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**THE AFTERLIFE:  
A STUDY OF BANGLA SHORT FICTION  
ON PARTITION**

*Dissertation submitted to the Jawaharlal Nehru University  
In partial fulfillment of the requirements of the award of the degree of*

**MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY**

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## DECLARATION BY THE CANDIDATE

July 21, 2004

This dissertation entitled “**THE AFTERLIFE: A STUDY OF BANGLA SHORT FICTION ON PARTITION**”, submitted by me to the Centre of Linguistics and English, School of Language, Literature and Culture Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, for the award of the degree of Master of Philosophy is an original work and has not been submitted so far in part or full, for any other degree of diploma of any university/ institution.

  
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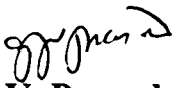


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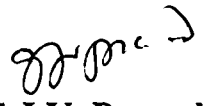
**CERTIFICATE**

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## CHAPTER-I

### **Introduction**

### **1**

What is the need of studying literature on the partition of India after 57 years of the actual event? The academic interest in this kind of writing is still in the emergent phase; anthologies of partition stories have been published in the 90s. Urvashi Butalia's *The Other Side of Silence* has also been published in the 1998. The rise of interest in partition literature somehow clashes with the rise of Indian novel in English. Literature on the partition of India can be interrogated with the same questions, which the latter branch of writing is. The word partition is historically associated with the pains of dislocation, fragmented identities and exile. A partition narrative can potentially be a tale of mass-scale rape and murder in a third-world country. These characteristics may mould a sensational and exotic package, which essentialises colonisation, communalism and victim hood. The question becomes obvious; is the academician/writer trying to use partition literature as a trope to be a part of the post-colonial 'activity' in the third-world? But there are a few other events, which mark the decade of the 90s, the Ram Janmabhoomi-Babri Masjid controversy that generated riots all over the country. There has been an Indo-Pak war in 1999 and another riot in Gujrat in 2002 (and also the numerous incidents that did not get reported because they did not get the status of an event). Memories of the holocaust have attacked us with new questions; According to Ranabir Samaddar, partition was supposed to be a modernist solution to the problem of differences (*Reflections on Partition in the East*). Partition reminds us of the unresolved problems of differences and throws up a lot of questions: How did people react when riots started breaking out? How did they prepare for the exodus? How did they adapt to their new life in the 'other' land? While history has

limited its efforts to find out the causes of partition it is literature, which can help us to re-live the irrational experience of trauma. However suspicious our attitude is we have to go to partition literature to understand our past and present.

The area of research in this dissertation is themes of partition in Bangla short fiction. As a part of partition literature, this stories should be read both against the background of the events in 1947 and the present backdrop of communal bloodbath. The critical focus is not directed solely at problems like communalism, fundamentalism and secularism, but also apparently private emotions like love, hostility and responsibility and freedom, which were re-defined during the partition.

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Narratives are always told from someone's point of view, to take control of the frightening diversity and formlessness of the world; they literally produce a world in which the self finds a home. Or it would perhaps describe the process better if we say that around a particular home they try to paint a picture of some kind of ordered, humane and habitable world.

(Sudipto Kaviraj, "The Imaginary Institution of India", *Subaltern Studies* vii) (13)

The displaced subject finds a home in the partition narratives; it is his/her community's history which instigates the artist to

adapt to the fearful, inhuman and chaotic present by reconstructing it along with its past on the paper, the screen or the stage. There is a deliberate neo-historicist framework in the dissertation because it looks for historical cognition in literature. In his introduction to *Neo-Historicism and Cultural Materialism*, Brannigan writes about Greenblatt and Montrose's opinion on literature and history:

Greenblatt and Montrose treat literary texts as symbolic formation, which differ in no respect ultimately from other symbolical formation including historical events and trends. For this reason, they treat history not as a background context, as one possible frame of reference, which might help make the literary text meaningful, but instead they treat history as the very subject and form in which literature is enmeshed. (59-60)

This chapter consists of a short historical introduction to the partition of Bengal and the cultural modes of its documentation including films, theatre and novels. The third section of the chapter makes a brief survey of Bangla novels dealing with partition.

