up opportunities for young men from the middle classes to shape a new heroic mode of national belonging. The creating of a new heroic masculinity was a response to Jawaharlal Nehru's address to the Constituent Assembly where he summoned his audience to a project of nation-building with:

> [the] future is not one of ease or resting but of incessant striving so that we might fulfil the pledges we have so often taken and the One we shall take today. The service of India means the service of the millions who suffer. … And so we have to labour and to work and work hard to give reality to our dreams.[1]

Composed within a decade of Independence, Narayan Sanyal's *Bokultala PL Camp* (*Bokultala Permanent Liability Camp*, 1955)[2] is deeply ensconced within the Nehruvian vision of compassionate (and paternalistic) nation-building through labor. The novel's middle-class protagonist, Ritobrata Bose, is just the man to realize the dream. This chapter tracks the novel's mapping of a set of talents desirable in the "new" nationalist masculinity, and examines how this secular, conscientious patriot and man of science, on the one hand, takes the place of the old anxiety about masculinity induced by colonialism, and on the other, articulates a rejection of the brutal masculinity associated with the Great Calcutta Killing, and the Partition.

Beginning in the nineteenth century, colonial representations of Bengali masculinity were unflattering. Whig parliamentarian, essayist, and historian Thomas Babington Macaulay, for instance, commented that:

> Whatever the Bengalee does, he does languidly. His favorite pursuits are sedentary. He shrinks from bodily exertion; and though voluble in dispute, and singularly pertinacious in the war of the chicane he seldom engages in personal conflict, and scarcely ever enlists as a soldier. There never perhaps existed a people so thoroughly fitted by habit for a foreign yoke.[3]

Elsewhere Macaulay wrote that, "The physical organization of the Bengalee is feeble even to effeminacy. … His pursuits are sedentary, his limbs delicate, his movements languid. During many ages he has been trampled by men of bolder and more hardy breeds."[4] And Macaulay was not alone! Colonial fiction at the *fin de siècle* also reinforced the stereotype of the feeble Bengali man. "The Head of the District" (1899) by Rudyard Kipling presents a sketch of the Bengali man in Grish Chunder Dé: Oxford educated, "a Bengali of the Bengalis, crammed with code and case law; a beautiful man so far as routine and deskwork go."[5] Dé is appointed Deputy Commissioner of the district of Kot-Kumharsen in northwestern India, to replace the late English officer. Soon after his arrival the Afghans residing outside the borders of Kot-Kumharsen launch a raid on the district; and Dé, petrified, refuses to accept his charge and flees. His brother, Debendra Nath Dé, who accompanies him to the district, also leaves, but is captured by an Afghan, and beheaded. Only by the timely action of Tallantire, Grish Chunder Dé's English subordinate, who knows "his district blindfold,"[6] are the attackers apprehended, and one of Tallantire's colleagues comments that "it is better to have a sharp short outbreak than five years of *impotent* administration inside the Border"[7] (italics mine). At the end of the story, the leader of the Afghan tribe, Khoda Dad Khan, brings to Tallantire, the "crop-haired head of a spectacled Bengali gentleman [Debendra Nath Dé] open-eyed, open-mouthed – the head of Terror incarnate."[8] Tallantire tells Khan, "Rest assured that the Government will send you a *man*!"[9] (italics in original) and the latter responds with "Ay … for we also be *men*," and adds "And by God, Sahib, may thou be that *man*!"[10] (italics mine). The ending is a call for the continuation of *British* rule in the region (since only the British can keep peace inside the border, and protect the natives from harm), rather than ineffective administration by an educated Indian. What is striking is the use of the word "impotent" and repetitions of "man."[11] The message is clear – the British are "manly" as are the bellicose Afghans living in the border area, but the Bengali fails the test of serving as proxy-imperialists! The business of running the empire is, as W.E. Henley in his review of Kipling's work writes, "a man's work done for men,"[12] and the Bengalis are simply not man enough.

Analyzing colonial masculinity, historian Mrinalini Sinha writes:

> By the late nineteenth century, the politics of colonial masculinity was organized along a descending scale: senior British officials associated with the administrative and military establishment, and elite non-officials, those not directly related to the colonial administration, occupied positions at the top of the scale. Other groups and classes that made up colonial society supposedly shared some, though not all, of the attributes associated with the figure of the "manly Englishman". In this colonial ordering of masculinity, the politically self-conscious Indian intellectuals occupied a unique place: they represented an "unnatural" or "perverted" form of masculinity. Hence, this group of Indians, the most typical representatives

> of which at the time were the middle-class Bengali Hindus, became the quintessential referents for the odious category designated as "effeminate *babus*".[13]

The charge of sloth and impotence was directed chiefly at English-educated Bengali Hindus. By contrast, Bengali Muslims, "the vast majority" of whom, Sinha notes, "were among the laboring classes and were also under-represented in the Western-educated community," were "usually exempted from the popular elaboration of Bengali effeminacy."[14] There were, nevertheless, "Bengali Muslim leaders who were equally concerned about the effeminacy of the Muslims in Bengal."[15] And, in the years after the founding of Pakistan, Bengali Muslim men from East Pakistan would suffer similar prejudices from West Pakistanis.[16]

Bengali Hindus in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries concurred with the colonial claim; they came to believe that their want of muscle and masculinity was the reason for their subordinate condition.[17] The following verse from 1896 is testament to their adoption of the colonial stereotype and ridicules the indolent Bengali man as a contemporary version of the gluttonous comic *vidushaka*, a stock character in Sanskrit courtly literature. The poem is a severe indictment of the "slavish" Bengali babu, who yet worships *Shakti*:

> The Bengali alas! is always pathetic,
> Eats, dresses, slumbers, and guards his domestic,
> Should you give him a meal – no matter trash or treat,
> That instant he's your slave and falls at your feet!
> So why does he worship those red feet with flowers?
> Abandon your lion-riding, in these parts O Mother,
> Should such a breed worship you, who will then be porters?
> Who will be the pen-pushers? And toil in hordes?
> For Mother you can never make them unlearn ever:
> Bengalis have been slaves – forever and forever.[18]

The effeminate babu was also caricatured by satirists and folk artists, particularly the Kalighat painters and the *Patuas*. Hindu cultural nationalists responded to the slandering of Bengali masculinity, by initiating a project of re-masculinization through body building and the development of the martial arts.[19] Prominent Hindu religious ideologue and nationalist Swami Vivekananda, for example, a wrestler himself, exhorted his fellow men with, "You will understand the *Gita* better with your biceps, your muscles, a little stronger. … You will understand the *Upanishad*s better and the glory of the Atman when your body stands firm upon your feet, and you feel yourselves as men."[20] The alliance between nationalism and male bodybuilding also found discursive support in the work of Bengali litterateurs like Bankimchandra Chattopadhyaya and Saratchandra Chattopadhyay in the writings of the freedom-fighter Aurobindo Ghosh, and in the work of the ardent nationalist

Saraladebi Chaudhurani (née Ghoshal). But this militaristic masculinity was, from the beginning, closely associated with Hindu nationalism and sectarian in its makeup. Saraladebi's uncle Rabindranath Tagore censured this alliance between an aggressive masculinity and a polarizing nationalism in his novel *Ghare Baire*[21] (*The Home and the World*, 1916) through the figure of Sandip, the charismatic but unscrupulous leader of the Swadeshi Movement.

The attainment of Independence offered the opportunity to re-write the script of Bengali masculinity. Partition-related migrations and violence, in combination with the optimism around Independence, particularly the promise of developing a modern nation, offered the right setting for presenting the "new" man – the laboring patriot. But while postcolonial writings were both a response to, as well as an overcoming of, the colonial model of masculinity, the authors often adopted some fundamentals of the colonial model. On masculinity and labor, for instance, Bengali writings championed the model of colonial masculinity derived from the Victorian period when, as Martin Danahay notes, "'men' and 'work' were used as virtual synonyms."[22] Just as Will Musgrave, an Englishman in India, in Ethel M. Dell's *The Way of an Eagle*, "works like an ox,"[23] the Bengali hero Ritobrata Bose in Sanyal's *Bokultala PL Camp* is repeatedly presented as a conscientious worker – he gives up the comforts of city living and chooses instead to live in the refugee camp where he supervises daily the construction work while also catering to the needs of the residents. The representation of masculinity in the novel also departs from the colonial model in some important aspects: the new Bengali man is less anxiety ridden about his manhood than the heroes of Raj fiction. Unlike Dell's Captain Merryon in the story "The Safety Curtain" – whose masculinity is underscored using a long string of descriptors, "indomitable, unfailing, always fulfilling his duties with machine-like regularity, stern, impenetrable, hard as granite"[24] – or conveyed through the deliberate disregard for artistic talents, considered "bad form" by the Anglo-Indian community in E. M. Forster's *A Passage to India*,[25] Ritobrata writes poetry, composes stories, and is sensitive to another's suffering to the point of tearing up, but he never agonizes about his actions as being perceived as unmanly. His conduct articulates a simultaneous rejection both of the colonial "hard as granite" manliness as well as of the violent masculinity associated with the Partition. In other words, the novel asserts the ascendancy of the intellectual and laboring man, the "thinking and doing man" rather than the "macho man."

The following section, "To labor, serve, and protect" examines the development of the heroic national masculine in Sanyal's *Bokultala PL Camp*.[26] But masculinity, in the novel, is more than just good work ethic, it comprises a blend of virtues: integrity; the protection of refugees, and of women; and above all, nationalism – the love of country. While not *all* third-world texts are national allegories as Fredric Jameson has claimed,[27] *Bokultala PL Camp* is an example of one such text. Through the story of the refugee camp, the novel tells the story of the Indian nation and its discontents. The refugee camps were visible reminders of the failure of Indian nationalism to support

the cultural and religious plurality of the subcontinent, and the fact of the refugees fleeing the lost parts of India, a sign of the disaffection of the Muslim population. The Partition and the creation of Pakistan were signs of the fragmenting of Indian nationalism by the religious right, both Hindu and Muslim. *Bokultala PL Camp* seeks to recuperate, in some measure, faith in Indian nationalism through the earnest service of the moral masculine.

To labor, serve, and protect

Narayan Sanyal's *Bokultala PL Camp* draws upon the author's first-hand experiences as a superintending engineer in a refugee camp. ("*PL*" in the title stands for "Permanent Liability." The Indian state designated as "Permanent Liability" indigent Partition refugees including old, infirm, or injured men, widows and other women without male guardians, and all accompanying children. Since these refugees lacked financial resources and male custodians, the state assumed parental responsibilities and set up camps where the "permanent liability" were housed, and given a weekly ration of food and a small cash dole.) As with many Bengali social-realist novels from the 1940s and 50s, the novel is minimalist in terms of style. Its social and political message is lightened with moments of irony. Set in the mid-1950s, it presents an optic into camp life through a spectrum of refugee and non-refugee characters. The third-person narrator, of limited omniscience, is the protagonist's friend who assembles the narrative from the hero Ritobrata's journal entries, and personal letters, and interviews with his wife. The narrator's knowledge, therefore, is limited by what Ritobrata and his wife share; this form allows for a certain patterned silence to pervade.

Freshly graduated from engineering college, Ritobrata's first professional appointment is as sub-divisional officer in charge of construction and repair at a refugee camp at Bokultala. Located near the Bengal–Bihar border, the barracks, originally built for the army, have been converted to accommodate the state's "permanent liabilities," housing displaced people from Pakistan of all ages and conditions. At the camp Ritobrata comes into contact with a large number of refugees ranging from an educated "mad-man" who recites Latin verses from Virgil and speaks English fluently; through Kusum, who has taken shelter in the camp pretending to be a widow, and her husband Bishwanath;[28] to the beautiful Kamala and her mother; and the slothful Barokhoka who perpetually harasses Kamala. Like Ritobrata, there are non-refugee camp residents as well: the elderly Mr. Tafadar,[29] the camp superintendent genuinely interested in refugee welfare; his deputy Bhairabchandra who, in league with the camp physician Sadhucharan, ruthlessly exploits refugee women for personal gratification and money. And then, there is the cunning Ramsharan Singh, the contractor, whose clashes with Ritobrata provide much of the drama in the novel. Besides the residents of Bokultala, there are cameo appearances by Ritobrata's bosses, Mr. Dutt, the Executive Engineer, and the unnamed Chief Engineer; his friend and mentor Mr. Chaudhuri; and his

older brother, *mejda*. Ritobrata's interactions with this cast of characters constitutes the plot of the novel, which tracks the hero's growth from guileless naiveté concerning refugee welfare to the more practical realization that his good intentions alone are not sufficient. It ends with Ritobrata's marriage to Kamala and his decision to leave his employment at the camp.

The novel presents the idealist Ritobrata Bose as a prototype, the kind of young man the newly independent nation needs. In fact, singularly interesting is the narrative's romanticized construction of a national masculinity presented not only through the hero, Ritobrata, but also the secondary protagonist, Bishwanath, whom Ritobrata meets in the camp. Together they represent the younger and older versions of the ideal Indian (Hindu) man. Model masculinity, in this novel, is organized around four intersecting issues: the protection of women, service to the nation, the love of labor, and personal integrity.