If we look at the history of Bengal before and after 1947, we find various discourses such as poverty, exile, migration, refugee, deaths and abduction and what is euphemistically called 'the outrage of modesty' of women. Bidyut Chakraborty in his *Communal Identity in India* describes the partition of Bengal as an event of renegotiation and reordering, the unfolding of historical process in which people participate by compulsion. This 'coerced



migration' (*The Trauma and the Triumph*) changed the character of Bengal. Before studying the literature on partition it is necessary to be acquainted with the major changes in the Hindu Bengali society during partition. Kolkata, the city, which acted as the central refuge, was friendly and hostile, judicious and corrupt, depressing as well as hopeful. Jashodhara Bagchi writes in her essay "Freedom in an Idiom of Loss" (*The Trauma and the Triumph*):

The refugee population transformed Calcutta from a city of armchair babus devoted to genteel culture into a militant angry leftist city where middle class women, uprooted from the shelter of the village homes came out to work. (24-27)

With the influx of refugees, Kolkata developed new threats, fears and liabilities. The dynamics of the newfound cosmopolitanism in the city was controlled by fear and poverty. There had been a famine in Bengal in 1943. Bengalis fled to different lands and people from other places (Sikhs, Oriyas, Marwaris including Hindu refugees from East Bengal) came to Kolkata in search of 'food ' and 'shelter' in their skeletal connotations. Krishna Dutta, in her book *Calcutta*, gives an account of Kolkata's population in the decade of partition. From early 1940's there had been a steady flow of middle class refugees. By 1948, the city had been flooded by people of the middle class and rural poor class. In 1949, there were more than 40 colonies in southeast Calcutta and 65 in the north. In 1951, 2/3<sup>d</sup> of Kolkata's inhabitants were new immigrants. It was this city of poverty, death and squalor, which Mother Teresa discovered as a social worker and Kolkata became infamous for people dying on its streets.

Abhijit Dasgupta in his essay “ The politics of agitation and confession: displaced Bengalis in West Bengal” (*Refugees and Human Rights*) refers to the definition of displaced Bengali which the government of India announced in 1948:

A displaced person is one who had entered India (who left who was compelled to leave his home in East Pakistan on or after October 15, 1947) on account of civil disturbances or fear of such disturbances on account of setting up of the two dominions of India and Pakistan. (98)

I summarise Partha Chatterjee’s “Second Partition Of Bengal” (*Reflections on partition in the East*) as a brief history of these displaced people. In 1905, Lord Curzon divided Bengal into West Bengal, East Bengal and Assam; the given reason was that of administrative convenience. The area of 189000 sq miles and a population of 79 million was said to have become ungovernable. Sumit Sarkar, in his book on swadeshi movement in Bengal writes that Bengal was divided in 1905 in order to curb the growing nationalist sentiment of the educated bhadralok<sup>1</sup>. Curzon wanted to weaken Bengali intelligentsia and separate the Muslims geographically so that rhetoric of Hindu Muslim unity would never be realized. The reformers and politicians seemed to have been blind towards the deep-rooted differences of the two communities. They constructed an unproblematic homogenous Bengaliness, which had to pay a heavy price during the second partition of Bengal. As Chatterjee writes “The nationalist political leadership in Bengal at this time was overwhelmingly upper-class Hindu.”(39) In the 19<sup>th</sup> century renaissance in Bengal, it was Hinduism, which was

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<sup>1</sup> Bhadrakok-A term used to refer to educated people from middle class or upper class. They are supposed to be well-bred professionals and landowners who do not engage in professions of manual labour.

redefined, and reformed, only Hindu women were liberated. Sufia Ahmad makes a series of complaints in her book *The Muslim Community in Bengal*: The Muslims did not join the Congress before 1930. She quotes Vivekananda: "...conquest of the whole world by the Hindu world." Bankim Chandra's nationalist novels like *Anandamath* did not show any traces of affection in Muslims. She also quotes Mujibur Rehman:

The Bengalee Hindus while they profess such equality in the press and on the platform scarcely give any opportunity to the Bengalee Mussalmans to believe in their sincerity...(65)

His view is ultimately cynical:

Unfortunately there are men in the Moslem community who hold a very low opinion of the Hindus. The very fact that idolatry is a part and parcel of their religion makes them incapable in the opinions of some of the musalmans of any good, noble or right thing. (65)

It is evident that the possibility of Hindu- Muslim friendship was used as a banner for mass mobilization. There was no cultural or social programme to educate the masses about overcoming the differences between the two communities. Nirad C Chaudhury's *Autobiography of an unknown Indian* can be of some help to us, while literature of partition did not evolve before 1960s, Chaudhuri gives us views on communalism in 1951:

When we were very young, that is to say when the swadeshi movement had not coloured our attitude to the Muslims, we presented four distinct aspects in our attitude towards them as it

was shaped by tradition. In the first place we felt a retrospective hostility towards the Muslims for their one time domination of us, the Hindus. Secondly on the plane of thought we were utterly indifferent to the Muslims as an element in the contemporary society, thirdly we had friendliness for the Muslims of our economic status with whom we came into personal contact. Our fourth feeling was mixed concern and contempt for the Muslim peasants, we saw them in the same light as ...the low caste Hindu peasants.

(112)

The issue of the "low caste Hindu peasants" can be taken up to structurally analyse the second partition of Bengal. As Chatterjee writes:

The fact that the peasantry in eastern Bengal was predominantly Muslim and the landlords largely Hindu has for long been regarded by historians especially Marxist historians as the crucial structural condition that allowed a class antagonism to be expressed as a conflict between religious groups and that enabled the British to manipulate the various Indian organizations around this issue. (39)

Chatterjee refers to Sugata Bose who said that initially the relationship between landlords and peasants were symbiotic but the prolonged depression of 1930s created a hierarchy in Bengal. In his book *Communal Riots in Bengal*, Suranjan das writes that there was a significant change in Hindu-Muslim relations between the two partitions of Bengal. During the 2<sup>nd</sup> partition, class and communal identities converged; elite and popular communalism had also converged. The depression played a major role during this period, it really managed to create a hierarchy in the state which finally led to the partition of Bengal. In the introduction to *Partition: literary responses*, SR Chakraborty and Mazhar Hussain write that the league had not been popular in Bengal till 1937, it was defeated till 1937. The winning party was Krishak Praja party, a party of middle class peasants and the emerging educated Bengali Muslims. The Muslim League came to prominence in Bengal in 1940s. By 1945-46 it won most 113 out of 120 seats. The ground for partition was prepared by then. The Amrita Bazaar Patrika openly campaigned for the partition of Bengal; Chatterjee writes that the decision of partition did not involve the masses. The members of the Bengal assembly, elected on the basis of a very restricted suffrage, made the relevant decisions. Mass agitation against the partition was not very powerful. The two main events leading to the partition were the riots in Kolkata and Noakhali. It meant that Pakistan was inevitable. Chatterjee complains that Bengal was politically inactive during the partition. In May 1947, a debate broke out between Abdul Hashim and Maulana Akram Khan regarding the Sarat Bose-Suhrawardy proposal for a sovereign united Bengal. Abdul Hashim supported the idea while Maulana Azam Khan said that the Provincial League was not to arbitrate in this matter because it was Jinnah or the central body of the league who could

take all decisions on behalf of Indian Muslims. Once the partition of Punjab was accepted, it was obvious that Bengal would also be divided.