First, the issue of women: set in the postcolonial moment, Sanyal's novel offers a response to James Mill's views on Hindu customs and the status of women in *The History of British India* (1817).[30] In this work of colonial historiography, Mill writes that:

> The condition of the women is one of the most remarkable circumstances in the manners of nations. Among rude people, the women are generally degraded; among civilized people they are exalted. … Nothing can exceed the habitual contempt which the Hindus entertain for their women.[31]

Bokultala PL Camp counters Mill's claims of misogyny and the degradation of women in Hindu society with the love and esteem Ritobrata and Bishwanath exhibit towards the women in the novel. It also offers bold and lively individuals in the novel's two women characters, Kusum and Kamala. There are, also moments of agreement with Mill. Like Mill, *Bokultala PL Camp* uses the woman-index as a way to distinguish between "rude people" and "civilized people," in this case, between bad and good Indians, in other words, those who are not sufficiently respectful towards women, and those who are; and this is also a measure of their masculinity.

Women-related concerns, in fact, comprise a large part of the novel. These are ranged along two axes: (i) the terrorizing of women through the pervasiveness of sexual violence; and (ii) the social restoration of middle-class refugee women. Despite some overlaps, the problems are almost neatly compartmentalized between Kusum and Kamala – the first through the story of Kusum (mostly) and the second through that of Kamala. Partition is here fully submerged into these deeper social issues. First, about the prevalence of sexual violence: both in and outside the context of Partition, the deployment of intimate violence in terrorizing women constitutes an important area of the novel's social commentary, whether it is the brutalities committed by foreign soldiers defending British colonial territory during World War II, the enemy created by a demonizing sectarianism, or, that perpetuated by one's co-religionists. Its

presence is felt in the local village women's horrific memories of the military camp in their midst;[32] or, the abduction of Kusum, and the death of her sister Kamini. It is also manifest in more everyday forms – only seemingly less brutal – such as Barokhoka's constant leering and the stream of offensive comments aimed at Kamala.

Writing soon after Independence, Partition, and the communal riots in West Bengal, India, and in East Pakistan in the 1950s, when populist discourse in India regularly projected Pakistani-Muslim men as dangerous tormenters of Hindu women, and Hindu men as their dedicated protectors, Sanyal, while not denying the culpability of some Muslim men in the violence against Hindu women, simultaneously asserts that often Hindu men, despite the claims of Indian nationalism, did not hesitate in taking advantage of Hindu women's vulnerability.[33] If, on the one hand, there is Abdul (Muslim), who abducts Kusum, and whose relentless harassment contributes to Kusum's sister Kamini's suicide; on the other, are Sadhucharan, the physician at the camp, and Bhairabchandra, its deputy superintendent (both Hindu) who use defenseless refugee women in the basest of ways. And, there is Barokhoka (also Hindu) with "eyes glowing like those of a ferocious dog …, eyes licking [Kamala's] freshly-bathed body all over."[34] The novel contends that if Hindu women living in East Pakistan are compelled to flee to India because of atrocities committed by Muslim men, their lives and honor are not necessarily more secure on this side. Thus, while it is deeply embedded within a discourse of nationalism, the novel resists chauvinistic self–other stereotyping. Further, it suggests that the insecurity and lack of freedom women face have both developed from patriarchal norms shared by Hindus and Muslims alike, in consequence of which the claim that Hindu men will protect women on the basis of nationalist feelings is dubious.

Second, as a way to socially rehabilitate young middle-class refugee women, *Bokultala PL Camp*, like Jyotirmoyee Devi's *Epar Ganga Opar Ganga*, favors marriage. Kamala is a case in point. However, the fact of her "paper" marriage to Ritobrata, although blessed by Ritobrata's mentor, the fatherly Mr. Chaudhuri, and legitimate insofar as the state is concerned, is by itself insufficient for her to claim her place within Ritobrata's family and community given the prejudices surrounding refugee women. In order to situate Kamala in the heart of Hindu upper-caste and middle-class domestic respectability, the novel uses the traditional Bengali wedding ritual *boubhat* (*lit*. bride-rice),[35] and the symbolic significance of Ritobrata's kin and community consuming food served by Kamala. Tension is created around it since the food Kamala cooked had previously been rejected by Ritobrata's kin. The *boubhat* enacts a reversal of the scene of rejection.[36] The *boubhat* gathers together *mejda*, Ritobrata's older brother and the family patriarch who previously snubbed Kamala's lunch invitation, and Ritobrata's boss, who believed the baseless camp gossip regarding Ritobrata's womanizing and had expressed his disapproval by leaving his home unfed, together with Kamala, the new bride serving food. It is a moment of reconciliation and Kamala's social

acceptance. Both, the familial and the professional/public worlds Ritobrata inhabits, accord space to the refugee woman.

The issues involving women – the ubiquity of intimate violence, and the social restoration of refugee women through marriage – are instrumental in the construction of an idealized masculinity represented by Ritobrata and Bishwanath. In the novel's definition of the model (male) citizen, regard for women constitutes a critical component. Both men are presented as being keenly protective of women's honor. (Their action offers a reformulation of Gayatri Spivak's observations on the colonial prohibition of *sati* as "white men saving good brown women from bad brown men."[37] Instead here, in the postcolonial era *brown* men are saving brown women from brown men.) On the one hand, Bishwanath foils Kusum's reduction to an item of barter in the Nirmal–Abdul squabble over her, he murders Abdul to avenge her honor and her sister's death, and finally, saves her from the clutches of the lecherous camp physician Sadhucharan. On the other, Ritobrata refuses, as Kusum's employer, to deliver the pregnant woman to the self-righteous camp staff and residents planning to expel her, he orders a partition to screen Kamala from Barokhoka's relentless leering, saves her from Bhairabchandra's indecent proposal, and provides her refuge when she is alone and vulnerable. Throughout, the attitude towards women – respect, or the lack thereof – is treated as an index of the individual's morals, indeed of masculinity. And on that scale Abdul, Barokhoka, Sadhucharan, and Bhairabchandra score very poorly.

Bishwanath and Ritobrata's protective impulse extends to their electing to marry women considered socially unacceptable (Kusum) or socially inferior (Kamala). Kusum's abduction by Abdul Gani not only leads to her family's exclusion among the village Hindus, but also wrecks her chances of finding a husband in their traditional society, one that insists on marriage. Marriage with Bishwanath offers her the chance to live a respectable and fulfilling domestic life. To fully evoke the heroism of this act, the narration mentions that although Bishwanath was away when it happened he is cognizant of Kusum's abduction; he is aware of her social standing in the village as an outcast, and deliberately defies social conventions. Bishwanath's acceptance of Kusum directly counters the treatment abducted women received within their families. While Bishwanath's story is revealed using reported speech, the novel carefully charts Ritobrata's inner deliberations and his battles with his middle-class prejudices concerning refugee women. After Mr. Chaudhuri apprises Ritobrata of Kamala's feelings towards him, he muses:

> To dream of marrying a highly-placed engineer in government-service is wrong for a girl like her. A sin! Then why her lofty aspirations? If you knowingly thrust your hands into a fire, would the flames forgive you? Yet he had written a poem on Kamala! Shame! … Both were aware that it was absolutely impossible for him to marry Kamala. … Shame! What's this drivel he's been thinking? Who is Kamala? Just an ordinary refugee

> girl, *who after tasting different waters had finally drifted to the camp*. He came from a reputable family himself. What's more shameful than for him to take home a refugee girl from the camp and introduce her as the junior daughter-in-law of the Bose family? Strange! Where did the question of marriage arise?[38] [italics mine]

While Ritobrata's reluctance to consider a relationship with Kamala is obvious, what is remarkable is the recurrence of the word "shame." He finds it shameful to have nurtured feelings for "an ordinary refugee girl." Yet, it is not so much himself, but rather Kamala that he blames – *she* is playing with fire. Negating the sincerity of her affections, he deems her a social climber seeking marriage with a well-placed officer which "for a girl like her," is a "sin." It is their mismatched social ranks which makes their marriage "absolutely impossible." However, what bothers him more is revealed in his description of Kamala using the Bengali idiom "*sat ghater jol khaowa*." It translates literally to "one who drank water from seven places in the river," in other words "one who has been places" thereby characterizing the person as experienced. When applied to a woman, "experienced" usually hints at sexual promiscuity. In addition, the phrase suggests that having been "in many places" Kamala could scarcely have maintained food–water rules, thus, calling into question her bodily purity. The suspicion of her impurity operates on many levels.

Eventually, our hero does the right thing. The recurrent anxiety plaguing the non-displaced middle-class is that of the refugee woman's lack of purity, and it is precisely this that Ritobrata must overcome. It is his contemplation of the possibility of marriage with a refugee woman even while vehemently repudiating the idea that sets him apart. His harsh rejection is set in contrast with his later decision to wed her in the face of resistance from his family:

> he couldn't leave Kamala. It would be wrong, a sin, to disregard this immense and profound love. Ritobrata cared nothing about society. He wouldn't let the bogus curse of family-pride touch their pristine, steadfast love. In a low voice, as if uttering a sacred chant, he called "Kamala. Kamala!"[39]

The individual finally prevails over expectations of his community, in other words, desire overcomes custom. The words "wrong" and "sin" occur in the above passage and the one previously quoted. But he applies them to Kamala and himself differently – in ways determined by gender. If it had been "wrong" or "a sin" for Kamala to aspire to marry Ritobrata, it would be "wrong, a sin" for him to ignore her love. Whereas it is a sin, according to him, for Kamala to seek to rise above her station, for him, it is more of a moral failure. Both words add a quasi-religious note that would be difficult to miss. The description of their love in the second passage as "*apaapbiddha*" literally meaning "untouched by sin," translated above as "pristine," in other words, "unconsummated," lauds their restraint, and gives their love a

sanctified character. The religious aspect is further reinforced with Ritobrata uttering Kamala's name in a "low voice" like a "sacred chant" – the description is evocative of rituals in a traditional Hindu-Bengali wedding ceremony. Their marriage is a religious obligation for him. Ritobrata is an exemplary masculine citizen of a newly independent nation optimistic about its future, nothing less would be expected of him! (Yet, Kamala too must re-make herself in such a way that she may be *worthy* of him. When Ritobrata finally sees her after having avoided her for a few days, she brings to his mind the image of Aparna grown thin in penance. This is an allusion to Aparna, or the goddess Parvati, in Kalidasa's *Kumarasambhava* who, after Shiva thwarts her attempt to seduce him into marriage, has to win him through penance, prayer, and meditation. Through the comparison with the goddess, Kamala is elevated further, and rendered purer than before; she is now fully "deserving" of the hero of the novel.[40]) In *Epar Ganga Opar Ganga* the good citizen Pramode also proposes marriage to the refugee Sutara years after witnessing her relentless harassment in his family. But although he proposes marriage, Pramode has little romantic attachment towards her. He does it simply as an act of compassion. What makes Sanyal's hero special is that Ritobrata and Kamala connect on a more passionate plane – they fall in love. The novel is able to imagine a romantic destiny for them. The romance plot bequeaths on the novel a "happily ever after" ending.

Together Ritobrata and Bishwanath represent two chapters in the development of a vision of the finest form of Indian national masculinity. Their respect towards, and protection of, women is of a piece with their love for the motherland. In the case of Bishwanath, a correlation is made between the woman and the nation in the transparent symbolism of his resolution of the Nirmal–Abdul conflict over Kusum. The Hindu and the Muslim man are ranged against one another struggling for control over the body of the woman/motherland. The nationalist Bishwanath understands that neither alternative alone is good for the woman/motherland, and his intervention saves her from dishonor.

Like Ritobrata, Bishwanath is a patriot. And, their dedication and service-commitment to the nation rise to the level of private virtue.[41] Yet, Bishwanath's patriotism, the novel suggests, stands on slightly precarious grounds. While his well-built body with broad shoulders and chest, as well as his wrestling skills counter the colonial model of the effeminate Bengali, it risks being associated with sectarian nationalism. This is because, as mentioned earlier, the cult of the male body and particularly the mastery of the art of wrestling are associated with a muscular and masculinized form of Hindu nationalism beginning in the nineteenth century. As mentioned earlier, litterateurs and political activists were involved in the project of reviving Bengali masculinity, discursively and on a corporeal level. Saraladebi Chaudhurani, for instance, founded gymnasiums (*akhara*) in clubs for young men to train in wrestling, fencing, and so on to enable them to build "a strong and manly nation."[42] The cult of masculinity had discursive and ritualistic aspects as well.

Saraladebi Chaudhurani inspired young men with narratives of past heroism and glory (even reinterpreting historical personages and their actions to suit her objectives), and revived selected socio-cultural and religious practices. Her chosen heroes were victorious Hindu men and the rituals too were borrowed from Hinduism. She started the Pratapaditya Utsav to honor the valor of Pratapaditya whom she regarded as "Bengal's Shivaji" and admired "the glory of his manly courage that led him, a small Hindu zamindar, to resist the Mughal emperor alone and to declare the independence of Bengal."[43] (On the other hand, Rabindranath Tagore had censured Pratapaditya in his historical novel *Bouthakuranir Haat* (1883), and was critical of his niece's commemoration.[44]) Saraladebi Chaudhurani also organized the Udayaditya festival to resurrect the heroism of Pratapaditya's son, who died fighting the Mughals. Unable to find a portrait of Udayaditya, she decided that, "A sword would be placed on the stage and all the attendees would commemorate Udayaditya by offering flowers to it."[45] The alliance between masculinity and brute force could scarcely be more obvious. The project of re-masculinizing Bengali youth was, from the beginning, steeped in Hindu traditions. And while it found favorable reception among members of the Indian National Congress, the project bore shades of Hindu nationalism that was not only anti-colonial in its makeup, but anti-Muslim as well. This cult of masculinity was appropriated by militant Hindu groups such as the Hindu Mahasabha. "A volunteer wing of the Hindu Mahasabha," the Bharat Sevashram Sangha "adopted a martial style and urged Hindus to train themselves in the art of self-defence."[46] At one of the Sangha meetings held in September 1939, the audience was encouraged to:

> organise Akharas with the help of Pulin Das and Satin Sen, ex-convicts, and develop their physique[s] and raise a thousand of lathis if the Hindus were attacked. … Posters in Bengali were displayed of which one was entitled "Give up the idea of non-violence now, what is required is strong manhood (*pourasha*)."[47]

And at another Sangha meeting, "Bengali placards with the inscription, 'Hindus, wake up and take up the vow of killing the demons,' were displayed in the pandal."[48]

Bishwanath, however, distances himself from the fascist discourse of Hindu sectarianism and intolerance, establishing instead his patriotism as secular through a private demonstration of his love for the motherland. This is done through setting up a contrast between the refusal of his Muslim co-villagers to participate in the singing of Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay's "*Bande Mataram*" ("Hail Motherland") at a joint Hindu–Muslim peace meeting, and Bishwanath's deference to Muhammad Allama Iqbal's patriotic Urdu song "*Saare jahaan se achchha Hindostan hamara*" ("Better than all the world is our India"). Thus, although Bishwanath and his friends are silenced when they start singing "*Bande Mataram*," as a true nationalist he still pays a solitary homage to the motherland.