#### **After partition**

Both Jasodhara Bagchi and Prafulla Chakraborty write that unlike Punjab, partition in Bengal was not one swift swipe but an on going process since the Noakhali riots of 1946. Prafulla Chakraborty in *His Marginal men: the refugees and the left political syndrome in West Bengal* writes that there was no large-scale killings immediately after the partition. He is more concerned about the ongoing infiltration in the Indian Bangladesh border:

The exodus sparked off by the Noakhali riots gradually ceased and atmosphere of violence yielded to a sense of euphoria generated by the newly born independence. Why did it start again at an accelerated rate? (6)

Rachel Weber writes in "Re (creating) the home..." (*The Trauma and the Triumph*):

The entire landscape of the Calcutta Corporation Area was radically altered as older central areas swelled beyond capacity and new areas on the periphery of the city were brought under habitation. (67)

The new settlers extended the city beyond its horizontal boundaries. Weber further writes about the Great Calcutta Killings and Noakhali riots, which set off widespread harassment discrimination and persecution of the Hindu population. Growing sense of insecurity was sufficient to

precipitate a mass exodus. Fear of rape and dishonour of women was the primary motivating factor behind the same.

The process of collective takeover has been mythologized and immortalized by the term *jabardakhal* (seizure and settlement). People not belonging to the group of chosen few who got a plot of land by the government acquired property by forcibly occupying vacant lands. The very act of erecting a home, even a *kutchra* settlement was symbolically and politically significant for the refugees. Seizure-settlement was justified because the government failed to provide proper rehabilitation for all. In *Marginal Men...* Chakraborty writes how Hiranmoy Bannerjee, the commissioner of relief and rehabilitation committee in 1949 divided the refugees into three distinct categories.

1. A relatively well-off and energetic class of refugees who did not look forward to government help but depended on their own resources for rehabilitation themselves.

2. Another class lacked money, but not energy occupied deserted houses or fallow land where they resided temporarily and took upon themselves the task of earning livelihood.

3. The refugees placed in the third category were poor and lacked the will to stand on their own feet. It was the refugees of the last category who sought shelter in the government camps. (7)

Chakraborty writes that by 1949, the camp-dwellers had swelled to 70,000. Among them 7000 were unfit for rehabilitation, they

consisted mainly of women and children without any adult male to look after them. They were homed in permanent liability camps. The remaining 62500 refugees or 12500 families at the average rate of 5 persons per family had therefore to be rehabilitated. Tai Yong Tan and Ganesh Kudaisya write about this rehabilitation in the essay "Divided Landscapes, Fragmented Identities"(*The Aftermath of Partition in South Asia.*). The refugees in West Bengal started becoming a burden to the government by 1950s.They could not provide any more shelter. The state thought that the federal government should also take responsibility in the duty. Plans were prepared to dispose the refugees outside West Bengal. As the population density of Bengal rose by 12%, its regional economy suffered a lot. They could not bear the additional burden of rehabilitation. At the same time Muslim migration from this side of the country had been negligible, very little evacuee property was left. According to the authors (Tan and Kudaisya), the government thought that help to the refugees would lead to a heavier influx of refugees from the other side of the border. This was the main problem when Dr BC Roy took over the ministry of rehabilitation (UCRC) was found. The aim was to gather all the refugees in West Bengal under the banner of a single federated body of all political parties and democratic organization. Gradually, the angry impoverished refugees were drawn into left politics. They took to hunger strikes, hartals, processions and gheraos; the literature/cinema/theatre of partition barely escapes this trace of anti-establishment anguish.

### 3

Is there any specific genre of partition literature in Bangla? Tapati Chakraborty, in her essay "Within a spectrum: partition and



Bengali literature” argues that partition in Bengal can be linked to several realities, that of migration, impoverishment, unemployment and dishonour of women. Many literary works written during and after this period touched upon these never ending problems, which emerged after the famine of 1943. Bidyut Chakraborty in his essay, mentions that Bengali literature on these issues deal less with violence directly (this is not to suggest that partition literature in North India does not have its own stereotypes). Partition in Punjab was one stray incident of unreal dehumanization, but Bengal partition is one continuous process which goes on till date, same is applicable to the literature of the two respective communities; every year records some new Bengali novel or short story on partition or the consequential experience, that of a refugee.

In his essay “The Riddles of Partition: Memories of the Bengali Hindus”, (*Reflections on partition in the east*), Sandip bandopadhyay writes that the tendency to forget or overlook the facts that partition was not the handiwork of the Britishers or the Indian Political leaders alone, that it gained considerable support from all communities

...had led to the formation of a number of stereotypes and provided a set of readymade categories to be used for understanding the catastrophic event that partition was. The result is that while the total history of partition still remains unexplored, an alternate version has evolved...(60)

Bidyut Chakraborty writes in his essay

With the demarcation of boundaries, to those uprooted, the geographical space became a part of memory overnight. Partition is therefore a modal point underlining a massive shift in conceptualizing the 'self' and the collectivity in relation to the politically demarcated boundaries. How does one capture the shift, which was partly obvious given the changed complexion of the ideas of nation that began transforming to advance a political goal ever since the articulation of Hindu-Muslim differences? Here the creative writings of the phase are most crucial to capture and meaningfully explain the multifaceted voice of the people. (76)

Bidyut Chakraborty mentions the writings of a certain phase, which captures this shift, but this renegotiation is still an ongoing process. If one goes through a novel/film/poem dealing with any aspect of the experience generated by partition, it will be perceived that almost all the problems of the modern/post-modern/post-colonial world have unfurled themselves. Exile, migration, displacement, impoverishment, corruption, religion, identity, communalism, and fear of women's dishonour are some of the themes of these writings.

The state and the central government both failed to provide proper resources to the refugees. Krishna Dutta in her book *Calcutta*, writes that the writers and artists and responded to the problems of refugees. Many of them joined the Indian People's

Theatre Association (1943) it was an anti-fascist group, the IPTA produced and toured with plays about the plight of ordinary people including the refugees. Salil Sen's *Notun ihud*(1950) or *The new Jews* is an important play of this period. Manmohan Bhattacharya is a Sanskrit teacher in a school run by Muslim authorities. Sanskrit is the first subject to be removed from the school syllabus. Manmohan comes to Kolkata, where he has no other option than to take up the job of a cook. His son dies and his daughter becomes a prostitute.

Ritwik Ghatak's *Meghe Dhaka Tara*(1960)or *Cloud capped stars* shows a female protagonist who has been reduced to doing a job in order to save her family from starvation. Her father holds a master's degree in English but he is a jobless refugee. Neeta's(the protagonist)supports her whole family including her elder brother and her boyfriend. Her brother is a budding artist and refuses to work because it will damage his creativity; her boyfriend depends on her when he is a researcher but deserts her when he takes up a job in a big company where his academic skills are not needed. He marries Nita's sister Gita , he does not want to wait for her. Neeta's mother is afraid of getting her married because that would mean washing their hands off the only breadwinner of the family. The implicit idea is that of ghorer lokhhi or the lakshmi of the household who is forced to cross the threshold of her house. Her professional venture is a risk; a transgression when the patriarchal set up fails to sustain itself. She loses her love, her life is a sacrifice and she becomes a victim of tuberculosis, the disease being the metaphor of the decay of the society. The typical female victim of partition in the Bengali sensibility was not a woman contaminated by an enemy but she was either a self sacrificing breadwinner like Nita or the mother whose children have been snatched away from her. *Jukti, takko, gappo, or*

*Reason, argument and story* another film by Ghatak uses a rabindrasangeet of similar concept: the onlooker addresses a young girl as the mother of Bengal and blames some anonymous selfish force for violating her:

Young girl

Are you the soul of Bengal?

Resurrected after the massacre of Bangladesh

Will she Unite those who

Have already violated her for her selfish tends or narrow preoccupations.