While Bishwanath participates in the country's freedom struggle against the British imperial regime and is jailed for it, Ritobrata's contributions come from his technical expertise in service of the recently decolonized nation which, following the Nehruvian vision of development, is looking for engineers and builders. The former seeks to rescue the nation from foreign domination, while the latter seeks to develop it – an older and a newer phase in the same trajectory. Bishwanath's study of Sanskrit poetry demonstrates his appreciation for India's ancient literary traditions and his deep familiarity with the national past, while Ritobrata's training in civil engineering is geared towards designing the future society. When Ritobrata meets Bishwanath in the refugee camp a few years after Independence, the latter has contracted tuberculosis from his years in colonial prisons and is wasting away. It suggests the end of an era, the transition from colonialism to Independence. Bishwanath, no longer a young man, is a colonial relic, and in his stead, the new man Ritobrata takes over because it is time to build the nation. However, patriotism in the colonial era is much less problematic, directed as it is against the oppressive colonial state; postcolonial patriotism, on the other hand, seems to demand an unqualified devotion to the state, as reflected in Ritobrata's steadfast support for the government's refugee welfare efforts. In fact, his conviction in the state's efforts runs so deep that he places the blame for the refugees' dismal circumstances not with the Congress government's unfair treatment of Bengali refugees from East Pakistan (compared with its handling of refugees from West Punjab and the north-western region) but instead with a few corrupt employees involved in implementing welfare programs, and with the refugees themselves. This unreserved and robust support for the government's refugee rehabilitation program is toned down quite a few notches in Sanyal's subsequent novel on life in refugee camps, *Aranyadandak* (*Sentenced to the Forest*, 1961). Ritobrata's optimism regarding his ability to contribute to refugee welfare through committed service is abruptly ruptured at the end of the novel with him resigning from work at the Bokultala camp, and transferring elsewhere. This is a little troubling: is it a sign of his giving up on refugee welfare? Or, on the other hand, is his decision prompted by his realization of the futility of his efforts in the face of this enormous task?

In their different struggles for the nation's wellbeing, Ritobrata and Bishwanath are both laboring men. Labor is the responsible choice of "good" men. The dedication of one's life to labor is necessary for youthful, patriotic masculinity. Whereas Ritobrata proceeds with his duties upon his arrival at the camp, Barokhoka, a young and able-bodied refugee, shuns any kind of work and chooses instead to live on the government's munificence. The very name Barokhoka, used frequently to refer to the oldest male progeny in the family ("oldest-boy"), literally means "big little-boy" (*baro*=big and khoka=little-boy), idiomatically translating to "overgrown little-boy" and is an ironic reference to this character's infantile dependence on the government's welfare programs (and, therefore, his lack of adult masculinity). Barokhoka's refusal of labor amounts to immaturity and a lack of self-esteem – he is a "big little-boy," not

a grown man like Ritobrata. The description of his physique – "a well built young man, with a smooth body oiled to a shine"[49] – is provided simply to underscore its waste. Barokhoka is an example of the Bengali man Macaulay mocked, one who "shrinks from bodily exertion" but is "voluble in dispute." In the moral world of *Bokultala PL Camp*, labor is the mark of a man. The novel invokes a strong producer–consumer (active–passive) binary, deprecating Barokhoka as unproductive. Also, in contrast with the slothful Barokhoka, Bishwanath, despite his physical consumption, seeks employment to take care of his family. Standing alongside the new masculinist ethic of moral freedom and transcendence of custom is the sturdy bourgeois ethic of personal responsibility.

Protection of women and the love of labor are really aspects of personal integrity, an emergent conception of masculinity. As a patriotic Indian Ritobrata's conscience is comparable to "a porcupine's quill."[50] This is set in contrast with Ramsharan Singh, the contractor hired by the government, the unpatriotic Indian, who has no reservations about robbing the state and injuring refugees. Singh's fraudulent and self-serving scheme is set in motion when he is ordered to buttress the roof of the camp hospital with new timber columns provided by the government. He appropriates the expensive new timber, which he sells elsewhere for profit, and leaves the old and decaying timber columns in place, hiding his deception successfully by covering the columns with bitumen, so that it is no longer possible to tell the rot setting in them. The burden of Singh's duplicity is borne physically by the refugees who are injured when the roof of the hospital collapses during a storm. And also by the inexperienced Ritobrata who fails to see through Singh's cunning and is publicly humiliated by his superior, Mr. Dutt. (In another instance, Singh attempts to substitute tin sheets supplied by the government for the construction of refugee dwellings with inferior sheets of lesser thickness, but, this time, he is caught. Singh is brought to justice through a collaboration between his discontented chauffer Yasin and Ritobrata, a metaphor for the mutual cooperation between Hindu and Muslim youth to end corruption in the newly independent nation. It offers a means to consolidate Ritobrata's secular credentials.) Singh, like Barokhoka, Sadhucharan, and Bhairabchandra, represents a problem – the precarity of nationalism, a nationalism that has failed to rally all citizens around its cause. Driven by self-interest, unlike the selflessly laboring Ritobrata, they remain untouched by the moral urge to serve the country, and thwart the government's welfare programs and/or take advantage of them. Ritobrata, Bishwanath, and Ritobrata's mentor Mr. Chaudhuri are dedicated patriots, and for their service to the nation and its people, they are ultimately rewarded with Kamala, Kusum, and promotions at the workplace, while Ramsharan Singh, Barokhoka, Sadhucharan, Bhairabchandra, the "unpatriotic" set, are sentenced to prison, humiliated, or, at best left empty handed.

The strident message regarding national masculinity leaves no room for ambiguity. Barokhoka, Ramsharan Singh, Sadhucharan, and Bhairabchandra are foils to the moral masculinity of Bishwanath and Ritobrata. They are lazy, dishonest, hypocritical, and disrespectful towards women. Their corruption

threatens to undermine the state's efforts at refugee rehabilitation/integration. The model manhood represented by Bishwanath and Ritobrata is set in contrast not only with the *lumpen* Barokhoka or the devious Ramsharan Singh, but also the "westernized" Indian – in other words, the insufficiently Indian – in this case, Mr. Dutt, Executive Engineer and Ritobrata's boss:

> Mr. Dutt has the stamp of a foreign university. … [H]is mind and body bear the stamp of Anglicized Bengali circles of the nineteenth century. 'Merica crops up frequently in his conversations. He hasn't been able to forget his days in Massachusetts and often refers to that country across the seas as "home." … In the way he walks, the way he talks, in his hats and ties he is a proper sahib. His Bengali falters – he speaks English like a yankee.[51]

Clearly, Mr. Dutt does not fit the ideal of national masculinity. As a Western-educated and Anglicized Indian he would be deprecatingly counted among "Macaulay's children," or products of Macaulay's education policy to create "a class of persons, Indian in blood and colour, but English in taste, in opinions, in morals, and in intellect."[52] With his "mind and body" bearing "the stamp of Anglicized Bengali circles of the nineteenth century," Mr. Dutt is an anachronism in the post-Independence moment. If this was not sufficient condemnation, we are further told that vulgarity marks his speech – whether it is his use of "nigger"[53] when speaking of the coal-tarred columns, insulting the refugees as "heathens,"[54] or his callous public reproof of Ritobrata. (While the narrator is critical of colonial mimicry – Indians acting like "proper sahibs" – he seems to have assimilated a strand of British anti-Americanism in associating the uncouth Mr. Dutt not with Britain, but with the United States. This is evident in the narrator's use of "yankee," which the novel borrows directly from British parlance where the mildly pejorative term "yankee" refers to Americans[55] in general – and which is the way it is used in many of Britain's former colonies including India. This novel, set in the aftermath of British decolonization of the subcontinent, in fact, presents the British as rational and appreciative of true merit through the story of Mr. Chaudhuri. As a road-work supervisor in his youth, Mr. Chaudhuri's stubborn refusal to let a highly placed English officer, the Chief Engineer of the Public Works Department, drive on a road under repair impresses the officer's companion, Mr. Grey. He is convinced of Chaudhuri's integrity of character and hires him in his private firm, funds his education, and subsequently promotes him to an upper-level executive.)

Intriguingly, the sketch of Mr. Dutt bears resemblance to another mimic in colonial fiction, Grish Chunder Dé, in Kipling's "The Head of the District," cited at the beginning of this chapter. In that story, not only is the narrator's comment that "originality is fatal to the Bengali"[56] reinforced by the North Indian villagers who refer to Dé as a "Bengali ape"[57] but the description of Dé is also redolent of colonial mimicry: "Grish Chunder Dé talked hastily and much to Tallantire, after the manner of those who are 'more English than

the English,' – of Oxford and 'home,' with much curious book-knowledge of bump-suppers, cricket-matches, hunting-runs, and other unholy sports of the alien."[58] The quotation marks around "home" make the point about Dé's non-belonging in England, but paired with "alien" in the same sentence, evoke, unintended, pathos at his failure to even fathom his place. Kipling takes almost malicious delight in scoffing at Dé further by dismissing his talk of pleasurable pursuits as "book knowledge." But whereas Dé, "more English than the English," as a proxy-imperialist is a failed mimic, Dutt in *Bokultala PL Camp*, a "proper sahib" is not. It is just that what is needed is not a proper sahib (or a proxy white man), whether a failed (Grish Chunder Dé) or a successful one (Mr. Dutt). What is needed is aesthetically Indian. Speaking English "like a yankee" and outfitted with ties and hats under the hot tropical Sun, Dutt is put in his place by the erudite "mad" refugee, who not only speaks English with as much fluency as Dutt himself but also quotes Latin. The mad man's quote from Virgil's *Aeneid*, appropriate to the occasion, pitches a truly cultivated humanist against the pseudo-sophistication and "outlandish" (pun intended) learning of post-Independence India's technocratic elite. The novel thus critiques the existing postcolonial situation from the point of view of a "higher," or ideal, nationalism, one that hopes to retain and develop the best of what the colonizer brought.

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In his steadfast commitment to the advancement of the nation and its people, Ritobrata belongs in the genealogical tradition of Nikhilesh in Rabindranath Tagore's *Ghare Baire* (*The Home and the World*, 1916), a novel set in the years after the first partition of Bengal (1905). The deployment of sets of binaries in both novels serves to distinguish their heroes from the antagonists and leaves little room for ambiguity: altruistic/narcissistic, constructive/destructive, generous/avaricious, and so on. While both novels highlight the virtues of their respective protagonists, Nikhil's masculinity comes under repeated assaults both from his wife, Bimala, and his friend and guest, Sandip. Sandip's censure of Nikhil's "boyishness" accuses him of immaturity, an immaturity that is both political and sexual (since as a boy he lacks access to sexuality): "you will always remain good *boys* snivelling in your corners. We bad men, however, must see, whether we cannot erect a defensive fortification of untruth";[59] elsewhere, recognizing Nikhil's inflexibility on the question of forcing *swadeshi* on his tenant farmers Sandip once again calls him, "an incorrigible *schoolboy*"[60] (italics mine). Early in the novel, watching Nikhil struggle with Bimala's unfair demand to terminate a guiltless employee, Sandip swiftly grasps her perception of his hesitance as weakness: "She knew not how to pour her scorn upon her husband's *feebleness* of spirit"[61] (italics mine), and he exploits it fully in seducing her. He complains patronizingly to Bimala of his host's "*childlike* innocence" (italics mine) whose "lovable" quirks about the Swadeshi Movement "had a flavor of

humor."[62] Sandip's reflections on Nikhil are strengthened by Bimala's own condemnations: "Sometimes I have wished that my husband had the *manliness* to be a little less good"[63] (italics mine). Both Bimala and Sandip identify manliness with tyranny, and in light of that, they deem Nikhil's moral conscientiousness, his refusal to use "unreasoning forcefulness,"[64] his lack of "the turbulent, the angry, the unjust,"[65] as signs of emasculation. Their rhetoric feminizes him in a quasi-Gandhian fashion. (Nikhil's refusal to strong-arm his tenants into subscribing to *swadeshi*, his enlightened compassion versus Sandip's passion, his aligning of truth with freedom, construct him as an early *satyagrahi*.) The charge of Nikhil's want of masculinity is reinforced through what is perhaps the unkindest cut of all, Bimala's rejection both of Nikhil's "dull milk-and-water *Swadeshi*"[66] in favor of Sandip's grandstanding, and of him personally, through her relationship with the "manly" Sandip.

Bokultala PL Camp, on the other hand, leaves no room for suspicion on Ritobrata's masculinity. Nikhil loses his wife to his adversary, and although he is eventually vindicated through his wife's recognition of his moral rectitude, and her rejection of Sandip, for the hero of the postcolonial novel, that is not good enough. Ritobrata is upheld as a role model throughout, and beyond his naiveté which is borne of his inexperience, he is without the smallest shadow of a flaw. He is gifted with "courage and leadership" qualities, talents which make him "a fighter, warrior, protector, hero, provider, and initiator," and his "successful courtship and capture of the 'trophy' called 'woman'"[67] serve to shore up his masculinity. It is true that he loses his girlfriend Rekha Mitra, but the narrator presents her as somewhat unreliable, a woman who chooses to believe in Ramsharan Singh's malicious lies about Ritobrata's womanizing rather than place her trust in him. Also, despite his invitations, she never visits the refugee camp, marking her as insensitive to the plight of the refugees. In her stead, Ritobrata wins the love of the beautiful Kamala, who clearly "merits" his love.

The preference for the secular laboring "builder" patriot in *Bokultala PL Camp* and the implicit rejection of the "muscle man" model, whether of the British colonial mold or the combative and violent destroyer, is a symbolic denunciation of colonialism and the violence associated with Partition, respectively. (The presentation of the hero is also a reflection of the general tendency in this literature to steer clear of violence.) Significantly, the novel eschews religious fanaticism and identitarian politics which had inspired the Great Calcutta Killing in 1946 and the subsequent retaliatory violence in Noahkhali and Tippera.[68] In *Bokultala PL Camp* the quiet, thoughtful man offers the new model of masculinity.

Notes

1 Jawaharlal Nehru, "Tryst with Destiny," Constituent Assembly, New Delhi, August 14, 1947, on the eve of Independence.
2 Narayan Sanyal, *Bokultala PL Camp* (Calcutta: Nath Publishing, 1997; first published 1955).

3 Thomas Babington Macaulay, "Sir John Malcolm's Life of Robert Clive," in *Essays, Critical and Miscellaneous* (Boston, MA: Phillips, Sampson, and Company, 1859; *Edinburgh Review*, January 1840), 325.
4 Thomas Babington Macaulay, "Warren Hastings," in *Critical and Historical Essays Contributed to the Edinburgh Review* v. 3 (London: Longmans, Green and Co, 1870), 236.
5 Rudyard Kipling, "The Head of the District," in *Life's Handicap: Being Stories of Mine Own People* (New York: Doubleday & McClure Company, 1899), 191–92. All page numbers refer to this text.
6 Ibid., 202.
7 Ibid., 208.
8 Ibid., 210.
9 Ibid., 211.
10 Ibid.
11 Kipling presents the Bengali man's masculinity as an object of suspicion among non-Bengali natives. Upon being told that a Bengali has been appointed the Deputy Commissioner of his district, Khoda Dad Khan, speaking to Dé's English subordinate, Tallantire, reacts with:

> "O Sahib has the Government gone mad to send a black Bengali dog to us? And am I to pay service to such an [*sic*.] one? And are you to work under him? What does it mean?"
>
> "It is an order," said Tallantire. He had expected something of this kind. "He is a very clever S-sahib."
>
> "He a Sahib! He's a *kala admi* – a black man – unfit to run at the tail of a potter's donkey. All the peoples of the earth have harried Bengal. It is written Thou knowest when we of the North wanted women or plunder whither went we? To Bengal – where else? What child's talk is this of Sahibdom – after Orde Sahib too!"
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> (196; italics in original)

12 Cited in Anjali Arondekar, "Lingering Pleasures, Perverted Texts: Colonial Desire in Kipling's Anglo India," in *Imperial Desire: Dissident Sexualities and Colonial Literature*, eds. Philip Holden and Richard J. Ruppel (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), 68.
13 Mrinalini Sinha, *Colonial Masculinity*: The "Manly Englishman" and the "Effeminate Bengali" in the Late Nineteenth Century (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995), 2. Historian Tanika Sarkar also notes that "the empire symbolized by the lion, had often represented itself in strong, male terms. The standard British sneer against Bengali 'baboos' was that, unlike the 'manly', virile, British public schoolboy-cum-administrator, and unlike the Indian martial races, the Bengali babu was a weak, effeminate creature." Sarkar, *Hindu Wife, Hindu Nation: Community Religion and Cultural Nationalism* (New Delhi: Permanent Black, 2001), 251. Sarkar tracks the loss of the babus' "manhood" in terms of shifts in property relations in Bengal. She indicates that Hindu upper caste landowners complained of the attrition in their "moral authority" through the "loss of disciplinary power" developing from the revisions initiated by the Rent Act (1859) that revised the original privileges granted by the Permanent Settlement Act of 1793. Sarker, *Hindu Wife, Hindu Nation*, 36. See also Indira Chowdhury, The Frail Hero and Virile History: Gender and the Politics of Culture in Colonial Bengal (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1998); and Ashis Nandy, *The Intimate Enemy*: Loss and Recovery of Self Under Colonialism (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1988).
14 Sinha, *Colonial Masculinity*, 16.
15 Ibid., 29.

16 This is perhaps most evident in the rhetoric around the Bangladeshi Liberation War in 1971 which ended with East Pakistan seceding from Pakistan. The Pakistani administration believed that "the soft and degenerate Bengalis could not stand up to the strong Punjabi with his history of military skill and valor. As General Tikka Khan declared subsequently, 'Give me enough force and I'll crush them in 48 hours.'" R.J. Rummel, *Death by Government* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction, 1994), 319. Tariq Ali writes that "[t]he soldiery had been told that the Bengalis were an inferior race, short, dark, weak (unlike the 'martial races' of Punjab) and still infected with Hinduism. Junior and Senior officers alike had spoken of seeking … to improve the genes of the Bengali people." Tariq Ali, *Can Pakistan Survive? The Death of a State* (London: Verso, 1983), 91.

17 See Nandy, *The Intimate Enemy*.

18 Anonymous., "Bijaya Dashami Chhora," *Prachar* 1896, cited in Chowdhury, *The Frail Hero and Virile History*.

19 Subho Basu and Sikata Banerjee, "The Quest for Manhood: Masculine Hinduism and Nation in Bengal," *Comparative Studies in South Asia, Africa, and the Middle East* 26:3, 2006.

20 Swami Vivekananda cited in Sikata Banerjee, *Make Me a Man: Masculinity, Hinduism, and Nationalism in India* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2005), 1. Elsewhere he said, "What we want is muscles of iron and nerves of steel, inside which dwell a mind of the same material as that of which the thunderbolt is made. Strength, manhood, Kshatra-Virya [warrior's valor] … . We have wept long enough." Cited in Abhik Roy and Michele L. Hammers, "Swami Vivekananda's Rhetoric of Spiritual Masculinity: Transforming Effeminate Bengalis into Virile Men," *Western Journal of Communication* 78:4, July–September 2014, 546.

21 Rabindranath Tagore, *The Home and the World*, translated by Surendranath Tagore and Rabindranath Tagore (London: Penguin, 2005; first published in Bengali as *Ghare Baire* in serial form in 1915, first published in book form in 1916; first English translation published in 1919 by Macmillan).

22 Martin Danahay, *Gender at Work in Victorian Culture: Literature, Art and Masculinity* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005), 1.

23 Ethel M. Dell. *The Way of the Eagle*. Cited in Allen J. Greenberger, *The British Image of India: A Study in the Literature of Imperialism 1880–1960* (London: Oxford University Press, 1969). 12.

24 Ethel M. Dell, "The Safety Curtain," in *The Safety Curtain and Other Stories*. Cited in Greenberger, *The British Image of India*, 12.

25 In *A Passage to India*, Ronny Heaslop, unwilling to expose his artistic side, "repressed his mother when she enquired after his viola; a viola was almost a demerit, and certainly not the sort of instrument one mentioned in public." E.M. Forster, *A Passage to India* (Orlando, FL: Harcourt, 1984; originally published in 1924), 40. About the Anglo-Indians in Chandrapore, Forster writes that with the exception of an annual play at the European Club "they left literature alone. The men had no time for it, the women did nothing that they could not share with the men. Their ignorance of the Arts was notable, and they lost no opportunity of proclaiming it to one another; it was the Public School attitude; flourishing more vigorously than it can yet hope to do in England. If Indians were shop, the Arts were bad form" (40).

26 In the context of the Partition, there are no stories from Bengal on gendered brutalities performed on the male body. Taslima Nasreen's *Lajja* (*Shame*, Calcutta: Ananda, 1993) presents an episode of gendered violence on the male body in the context of the Bangladeshi Liberation War. This is when Sudhamoy Datta, a Hindu citizen of Pakistan, is tortured by the Pakistani military. See my essay "Masculinity in Crisis: Nasreen's *Lajja* and the Minority Man in Postcolonial South Asia," *Social Text* 108 (Autumn 2011). For a reading of Manto's work and

violence on the male body see Deepti Misri, "Anatomy of a Riot: Vulnerable Bodies in Manto and Other Fictions," in *Beyond Partition: Gender, Violence and Representation in Postcolonial India* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2014).

27 Jameson writes:

> All third-world texts are necessarily, I want to argue, allegorical, and in a very specific way: they are to be read as what I will call national allegories, even when, or perhaps I should say, particularly when their forms develop out of predominantly western machineries of representation, such as the novel.
>
> (Fredric Jameson, "Third-World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism," *Social Text* 15 (Autumn 1986), 69)

28 The tomboyish thirteen-year-old Kusum, the daughter of a Sanskrit pandit from Lakshmipur in eastern Bengal, is good at outdoor games, and thus, much in demand among the village boys. One day, this leads to a clash between Nirmal (Hindu) and Abdul Gani (Muslim) over her, and when Abdul wins on the strength of his larger following of Muslim boys, he is prevented from carrying away his prize by Bishwanath, a co-villager and wrestler. Two years later, during the eruption of communal violence in the village, Kusum is abducted. Although she is rescued later that day, the fact of her abduction leads to her family's excommunication from village society, and subsequent difficulties in finding a suitable match for her. Devastated by the turn of events her father dies and a male cousin Tarapada comes to live with them. Meanwhile the balance of power in the village has shifted, with the Hindu landlord, who was also a supporter of the freedom movement, being displaced by Abdul Gani's father. After Kusum's sister Kamini's death a few years later, Kusum and her mother decide to leave the village but their plan is halted by the arrival of Bishwanath, who had been languishing in prison for his involvement in the nationalist movement. He proposes marriage to Kusum and they are secretly married in the presence of Kusum's mother and the Hindu landlord. Bishwanath is captured and jailed again in 1942. After his release in 1947, Bishwanath, Kusum, and Tarapada decide to leave for India to escape the rising communal hostilities in eastern Bengal. While packing up the house, Kusum finds Kamini's suicid -note in which she blames Abdul Gani for her death saying that it was because of his indecent proposals and his attempts to alternately lure and terrify her into consenting to live with him that she resolved to end her life; in addition, the note reveals that Abdul was responsible for Kusum's abduction. Reading Kamini's note, Bishwanath vows revenge and sends Kusum and their child to Calcutta with Tarapada. Tarapada dies during the journey. Bishwanath murders Gani and goes into hiding. Donning the garb of a widow Kusum, and her child, arrive at the Bokultala PL Camp, and are given shelter.

Bishwanath locates Kusum. Since he is unemployed, and tubercular, the couple decides that it would be better if Kusum and the child stay at the camp until her husband makes alternative arrangements. In order to remain in the PL camp, Kusum continues to dress like a widow and Bishwanath is introduced as her cousin Tarapada. The camp doctor Sadhucharan is attracted to Kusum, and sensing Tarapada-Bishwanath as an obstacle to his lust forbids the latter's presence on camp premises. When she is pregnant the camp staff and residents, believing that she is in an incestuous relationship with her cousin, attempt to oust her from the camp, but Ritobrata, who has employed her as a cook, foils their plan. While he is away in Calcutta, the camp residents chance upon the couple; they thrash Tarapada-Bishwanath and shave Kusum's head as punishment, but are prevented from shaming her further by Ritobrata's arrival. Recovering in his residence for a few days, the couple eventually leaves for Calcutta. Kusum's letter addressed to

Bose and the accompanying wedding photograph disclose the truth about her relationship with Tarapada-Bishwanath.

29 In the 1955 edition of the novel, he is called "Mr. Dafader."

30 James Mill, *The History of British India* (London: Baldwin, Cradock, and Joy, 1826, 3rd edition; first published in 1817).

31 Mill, *The History of British India*, 383, 386.

32 Puzzled by the unusual name "Golad" given to one part of the village, Ritobrata finds that it is a truncated form of "*golaydori*," meaning, literally, "neck in a noose" or "death by hanging" – marking the place of a peasant woman's suicide by hanging following her rape by soldiers residing in the village during World War II.

33 It is this nationalist sentiment that also lies behind the state-sponsored mission to recover abducted women. The Indian state concerned itself exclusively with restoring to their families Hindu and Sikh women abducted by Muslim men and presently living in Pakistan; it did not focus on recovering Hindu and Sikh women who may have been abducted during the riots by their co-religionists.

34 Sanyal, *Bokultala PL Camp*, 36.

35 At the *boubhat*, the bride serves food for the first time to her in-laws and the rest of the community, and the partaking of the food indicates the acceptance of the bride. This is because, for upper-caste Hindus, the preparation and the consuming of food (and water) is bound up with purity–pollution conventions, with elaborate caste-determined rules laying down who cooks, who serves whom, who eats with whom, under what circumstances food may or may not be consumed. These regulations are founded on the belief that food ritually prepared and served absorbs qualities of the cook and server – his/her caste, virtue, purity-pollution. and so on. And in consuming that food, one takes into his/her own body something of the cook and the serving individual – this is the reason why who cooks the food and who serves it are regarded as important – therefore, consenting to partake of the food signals a definitive acceptance of those who prepare and/or serve it. This is the reason for Bibha's mother's watchfulness in *Epar Ganga Opar Ganga* regarding keeping Sutara away from her kitchen, and her rage upon finding Sutara helping in food preparation or serving water to family members.

36 Upon hearing of Ritobrata's hiring of a young refugee woman (Kamala) as cook and housekeeper, the disturbed *mejda* pays a surprise visit from Calcutta. When Kamala tells him that Ritobrata is away, he turns to leave. She tries to stop him but to no avail. The senior Bose's disapproval of the refugee woman saturates their brief encounter, beginning with his body language (raised eyebrows) and his manner, through to the brusqueness displaced onto Ritobrata's orderly. *Mejda*'s detecting done, he would rather wait at the station to catch the next train back, than enjoy Kamala's hospitality. In turning down her invitation to stay for lunch, and in her dismay over it, both are reading off the same social and cultural script. She is alert to the subtext of his declining the food *she* cooked – it is a metonymy for snubbing *her*. As an impoverished refugee woman she is considered second-rate by the Hindu Bengali elite.

37 Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?," in Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture, Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg eds. (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988), 297.

38 Sanyal, *Bokultala PL Camp*, 131–32.

39 Ibid., 145.

40 While celebrating a heroic masculinity, one that dares to defy custom, *Bokultala PL Camp* remains confined to the conventional where women are concerned. The bold step Ritobrata takes in marrying a refugee woman marks him as the agent of action, and her as the site for bestowing enlightened compassion. Marriage is the only "respectable" option available to Kamala. Despite her education, including her ability to communicate in English, she chooses to serve as his domestic help,

cooking and keeping house for him. She even refuses financial compensation for her work. She is "the angel in the house." Compared with her warmth and selflessness, Ritobrata's former girlfriend, Rekha Mitra, a magazine editor, falls far short.

41 In the period around decolonization and Independence holding anti-colonial sentiments was a matter of making good moral choices. During my research in the newspaper archives in Calcutta, I came across a matrimonial advertisement in the local English daily *Amrita Bazar Patrika* (October 13, 1946) in the "Brides Wanted" section where "nationalist" was listed among the groom's positive qualities.
42 Basu and Banerjee, "The Quest for Manhood," 489.
43 Saraladebi Chaudhurani, *The Scattered Leaves of My Life*, translated by Sikata Banerjee (New Delhi: Women Unlimited, 2011), 117.
44 Ibid.
45 Ibid., 118.
46 Joya Chatterji, *Bengal Divided: Hindu Communalism and Partition, 1932–1947* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 233.
47 Memo dated September 9, 1939. Cited in Chatterji, *Bengal Divided*, 233.
48 Chatterji, *Bengal Divided*, 234.
49 Sanyal, *Bokultala PL Camp*, 28.
50 Ibid., 76.
51 Ibid., 42–43.
52 Thomas Babington Macaulay, "Minute on Education," in *Sources of Indian Tradition*, ed. Wm. Theodore de Bary (New York: Columbia University Press, 1958), v. 2, p. 47.
53 Sanyal, *Bokultala PL Camp*, 44.
54 Ibid., 45.
55 The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines yankee as "often *derogatory* a person who lives in, or is from, the US" (italics in the original), http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/us/definition/american_english/Yankee.
56 Rudyard Kipling, "The Head of the District," 202.
57 Ibid., 198.
58 Ibid., 199.
59 Tagore, *The Home and the World*, 105.
60 Ibid., 120.
61 Ibid., 54.
62 Ibid., 51. According to Bimala, Sandip treats Nikhil as "a younger brother, of whom personally one may be very fond and yet have no use for his business advice" (51).
63 Ibid., 22.
64 Ibid., 41.
65 Ibid., 42.
66 Ibid., 95.
67 Mamphela Ramphele, "Teach Me How to Be a Man: An Exploration of the Definition of Masculinity," in *Violence and Subjectivity*, Veena Das et al. eds. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 116.
68 The model of masculinity presented in this novel is a critique of the "macho" man depicted in the poster from Anand Patwardhan's documentary film *Father, Son and the Holy War* (1994). The poster features a straddling brawny man outfitted with multiple arms – in imitation of the goddesses Durga and Kali – wielding weapons and holding a severed human head in one hand. Based on the events leading to the demolition of the Babri Masjid and the subsequent riots, another reenactment of sectarian hostilities in the subcontinent and beyond, the film traces, using the trope of masculinity, the rise of Hindu fascism in India asking, "Does the root of India's recent bloodshed – perhaps all bloodshed – lie in male insecurity, itself an inevitable product of the very construction of 'manhood'?"

7 Identity lessons

Trauma and children's education in difference

The following passage is an excerpt from Bhisham Sahni's Hindi short story "Pali":[1]

> The jeep had not gone far [from the border] when the lady social worker, as if acting on sudden impulse, extended her right hand, whisked the Rumi cap off the boy's head, and flung it out of the jeep …
>
> "My cap!" the boy's hand went to his head. "Hai, my cap!"
>
> The lady social worker leaned towards him. "You are a Hindu boy. Why would you wear a Muslim cap?"[2]

Freshly estranged from foster parents and uprooted from his home of many years, Pali is required to also forego his Rumi cap since it obstructs the Hindus' claim on him. His education in Hindu–Muslim difference begins early. First, after his conversion from Hinduism to Islam at age four, he adapts to the "new ways" of his Muslim foster parents; and then, seven years later, when he is brought from Pakistan to India and restored to his biological parents, Pali is required to discard his religion and learn Hindu customs. His condition is captured in recurring descriptions of disorientation, set in contrast with the certainties of family, community, and state.

Bhisham Sahni's "Pali" is one the few Partition narratives that examines the condition of children who, like the adults around them, were subjected to Partition's violence, dislocation and dispossession. Another is Manik Bandyopadhyay's Bengali short story "*Chhelemanushi*" ("Childishness").[3] Writings about children's experience of the Partition are scarce. In works where grown children are present, they are usually observers, as in the case of Neelu in Sankha Ghosh's *Supuriboner Sari* (*Lines of Areca Palms*, 1990) or Deepu, in Prafulla Ray's *Bhagabhagi* (*Divisions*, 2001). The narratives trace these children's loss of innocence through the violence around Direct Action Day and the Partition, and their bewilderment at the passing of the world they once inhabited, symbolized by the breakdown of friendships with other, equally uncomprehending Muslim children.[4] The third-person narrator in both novels follows Deepu and Neelu around; this enables the presentation of social commentary in the guise of a child's naive musings. While both "Pali"

and "*Chhelemanushi*" evaluate the violence tearing apart the "adult" world, they do it through the subjectivity of the children. "Pali" delves into the title character's extended trauma which reduces him to speechlessness, while "*Chhelemanushi*" contrasts two Hindu and Muslim children's spontaneous friendship with the pathological sectarianism of adults. This chapter examines children's socialization and, especially, their education in religious difference. The re-forming of Pali following repeated uprootings from home and parental attachments and the prohibitions on Habib and Gita in "*Chhelemanushi*" illuminate the traumatizing of children by the demands of a steadily partitioning adult society. The chapter also addresses how, despite the children's remarkable adaptability, a disjunction is created between what they want and what, as members of a particular community, they ought to, and ultimately have to, want.

Sahni's and Bandyopadhyay's childhood focus exemplifies the reproduction of communalism[5] at the level of everyday life. Communalism is presented not just as the manipulation of the masses by an elite leadership or the result of the colonial government's policy of "divide and rule," but, instead, as an unavoidable circumstance. Together the writings aesthetically explore the massified, irrational character of communalized identities, censure their fundamental ethical constriction, and suggest moral alternatives.

Citizens of the future

Four-year-old Pali is separated from his father as his Hindu family flees from Pakistan. A street peddler, Shakur Ahmed finds him crying and offers to help locate his parents. But the refugees have left, so Shakur takes Pali home to his wife Zenab and the childless couple adopts him. Their simple decency is then set in contrast with the conduct of the irate maulvi who demands the conversion of the "*kafir*'s [infidel's] polluted child," whom he calls a "snake."[6] Shakur and Zenab agree to the conversion ceremony:

> The circumcision was performed the very next morning. Little Pali was terrified at the sight of the razor and clung to Zenab's legs.
>
> The circumcision done, the maulvi petted and consoled little Pali ignoring the fact that all the time the child had kept uttering "Pitaji! Pitaji!" in great agony. The maulvi did not mind it at all. He just smiled indulgently. The neighbours came and felicitated Shakur and Zenab.
>
> The maulvi gave the boy the gift of a red Rumi cap with a black tassel and placed it on the boy's head himself. Zenab gave him a brand-new white muslin kurta to wear …
>
> The child was renamed Altaf – from Pali to Altaf. Carrying Altaf in her arms, Zenab went around distributing sweets in the mohalla.[7]

Pali, or Altaf, is eventually traced by his biological father, Manohar Lal, and brought to India at age eleven. While his parents celebrate his return, he

performs *namaz* in the presence of guests. The visitors are troubled at this manifestation of "otherness," and the local bigwig, referred to as the Chaudhri, resolves to rectify what he regards as the boy's deviant behavior. He summons the local barber and priest and organizes Pali's thread ceremony:

> The barber sharpened the razor on his palm and, according to the directions given by the pandit, started shaving the boy's head. As long as the ceremony lasted, the boy kept sobbing with bowed head. Once he got up in fright, and crying "Ammi, Ammi, Abbaji!" he ran towards the wall of the courtyard. Standing with his back against the wall, he looked at the Chaudhri like a deer at bay, watching a hunter. …
>
> A tuft of hair was left in the middle of his cropped head. Pali was bathed, then given a brand-new dhoti and kurta to wear. To the chanting of mantras, he was given a sacred thread.
>
> "Child what's your name? Say five times. Pali, Pali, Pali …"
>
> Some time later, looking every inch a brahmachari, Yashpal, Pali, stood at the door with folded hands, seeing off the guests. … Manohar Lal distributed laddoos.[8]

Together the two passages cited above possess an unambiguous symmetry. While they refer to two rival communities – Muslims and Hindus, these dramatic moments are identical whether we speak of the characters – the child, the parents, the master of ceremonies,[9] the crowd; or recurring props such as the razor, the new clothes, the sweets; or the reason behind the ritual. In both, Pali's body is the site of contest. The child's body is re-constructed by enforcing on it new signifiers that effectively dislodge it from the past. In addition to the alterations to the body (the circumcision or the shaved head with a tuft) are imposed markers such as the Rumi cap or the dhoti and sacred thread. The new identity is made explicit by way of a name-change. There is an intuitive understanding in both communities that the ability to appropriate the child's body marks a symbolic triumph over the rival community. The game of one-upmanship seems to have been rhetorically choreographed in a way that every movement made in the first passage is unmade by a reversal in the second.

Notably, in the first passage, the route to Pali's belonging within the Muslim community is bloody and fraught with intense pain. It is the "surgical cut" that separates his Hindu past from his Muslim present. In the second, he is upset by the rituals, which intend to erase his everyday practices (performing *namaz*) and, therefore, his "difference." Both the maulvi and the Chaudhri treat Pali's body as a *tabula rasa* where each erases the "other" and inscribes the practices of his community. Both ignore Pali's sufferings. For them, he is simply the "ground" on which the claim of religious dominance is confirmed, the site of contest with the absent rival community. There is a reason why, in both cases, Pali's conversion is treated as a spectacle. This community event provides the two forms of public religiosity with an occasion to reinforce that

the individual has no alternative but to comply. Strangely, despite Pali's obvious distress, neither set of parents interrupts the rituals. Their silence and that of the crowd indicate a collusive endorsement of the physical and/or psychological cruelty performed on a child already traumatized by separation from parents. Pali's ordeal reveals that community membership is grounded in brutality and that, in order to belong, the adults have to subjugate themselves. Not fully socialized, the child exposes group identity as a form of collective self-oppression.

During his circumcision, Pali, in pain, cries for Manohar Lal with "Pitaji! Pitaji!" ("Father! Father!"), whereas during the *upanayan* or thread ceremony he calls for his other set of parents, Shakur Ahmed and Zenab, with "Ammi, Ammi, Abbaji!" ("Mom, Mom, Dad!"). The insertion of these words, bearing distinct associations with the linguistic practices of the "other" community, rather than the one that surrounds Pali, creates a disruption in the conversion rituals. Through these utterances, Pali stages an unconscious return to the very past that the present ceremony aims to efface. Pali's discursive return poses a small, but direct threat to the community whose traditions are being forced upon him. Hence his reactions, his dissents, are either ignored or silenced. Along with the tussle over Pali's body is a simultaneous struggle for control over discourse. This last is suggested by way of the Chaudhri's intimidation of the boy:

> "What's your name, boy?"
>
> Pali looked timidly at the massive bulk of the Chaudhri and mumbled in a subdued voice, "Altaf, Altaf Husain, son of Shakur Ahmed."
>
> The Chaudhri glared at the boy. With great difficulty, he restrained himself from slapping him. The boy felt that the pressure of the man's grip on his wrist had increased. He gave the man a terrified look.
>
> "No, your name is Pali – Yashpal."
>
> The boy stood silent and then mumbled, "Altaf."
>
> "Repeat that name again and see what happens. I'll pull out your tongue!"[10]

When the initial demonstration of authority fails to bully the boy into forgetting the past, the Chaudhri resorts to threats of violence and at terminating Pali's speech altogether. The disciplining of his unruly tongue promises suffering, and thus, renders Pali docile. Yet, despite his insistence, the Chaudhri himself declines to use either name, employing simply the common noun "boy." Not only does this constitute a denial of Pali/Altaf's individuality, but indicates the Chaudhuri's own confusion, a point further underscored by his compelling Pali/Altaf to say his name only to reject the response he receives.

Pali's repetition of his former name is not a slip. It marks his deliberate rejection of, or rebellion against, the "evil" father (the Chaudhri), whereupon the latter invokes the Law of the Father, threatening Pali with exclusion from

Language (forcible removal of the tongue), in other words, with castration. The possibility of banishment from sexuality and from social acceptance is crippling, and Pali backs down. (Residual memory of the "cutting off," the circumcision-trauma, adds to his panic, and gives the threat greater credibility.) This is the moment of the child's socialization into the fragmented adult world, and the aggressive Chaudhri – the Father/the superego – successfully contains the child's impulses, but at the cost of delusive denial. This is further reinforced through Pali's transformed body language during the thread ceremony that follows: "the boy kept sobbing with bowed head. Once he got up in fright, and crying 'Ammi, Ammi, Abbaji!' he ran towards the wall of the courtyard. Standing with his back against the wall, he looked at the Chaudhri like a deer at bay, watching a hunter."[11] The sobs, the bowed head, the fear, his deer-like defenselessness all present Pali as compliant. It is unlikely that the newly socialized Pali will respond to future questions about his name with "Altaf." The encounter with the Chaudhri marks the end of his childhood. Pali can run, but only to run into walls. He cannot escape the social boundaries within which he is trapped. The hunting/haunting of Pali is complete.

Also noteworthy in this episode is the peripheral position of the mother: Pali's two fathers – the affectionate father Manohar Lal, and the predatory father-figure Chaudhri – have taken over the project of socializing him, and forced the mother's disappearance. In Pali's childhood, after his accidental estrangement from his biological parents, Zenab's maternal presence is conspicuous. He spends most of his time with his loving foster mother to whom he is deeply attached. His grief over his separation from her is symbolically reproduced in his anguish over the loss of the Rumi cap – her parting gift. Pali's "retrieval" to India by Manohar Lal is a metaphor for the boy child's alienation from the mother. The father's intervention severs the mother–son bond. The possibility of the development of a similar attachment to his biological mother, Kaushalya, is slight since Pali is close to adolescence. (In fact, at Pali's age, the replication of an infant's attachment to his mother would be unhealthy.) On the day the parents celebrate Pali's return, the narrator says about Kaushalya that, she "was looking her normal self. She was not silent or withdrawn as before. She even laughed a little,"[12] yet, nowhere does Kaushalya speak – even when she is directly addressed by the neighbors about Pali's *namaz* prayers, Manohar Lal who answers for her. Her silence could be symptomatic of the protracted trauma precipitated by the violence of Partition, the family's forced relocation, her extended separation from her son, and the death of her baby daughter. However, I contend that her silence, her marginality, indicates her displacement by the (split) fathers – Manohar Lal and the Chaudhri – who have successfully separated Pali from the Mother (Zenab), and seized control over his passage to adulthood.

Pali's repeated parental abandonments and multiple uprootings, the recurring loss of love, protection, and comfort, produce a traumatized little boy. While he is the focus of the narrative, he speaks fewer than fifty words. His silence,

his passivity are likewise manifestations of his recurrent traumas. After his accidental separation from his biological family at the age of four, he mourns for them tearfully. Finally, exhausted from crying, he falls asleep. The next morning, finding himself in unfamiliar surroundings, he "started crying and repeating, 'Pitaji, Pitaji!'" and although Zenab tries to soothe him, "little Pali would not stop crying and soon broke into hiccups."[13] Eventually, he "sat in a corner, maintaining a grim silence and emptily staring this way and that. He kept sighing."[14] He is looking for his parents among the strangers who have taken him into their home! His estrangement from his parents is followed by the agony of circumcision during which time he clings to Zenab's legs but to no avail. However, Pali's mourning over the loss of his parents ends with time, and the love his new family showers on him enables him to re-engage with the world. But his sufferings are not over – his restoration to his biological family is accompanied by a repetition of his separation trauma, this time from his adoptive parents: "the child kept whimpering as he had done during the first two or three days of his arrival in Shakur's house."[15] Later, looking at his mother, "he still wondered if the boy who was standing before her, finger in mouth and brazenly staring at her, was really Pali. He would feel more and more confused."[16] His dazed condition is a repetition of the behavior he exhibits when the representatives of the two communities enforce their claims of ownership over him: at the circumcision, "Little Pali was terrified at the sight of the razor and clung to Zenab's legs"; and at the re-conversion ceremony, "Seeing the crowd in the courtyard, he became nervous and clung to Shakur's legs. Putting his finger in his mouth, he looked around at the people as if stupefied."[17] In both scenarios, Pali comes off as a frightened little boy. Finger-sucking is a symptom of psychological regression. In an eleven-year-old it is unusual. Alarming also is his being "stupefied." The two taken together suggest profound psychological problems, stemming from his experience of parental abandonment and forced rebirth into new communities, not once but twice.

At the gathering intended to celebrate his return to his family, which eventually turns into a re-conversion ceremony, Pali is "unnerved" and "utterly confused." He speaks in a "faint" and "subdued" voice. Once he looks "timidly" at the Chaudhri, and at another time gives him a "terrified look."[18] Throughout the ceremony he keeps "sobbing with bowed head."[19] Present nowhere in the scene is this eleven-year-old child's laughter, gaiety, or spontaneity; in fact, when Pali/Altaf tries to return to his daily routine (performing the *namaz*), he is immediately taken to task for it and subjected to bullying. When the enraged Chaudhri tightens his grip on Pali/Altaf's wrist, he simply gives the Chaudhri "a terrified look" but he does not ask to be released nor does he even attempt to withdraw his wrist. He is simply too traumatized. When the Chaudhri threatens to pull his tongue out, it triggers the trauma he endured during his circumcision. The Chaudhri's threat rekindles the memory of the brutalities adults are capable of unleashing upon him, and it staggers him into stupefied compliance. His terror, his loneliness, his fragility are captured in

his futile attempt to run away, yet he gets no further than the wall and stands transfixed observing Chaudhri, his tormentor.

***

In Manik Bandyopadhyay's Bengali short story "*Chhelemanushi*," inter-community rivalries jeopardize the play-world of the two small children, Habib and Gita. Their friendship endures their improvised riot-game and the intrusion of their parents and other adults whose neighborly sociability steadily declines with the escalating violence. Set in the immediate post-war period, it is a story of two middle-class families, one Hindu the other Muslim, living in an unnamed city in a "partitioned" house. Underscoring the similarities in the material lives of the adult members of both communities, the writer suggests that the discourse of Hindu–Muslim difference is inaccurate. The recurrence of the word "same," for instance, in the following excerpt is worth noting:

> Tarapada and Nasiruddin [the fathers of Gita and Habib] both went to work in the morning and came home exhausted at the day's end. The *same* blighted dreams and eager imaginings piled up day after day in both their hearts, the *same* anger against the *same* forces grew more intense every day. Indira and Halima [the mothers] spent the *same* captive lives: cooking and serving, scrubbing the pots, dreaming their dreams.[20] [italics mine]

The women spend their afternoons gossiping and then "spreading their saree-ends, they lie down side by side – two wives, two mothers, two cooks, two slaves."[21] Like the word "same," the reiteration of "two" links the women irrespective of religion.[22] The struggle, both passages indicate, is elsewhere, not over differences in religion. The opening sentence of the story, "The divide didn't last,"[23] referring to the families, and its many repetitions throughout, embrace the hope that the sectarian rift is temporary.

While the narrator stresses the parallels between the families, an echo effect is used to map the emerging gulf between them in the unstable political climate. When, for instance, Indira and Halima find their children Gita and Habib engaged in their riot-game, each anxious mother wants to protect her child against the "killer" other:

> Indira takes a glance and begins screaming: "He's killing her! He's killing my girl!"
>
> She bangs on the door and shouts "Open up! Open the door! That killer boy has locked the door and is murdering my girl! Open the door!"
>
> Halima too takes a look and screams in just the same key, "She's killing him! She's killing my boy!"
>
> She too bangs on the door and shouts "Open up! Open the door! That killer girl has locked the room and is murdering my boy! Open the door!"

> … Indira and Halima press forward like mad women to look through the opening at the same time. Their heads knock together. They look at each other with savage eyes, like two tigresses about to attack.[24]

Halima's paranoia, her screams, and even her pitch mirror Indira's, illustrating that not only their quotidian lives but even the imaginative universe of the two women is identical. (Since the Bengali third-person singular is unmarked by gender, Indira's "He's killing her!" and Halima's "She's killing him!" are indistinguishable in the Bengali original.) It is clear the women's past camaraderie has withered. The similarity in their diction and actions (the description in the last paragraph resembles synchronized dance movements) in fact, actualizes the distance between them. Something in Indira and Halima's world has changed, and changed fundamentally, dissolving in the process the memories of lazy afternoons together. In the present moment each directs her ferocious, protective, maternal rage towards the other and, especially, the other child.

The analogous character of the two women's responses is unsettling – both seem to be operating on autopilot, programmed to behave in the same way. It is darkly comical. There is no difference between Indira and Halima (or, between Tarapada and Nasiruddin) and yet, difference is at the center of their discord. In "*Chhelemanushi*," as in "Pali," practitioners of both Hinduism and Islam continuously mirror each other in the name of religious difference. In doing so, they expose the absence of difference; both religions have been denuded of all historically and civilizationally accrued content. In other words, Hinduism and Islam have been divested of their qualitative specificity, and reduced to mere labels of identity. And it is these massified, stereotyped identities that are at play in modern communalism. Both narratives suggest that it is only in as much as these religions are truly evacuated of content that they oppose each other. The distinctiveness they lay claim to is emptied of meaning, their fight is over labels not substance. In both "Pali" and "*Chhelemanushi*," the automatic behavior of adults, their incapacity to act as individuals, is representative of a wider character of society where homogeneity has become the precondition for difference.

Unlike their parents and other adults, the two children in "*Chhelemanushi*," Habib and Gita, reject boundaries. Not only do they enact wedding scenes, but also Gita consumes beef while Habib makes a flower offering during Saraswati Puja in Gita's house and eats *prasad* or consecrated food. With the invasion of violence into civic life the families insist on segregating the children and restrict their space of play to the home, but the enforced separation is short-lived. When the fuss between the adults and the children over the latter's cooking game brings the neighborhood men armed and ready for a sectarian clash, the children "look wide-eyed at the folly of their elders."[25] Habib and Gita both handle difference with a level of maturity lacking in the adults. Both children, for instance, receive a few nicks in the riot-game, but their reaction is nowhere close to the hysteria of their mothers mentioned above. Instead, reconciled they watch the adults in the locality prepare once again for their own "riot-game." The narrative inverts the usual adult–child hierarchy

as the amused children gaze from the rooftop at "the goings-on below"[26] of the grown-ups. While the adults quarrel, all that the children want to do is "to find a safe shelter to play in"[27]; the use of "safe shelter" brackets the children together with Partition's refugees.

Examining Jewish children's games in Nazi ghettos and concentration camps, George Eisen writes of their "subconscious needs for ludic experience, not always amenable to adult logic and rationalization."[28] Set in a violent time, though in conditions less extreme, in "*Chhelemanushi*" too, the ludic exceeds adult reason which cannot grasp the children's solidarity. But it is particularly ironic that the adults fail to recognize that the children are mimicking the irrationality around them. Not content with staging weddings:

> "Let's play at riots" says Gita.
>
> "Where are the knives and sticks?" asks Habib.
>
> "Just wait," says Gita.
>
> She quietly fetches weapons: Tarapada's razor and a knife. The razor is an old one; it isn't used for shaving … Gita latches the door with great effort; standing on tiptoe …
>
> "You're Akbar and I'm Padmini. Come on!"[29]

Even as the violence of public life hijacks their play-world, their childishness strips that violence of its menacing aspects, reducing it to play. Yet the game reveals the children's socialization, indicating also that such is inescapable. While adult society is critiqued through the lens of the children, they are in no position to arbitrate, and the future, it appears, is likely to be a repetition of the past.

Interestingly, Gita's selection of names is marked by their respective religious memberships and history. Habib is given an Arabic name, Akbar, after the Mughal emperor, while for herself she chooses the name of a Hindu queen, Padmini. Young as they are, the children recognize that in order to simulate a contemporary riot, the parties must follow the two rival faiths, and that their rivalry is somehow rooted in the distant past.

The choice of names is significant for the cultural memories they invoke. "Akbar" has multiple associations: on the one hand, it reminds readers of the Mughal emperor's tolerance or ecumenicism; on the other, it is part of the Muslim credo "Allahu Akbar" ("God is great!") often used as a slogan during communal riots. Thus, the mention of "Akbar" invokes two equally reified and one-dimensional aspects of South Asian Islam. Now to "Padmini": in some literalistic readings of Malik Mohammad Jaisi's sixteenth century Awadhi poem "Padmavat," readings that denude the work of its allegorical aspects, the text is thought to chronicle the threat posed to Hindu womanhood and Hindu wellbeing by Muslim rule. In other equally simplistic interpretations, the text has been regarded as straightforwardly documenting an episode in Islam's victory in India. Both readings anachronistically project modern identity preoccupations onto the medieval text. Both understand Alauddin Khilji's desire for Padmini, the beautiful wife of Rana Ratan Singh, Khilji's

subsequent sack of Chittor (in 1303 AD) and the Rajput women's *jauhar*, or mass immolation, as a tale of Hindu–Muslim conflict.

The allusion to Padmini, in "*Chhelemanushi*," in the context of Hindu–Muslim riots operates as a metaphor for women's Partition-related ordeals, while Alauddin Khilji and Akbar evoke contrasting images of Islam's history and character in South Asia. Khilji elicits memories of the attack on Chittor and the desecration of the Somnath Temple, in other words, of war, plunder, and bigotry. On the other hand is Akbar, the beloved Mughal prince. The celebration of Akbar's tolerance by Indian nationalist historians is predicated on his ceasing to be an orthodox Sunni Muslim, even founding a new and syncretic order, the "Din-i Ilahi" ("Divine Faith"). Akbar's lack of theological commitment to orthodox Islam, by contrast, offends staunchly religious Muslims who reject him. The nationalist era witnessed rival religio-political views congealing around Akbar – whether it was the Congress' endorsement or the fundamentalist censure. Jawaharlal Nehru, in *The Discovery of India*, makes a dig at a certain wing of the Muslim League with:

> It is significant that Akbar, whom the Hindus especially admired, has not been approved of in recent years by some Moslems. Last year the 400th anniversary of his birth was celebrated in India. All classes of people including many Moslems joined, but the Muslim League kept aloof because Akbar was a symbol of India's unity.[30]

Nehru offers the nationalist line identifying Akbar as a precursor of the secular-modern. But neither Akbar nor Alauddin Khilji provides a basis for a long-term harmonious co-existence between Hindus and Muslims. The possibilities for being Muslim, the narrative suggests, then, are to be bigoted or to abandon the faith. This unmastered past lies at the heart of Habib and Gita's riot-enactment.

"*Chhelemanushi*" ends with the army searching both houses for allegedly kidnapping the "other" child while Habib and Gita huddle close to their mothers and mutely watch the soldiers with "frightened eyes." Separated now from each other, the children are restored to their families and metonymically, their communities. Habib and Gita, silenced initially by the frenetic reactions of their parents and other adults over their riot-game, are in the end rendered voiceless, as is Pali after his thread ceremony. In both stories, family-community-state discipline thwarts the hope of resolving the hostilities which the children's accommodation of difference had offered.

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By the end of both narratives the children's innocence has been shattered. The process of socialization has demanded that each acquire knowledge of religious difference (though not necessarily of religious precepts). But at what cost to the children? Pali patiently endures his physiological and psychological trauma, while Gita and Habib emulate their surroundings in play. The

narratives paint a deeply disturbing picture of the future of the nation. Both ask, will the futures of these young citizens of the nation be vitiated by communal rivalries as were those of their parents' generation?

Habib and Gita, who have grown up in each other's company and homes, and whose "urge" to play together "knows nothing of politics, of arguments and permissions, caste and religion"[31] alone expose the emptiness of the contemporary discourse of Hindu–Muslim difference. In acting on their urges and ignoring the restrictions imposed on them by their parents or community, the children, not quite socialized yet, resist group belonging. To the extent they preserve this pre-socialized character, the children preserve their humanity, however infantile. In an interview on her Partition writings Bapsi Sidhwa makes a similar observation regarding her selection of a child narrator for her novel *Cracking India* (1988). She says that:

> When I wrote the book I found myself inhabiting the child's persona. And it is amazing how I was able to shed the prejudices I had learnt. We all learn prejudices, we all learn to hate and to be contemptuous of others from our elders, but inhabiting the child's persona helped me recognize this.[32]

Sidhwa's view regarding adults passing their prejudices on to children lines up with that of Manik Bandyopadhyay, the title of whose story "*Chhelemanushi*" ("Childishness") is a reflection on the adults rather than the children. The children's "riot-game" is a re-enactment of adult prejudices. "If we are to reach real peace in this world" said the proponent of non-violence, Mohandas K. Gandhi, "if we are to carry on a real war against war, we shall have to begin with the children."[33] The question is: who will educate them?

Notes

1 Bhisham Sahni, "Pali," translated from Hindi by the author in Frank Stewart and Sukrita Paul Kumar (eds.) *Manoa: A Pacific Journal of International Writing*. Special Issue: Partition Literature from India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh, 19:1, 2007, pp. 56–73. All page numbers refer to this text.
2 Ibid., 70.
3 Manik Bandyopadhyay, "*Chhelemanushi*," translated from Bengali by Sukanta Chaudhuri as "Childishness" in Alok Bhalla (ed.) *Stories About the Partition of India* (New Delhi: Harper Collins, 1999). All page numbers refer to this text.
4 In *Supuriboner Sari*, the disappearance of Neelu's melancholic, poetry-writing aunt, Phoolmami, to whom he was deeply attached, is a metaphor for the fading of beauty and communal harmony in the village.
5 The word "communalism" in South Asia is synonymous with "sectarianism." The "community" in communalism refers usually to one's religious community. In this intense identification with the religious community, rival religious communities are viewed as antagonistic. In the context of the Partition, communal violence refers to Hindu–Muslim or Sikh–Muslim conflicts.
6 Sahni, "Pali," 62.
7 Ibid., 62–63.
8 Ibid., 73.

9 In further emphasizing the identical character of the Muslim maulvi and the Hindu Chaudhri – both of whom insist on difference – the author repeats the same verb to describe their manner of speaking: "'Is there a kafir's child in here?' the maulvi *barked*, stepping into the courtyard," and "'We won't allow you to do such silly things in this house,' the Chaudhri *barked* at Pali" (61, 72; emphasis mine).
10 Ibid., 72–73.
11 Ibid., 73.
12 Ibid., 71.
13 Ibid., 61.
14 Ibid.
15 Ibid., 71.
16 Ibid., 71.
17 Ibid., 67.
18 Ibid., 72.
19 Ibid., 73.
20 Bandyopadhyay, "*Chhelemanushi*," 148–49.
21 Ibid., 151.
22 The insistence on "sameness" and the absurdity of imposing borders between people with shared social practices is used in a number of writings that focus on communal conflicts in South Asia. Jhumpa Lahiri's story "When Mr. Pirzada Came to Dine," for instance, captures the confusion Lilia, a ten-year-old girl American-born and raised, experiences upon being informed by her father that their South Asian friend Mr. Pirzada is not Indian but (East) Pakistani:

> It made no sense to me. Mr. Pirzada and my parents spoke the same language, laughed at the same jokes, looked more or less the same. They ate pickled mangoes with their meal, ate rice every night for supper with their hands. Like my parents, Mr. Pirzada took off his shoes before entering a room, chewed fennel seeds after meals as a digestive, drank no alcohol, for dessert dipped austere biscuits into successive cups of tea. Nevertheless my father insisted that I understand the difference. … He seemed concerned that Mr. Pirzada might take offense if I accidentally referred to him as an Indian.
>
> (Jhumpa Lahiri, "When Mr. Pirzada Came to Dine," in *Interpreter of Maladies* (New York: Mariner Books, 1999, 25–26)

And during the Indo-Pak War Lilia finds her parents and Mr. Pirzada "operating during that time as a single person, sharing a single meal, a single body, a single silence, and a single fear" (41).
23 Bandyopadhyay, "*Chhelemanushi*," 148.
24 Ibid., 157.
25 Ibid., 154.
26 Ibid., 159.
27 Ibid.
28 George Eisen, *Children and Play in the Holocaust: Games among the Shadows* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1990), 61.
29 Bandyopadhyay, "*Chhelemanushi*," 156.
30 Jawaharlal Nehru, *The Discovery of India* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1999; first published by The Signet Press, Calcutta, 1946), 343–44.
31 Bandyopadhyay, "*Chhelemanushi*," 153.
32 Bapsi Sidhwa. "Bapsi Sidhwa and Urvashi Butalia Discuss the Partition of India," *History Workshop Journal*, 50 (Autumn 2000), 237.
33 Mohandas K. Gandhi, speech at Montessori Training College, London, delivered on October 28, 1931. Published in *Young India*, November 19, 1931.

Conclusion

The Introduction to this book critically reviewed debates respecting the size of the literary archive on the Partition of Bengal. But apart from what might be termed "Partition Studies," there are also peculiar questions that arise in the domain of literary criticism. Veteran critic Srikumar Bandyopadhyay's influential study on the history and development of the Bengali novel, *Bangasahitye Upanyaser Dhara*[1] (*The Evolution of the Novel in the Literature of Bengal*) was originally serialized in the journal *Nabya Bharat* in 1923–24, and published in book form in 1939. The work has had immense impact on Bengali literary studies ever since. Updating it for the third edition, published in 1956, in a chapter discussing the contemporary novel, Bandyopadhyay added a short section which presented a general critical appraisal of Partition writings from West Bengal from the late-1940s onward. Three novelists in particular are discussed: Amarendranath Ghosh, Ramesh Chandra Sen, and Abinash Saha. In the revised and expanded fourth edition, published in 1962, Bandyopadhyay made no changes to his earlier assessment of this body of work, except adding brief notices of two additional Partition novels: Narayan Sanyal's *Balmik* (*Anthill*, 1958)[2] and Shaktipada Rajguru's *Tobu Bihanga* (*Not Yet, Bird*, 1960) both of which focus on the struggles and privations of refugees. (Although Bandyopadhyay continued to revise the book until his death in 1970, the section on Partition writings as it appeared in the 1962 edition was incorporated into subsequent editions without alteration.)

Bangasahitye Upanyaser Dhara acquired its authoritative status within the domain of Bengali literary criticism both for the extensive range of the study and for its important critical insights into the work of early Bengali novelists, particularly Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay and Rabindranath Tagore. On account of the book's iconic status, Bandyopadhyay's unfavorable assessment of Partition literature has been influential upon its subsequent reception, and may account for the neglect that, until fairly recently, this body of work has suffered from Bengali literary critics, translators, and publishers alike. At the time his critical views on this writing were first published in 1956, just about nine years after Partition, and Bandyopadhyay had only a small segment of this literature on which to base his observations. There is another caveat: elsewhere in *Bangasahitye Upanyaser Dhara* Bandyopadhyay discusses

Narendranath Mitra's novel *Durabhashini* (see Chapter Three), but not as a Partition novel, despite the fact that at the heart of the narrative is the dispossession and dislocation attending Partition that compelled middle-class Bengali Hindu women to enter the labor market in large numbers. Similarly, Bandyopadhyay applauds the originality in the plot of *Pancha Parba* (*Five Chapters*, 1954) by Banaphool or Bolaichand Mukhopadhyay, which explores the financial scams devised in order to take advantage of the legal complications ushered in by the political remapping in 1947. Yet, despite the centrality of Partition to the story, Bandyopadhyay classifies *Pancha Parba* as a "detective-type"[3] novel. Also, his discussion of Pratibha Basu's novel *Samudra Hriday* (*Oceanheart*, 1959), which is set during the Partition violence, is confined to a formal discussion of the plot structure alone. Basu's novel is not treated as Partition literature but classified under writings by contemporary women novelists. *Samudra Hriday*, a work that Tapati Chakravarty considers a Partition novel, Bandyopadhyay views as a romance. Bandyopadhyay's definition of Partition literature as a genre focuses, in other words, wholly on writings on the struggles and privations of refugees. Again, definitional inadequacy unnecessarily constrains our approach to the literary archive on the Bengal Partition.

While Bandyopadhyay identifies some of the general characteristics typical of this body of work, for instance, its protracted and blunt focus on human suffering – his evaluative categories are in themselves problematic. His vocabulary for critical assessment is borrowed from the ancient Sanskrit text Bharata's *Natyashastra* (*Treatise on Drama*). The recurring deployment of Sanskrit aesthetic categories of *bhava* (a word with many resonances, here mostly emotions, essence) and *rasa* (mood, sentiment) is indicative of a neo-traditional understanding of literary hermeneutics. While he describes the novel form as a "totally modern object,"[4] the product of the rise of democracy and individualism, his evaluative categories are decidedly inadequate to this critical recognition. Characterizing Partition literature as catering to the public's interest in "political issues and the emotive rehearsal of the Independence struggle," Bandyopadhyay writes that:

> Novelists have gathered their literary inspiration keeping an eye on mass movements announced in the large headlines of newspapers … for this excessive reliance on the seeming attractiveness of an occurrence, literature, in most cases, is descending quickly to the level of journalism. … It is true that the August Revolution in our country and the refugee problem have at present powerfully overwhelmed our sense of reality and the production of our literature. But their psychological impact has not progressed past the level of a blurry bewildered surge of feeling to lead to a deeper realization illuminated by certainty … just as the regrettable weakness and utter helplessness of the people are exemplified in the refugee problem. Its novelistic representation, likewise, oscillates uncertainly between the moods of pathos and horror. In this nightmarish

> whirling of crisis-lawlessness-rootless evictions there is no steady, definitive melody of human sentiment, no profound sorrow arising from the depths of the heart. … [O]ur artists have been unable to give a more effective form to it beyond the presentation of mute murmurs and dense perplexities, the stricken terror in the eyes of an animal pursued by death. There is perceptible in the lamentations of the damned in Dante's *Inferno* a harmonious strain of steady spiritual belief, but the heartfelt wailings in the inferno of modern Bengali having split into just so many discordant notes. These narcissistic shrieks have lost the unity of feeling and the appropriateness of sentiment.[5]

In the preface to *Bangasahitye Upanyaser Dhara*, Bandyopadhyay identifies realism as fundamental to the novel form. Realism denotes for him the narrative's being strictly grounded in the plausible, the rejection of all elements that strain credulity. At the same time, as the excerpt indicates, Bandyopadhyay is critical of what Sisir Kumar Das, in his discussion of Bengali Partition literature, refers to as the "rawness of experience."[6] Indeed, Bandyopadhyay rejects Modernism as a literary sensibility, particularly in its experimental and radically subjective aspect. As a traditionalist, he is no less critical of the socialist realism associated with the All-India Progressive Writers' Association.[7] In short, Bandyopadhyay for all his influence on twentieth century Bengali criticism, seems largely hostile to much of twentieth century literary production. The unexpected crisis ushered in by the Partition and the subsequent influx of refugees as well as the moral and, indeed, civilizational catastrophe that resulted from the mass manifestation of brutality in Partition's communal violence (the atrophying of conscience, and the unmasking of a darker side of Man) demanded a new poetics, one that was at least potentially adequate to new social conditions, conditions that defied refinement and were beyond redemption. In expecting "a harmonious strain of steady spiritual belief" as in Dante's poetic cosmos – in a twentieth century world ravaged by two global wars, a time that witnessed the construction of death camps to exterminate the European Jewry; and then, closer to home, the massacre of unarmed men, women, and children at Jallianwallah Bagh and elsewhere by the colonial government, a catastrophic man-made famine that killed millions in Bengal (1943), and communal violence beginning in August 1946 and stretching over a year that left millions homeless, others dead and/or dishonored – in expecting that is to appreciate timeless literary sentiments or moods in works produced by and about such a world, the critic himself seems out of step with the literature he comments on.

Bandyopadhyay not only complains about the poverty of spiritual belief in modern literature as a whole, he also censures its character of reportage, its documentary nature, in other words, its lack of those aesthetic qualities that, in his mind, make a piece of writing literature. These qualities, he claims, are receding to make way for an unvarnished report upon social realities. There is no cause to argue with his claim that India's modernity seems derivative, and

the postcolonial situation, melancholic. In fact, there is a purposelessness or perhaps we might say, a profoundly inchoate, yet multiply betrayed impulse to freedom that is reflected in the literature it generates. In this respect, Partition literature accurately reflects the world that produces it. To begin to develop a critical sensibility adequate to such a literature, the topicality and even documentary urge cannot be dismissed out of hand.

Among the reasons for Bandyopadhyay's discontentment with Bengali Partition writings is his claim that these novels are awash with unprocessed emotions. He demands of these works what they cannot deliver – catharsis, an emotional transcendence. Yet, the abundance of "pathos and horror," indeed their jarring admixture and interfusion, in this body of work is only to be expected as writers grapple with the question of how to effectively represent the reality of physical privation, forced eviction, the butchering of innocents, and the shattering of lives. In certain respects, then, Bandyopadhyay's assessment of this literature is not misleading even as it reveals a need for further critical consideration. Certainly, his evaluative categories need to be revised. For one thing, as I have said, the documentary or journalistic aspect of this body of work, of which Bandyopadhyay is critical, is a fundamental reason for the current resurgence of interest in it. Nor was this incidental to this work at the time it was written. On the contrary, it formed an aspect of this writings' necessity. For, dismissive as the term is, nevertheless an important aspect of Partition literature is that it served as a forum for the discussion of contemporary events. Indeed, since its birth in the nineteenth century, the Bengali novel has frequently served a distinctly social purpose, as a site for criticism of societal practices and the exposure of social problems. For instance, Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay's *Bishbriksha* (*The Poison Tree*, 1873) and *Krishnakanter Will* (*Krishnakanta's Will*, 1878) have served as fora for discussions around widow remarriage. Similarly, many of Saratchandra Chattopadhay's writings were critical of the oppression of women in a patriarchal society. Literature has, in fact, assumed a central and distinct role in the construction of the Bengali public sphere.

Like Srikumar Bandyopadhay, distinguished author and critic Hasan Azizul Huq expresses disenchantment with Partition novels from East Pakistan, but his reasons are somewhat different. Huq's critical appraisal, in the essay "*Dui Juger Desh Manusher Katha*"[8] ("A Two-Epoch Chronicle of the Land and People," 1974) focuses on East Pakistani novels composed during the 1950s and 60s. About Partition novels, in particular, he regrets the fact that "the great literature that could have been produced on the subject of Partition"[9] remains unwritten. Surveying works by Abul Fazl, Abu Rushd, Rashid Karim, and Sardar Jaynuddin, Huq finds them aesthetically deficient and shallow in content. The problem, according to him, lies with the narrow class concerns expressed in this body of work: composed by the urban Bengali Muslim middle-class it confines itself to the experiences of that class, the class that arguably benefitted from Partition (and certainly, the class most in favor of it). The novels, according to Huq, reflect sectional interests whereas the

story of the "colossal pain and suffering"[10] of those who actually paid the price for Partition – the rural underclasses – remains untold:

> The event has been presented exclusively from the viewpoint of the middle-class who were enthusiastic about the outcome of Partition. Those for whom it was not possible to be truly inspired due to the inherent limitations of the Pakistan Movement – and I am speaking of the numerous rural peasants and laborers here – literature has sidestepped their view on Partition. And yet, it is true that compared with the few scattered gains made by the middle-class, the common man had to endure unbearable ordeals and anguish. No novelist wrote about the heartbreaking human disaster that occurred in the aftermath of Partition. As for [the underclasses] whose numerical support for the Pakistan Movement was claimed on paper, their support was not a matter of instinct, rather it was generated through purposeful incitement, age-old superstitions, and bigotry. Using spurious political propaganda, they were mobilized to pull off communal riots, yet they were the same people who would never, for any reason, leave the land, who had never, not even in their imagination, contemplated migrating elsewhere, but who in the end, were uprooted from their ancestral homes and land in hundreds of thousands and turned into rootless refugees. No one has written about that colossal pain and suffering in our contemporary history. From our Bangladesh numerous people left for India, from West Bengal countless people arrived here, an astonishingly pointless journey! What a terrifying social, national, and spiritual crisis! Bengali novelists have only picked at the desiccated remains of this episode; they have not explored the roots of the country's predicament.[11]

Huq has himself tried to correct the deficiency by authoring short stories on Partition that focus on the underclasses, such as "*Parabashi*" ("The Exile") and "*Ekti Nirjala Galpo*" ("An Undiluted Story"), and, as we have seen, he also composed one of the finest works of Bengali Partition literature, his novel *Agunpakhi*. But *Agunpakhi* is not preoccupied with the underclasses and so whether his own class-preoccupied categories are adequate even to his own literary production is highly debatable. Certainly it is true that some work is more superficial, and others more profound, and it is likewise true that this is inherently related to its adequacy to historical experience, but this historical experience is ultimately that of society as a whole, however class-divided the society may be.

Literary scholar and critic Asrukumar Sikdar's wide ranging study of West Bengali prose writings on Partition – long and short fiction and memoirs – covers a multitude of different thematic areas in *Bhanga Bangla o Bangla Sahitya*[12] (*Broken Bengal and Bengali Literature*, 2005).[13] In his chapter "*Bhanga Desh, Bhanga Manush, Boba Bangla Sahitya*" ("Broken Land, Broken People, Mute Bengali Literature"), he seems to find chiefly absence and silence. Sikdar raises the question of Bengali literary representations of

violence and, like other critics, he finds it lacking because it fails to illuminate the centrality of violence in the Partition. In a section on violence, trauma, and their literary expression, Sikdar opens with a discussion of writings on the Holocaust and proceeds to women survivors' silence as noted by Urvashi Butalia, Ritu Menon, and Kamla Bhasin; he then draws support for his claim from Ashis Nandy's assertion that Bengali literature has shied away from representations of Partition's violence,[14] after which he concludes categorically that, "There is no doubt that there is a silence in Bengali literature."[15] Of course, compared with the sheer volume of Holocaust writings, not to mention the preservation of Holocaust narratives, the representations of traumatic violence in Bengali Partition literature fall far short. But to say that there is a "silence" is to overstate the case. Here again we see Bengali critics associating Partition's violence only with the years 1947 and 48 (as in the case of Punjab), when in Bengal the violence that erupted in 1946 with the Great Calcutta Killing and the riots in Noakhali and Tippera carried on in crucial respects for decades, albeit as a different, subtler kind of violence. The communal ferocities in 1950 and again in 1964, ripples of the unfinished business of the Bengal Partition, go unaddressed in criticism though not in literature. Traumatic violence, however, is not the only area where Sikdar notes a silence. He also laments the existence of an "unbroken flawless silence"[16] over Partition-related migrations, claiming that "No footfalls of the exodus are present in Bengali literature."[17] And yet, this comment comes at the end of a long paragraph where he discusses representations of Partition-related migrations in Shanta Sen's novel *Pitamahi* (*Grandmother*, 1994) and Narayan Sanyal's *Balmik* (*Ant-hill*, 1955)!

There are other claims which cannot withstand scrutiny. To take just one example: on the subject of literary representations of life in a refugee camp, Sikdar writes that "Excepting Narayan Sanyal's novel *Bokultala PL Camp* nowhere in Bengali literature is the story of these camp dwellers."[18] Again his comment is puzzling since, in addition to *Bokultala PL Camp*, Sanyal's subsequent work, *Balmik* and *Aranyadandak* (*Sentenced to the Forest*, 1961), also focuses on life in refugee camps. Similarly, Sunil Gangopadhyay's *Arjun* focuses on life on the platforms of Calcutta's Sealdah Station, in a refugee camp, and, later, in a squatters' colony (see Chapter Four), just as his *Purba-Paschim* (1988–89) focuses on the condition of refugees. It is unclear why these have been excluded.[19] Fundamentally, his claims are inflated or simply suspect. For instance, he generalizes Hasan Azizul Huq's observation made in "*Dui Juger Desh Manusher Katha*," mentioned previously, in support of his own claim of scarcity of material. In the essay, Huq, speaking of the agony of members of the underclasses uprooted by Partition complains that "no one has written about that colossal pain and suffering in our contemporary history." Huq's discontentment arises from his reading of novels from East Pakistan. But Sikdar, when he cites the passage, withholds the region-specific referent of the comment, and presents it as Huq's confession of his disappointment with Bengali Partition literature as a whole. In light of the above, my question is: is

the extant literature actually silent on the subject or, has the archive been rendered voiceless by commentary of this sort from critics?

Whether it is Bandyopadhyay's discussion of aesthetics or Huq's and Sikdar's content-based analyses, their approaches illustrate the different ways segments of this literature have been examined so far. There are, of course, many other ways of reading the texts critically. What I have attempted in this book is, above all, to indicate something of the sheer wealth of our literary inheritance, a wealth to which our critical practice is simply inadequate. I close this book with the hope that other scholars will analyze the many areas and aspects of this literature that are still waiting to be explored. Accompanying this necessarily would be a renewed impetus to edit, republish, and, potentially translate into English as well as into other languages of the subcontinent the greatest and most enduring works I have discussed here. This, in crucial respects, is the most sorely felt need, one to which I hope this book has at least modestly contributed.

Notes

1 Srikumar Bandyopadhyay, *Bangasahitye Upanyaser Dhara*. Calcutta: Modern Book Agency, 1962 (revised and expanded fourth edition).
2 It is not clear why Bandyopadhyay examines Sanyal's *Balmik*, but not his earlier novella *Bokultala PL Camp* (1955).
3 Bandyopadhyay, *Bangasahitye Upanyaser Dhara*, 673.
4 Ibid., 1.
5 Ibid., 685–86 (1962, fourth edition); 560–61 (1956, third edition).
6 Sisir Kumar Das, *History of Indian Literature, 1911–1956, Struggle for Freedom* (Delhi: Sahitya Akademi, 2006), 377.
7 In his presidential address to the AIPWA, Premchand stated that literature must contain "an impulse toward social reconstruction, the power to reflect the heard realities of life – in short we want a literature which may produce in us movement, change and restlessness" (*Tribune*, Lahore, 15 April, 1936, 13). Cited in Clinton Seely, *A Poet Apart: A Literary Biography of the Bengali Poet Jibanananda Das, 1899–1954* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1990).
8 Hasan Azizul Huq, "*Dui Juger Desh Manusher Katha*," in *Rachanasamngraha* (Ḍhaka: Jatiya Grantha Prakasana, 2001–).
9 Ibid., 17.
10 Ibid., 18.
11 Ibid., 17–18.
12 Asrukumar Sikdar, *Bhanga Bangla o Bangla Sahitya* (*Broken Bengal and Bengali Literature*) (Calcutta: Dey's Publishing, 2005).
13 Sikdar states at the beginning that the study is limited to Bengali writings from West Bengal. So when he uses "Bengali literature" he is referring to literature from the Indian part of partitioned Bengal.
14 Ashis Nandy claims that when it comes to literary representations of violence in Partition literature, the silence is "even more dismal in the case of Bengal. Though half the killings had taken place in that part of the world, the literary imagination there had obstinately refused to rise to the situation" (1). Ashis Nandy, "Too Painful for Words?," *The Sunday Times of India Review*, July 20, 1997, 1–3.
15 Sikdar, *Bhanga Bangla o Bangla Sahitya*, 23.
16 Ibid., 34.

17 Ibid.
18 Ibid., 36.
19 Sikdar's complaints over scarcity are often exaggerated. In another instance, he writes that "Although fifty lakh [5 million] people died in the famine of the 'fifties [Bengali calendar 1350; Gregorian calendar 1943–44], no significant Bengali novel has been written on that agonizing episode, except a few scattered stories and poems. Bengali writers had surrendered to silence even then" (20). My question is: what about *Ashani Sanket* (*Distant Thunder*) by Bibhutibhushan Bandyopadhyay? Or Amalendu Bhattacharya's *Akaler Sandhane* (*In Search of Famine*)?

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