(*Sakshat Ritwik*)

It is strange that most films dealing with partition like *Meghe Dhaka Tara*(1960)*Komal Gandhar*(1961) *Subarnorekha* (1962) and Nemai Ghosh's *Chinnamul*(1951) )deal mainly with the material and cultural loss of Bengal which took place due to the partition. *Komal Gandhar* shows a group of refugees who resort to theatre as a mode of protest when the state fails to provide proper rehabilitation. *Subarnorekha's* theme is degradation and decay in Kolkata,the female protagonist joins the flesh trade to sustain her family. *Chinnamul* narrates the miseries of life in the railway stations of Kolkata. Sandip Bandopadhyay,in his essay "The riddle of partition: Memories of Bengali Hindus"*(Reflections on Partition in the East)* observes that though these films focus on the pain of being uprooted and displaced they remain silent on the politics of communalism, they do not try to find out the reasons of partition.

## Novels

...our image of happiness is indissolubly bound up with the image of redemption .The same applies to our view of the past, which is the concern of history. The past carries with it a temporal index by which it is referred to

redemption. There is a secret agreement between past generations and the present one. Our coming was expected on earth. Like every generation that preceded us, we have been endowed with a weak Messianic power, power to which the past has a claim. That claim cannot be settled too cheaply. (254)

(Walter Benjamin "A Theses on the Philosophy of History," *Illuminations*)  
History either makes us proud of past glory or aggressive about some injustice done to us: we become protective about our location and identities. On the communitarian level, men and women want to look back to a glorious past, which gives them a secure present. The 'claim' was settled too cheaply for the people affected by the partition of Bengal in 1947, they could exercise no power when they were drawn into the exodus, ripped of address and history. The Hindus of East Bengal were displaced from their ancestral lands. For these refugees, the relation with their past is dualistic; there's a sense of picturesque security of remote past, in most cases it is the childhood; on the other hand there's the memory of dislocation and humiliation, uprooting, separation, impoverishment, unemployment and the image of the violated woman's body, raped, converted, stripped, and mutilated. Literature on partition of Bengal tries to make sense of these crisscross images of pain, fear and anguish. Novels, stories and poems speak about colonies, and estranged relationships, East Bengal and West Bengal, riots and other forms of violence. As mentioned earlier, partition literature in Bangla is continuing till date. The latest partition novel *Khoabnama* was published in 1994. In this brief survey of the major partition novels in Bangla I will not proceed chronologically but thematically.

The sanctity of women is the site of regulation and paranoia for all societies. In her essay "Freedom in an idiom of loss" (*The Trauma and the Triumph*), Jashodhara Bagchi writes

Moral regulation or, rather, a hypocritical obsession with women's sexual purity, marks the patriarchal foundation of the hegemonic class in India. (20)

Let us begin our analysis with a novel, which brings out the hypocrisies regarding the purity of a woman's body. As Jashodhara Bagchi says, *Epar Ganga Opar ganga* (1958) (*The River Churning*; 1995) is a rare example of a partition novel written by a woman. The author writes in the preface that there are no separate chapters on women in the epics except Mahabharata. The Setas, Draupadis and Helens becomes sites of political and social conflicts, it is the women who bear the signs of the community's humiliation. In the novel, Sutara Dutta loses her parents and sister in the Noakhali riot. A Muslim family rescues her. Though her life is saved, her identity is in danger. After staying with the in a Muslim family for few months, she reaches Kolkata in the guise of a Muslim girl She is an outcast in her brother's family. She is denied access to the kitchen because she has been with a Muslim family. She is almost unwelcome in family weddings. She is sent to a Christian boarding school, her education is a substitute for her social unacceptability. Bagchi writes: "Thus riot victims like Sutara are hit twice by patriarchy: first by the male of one community who establishes his own

...identity by exercising his territoriality over her body: second by her own community which invokes compulsions of ritual purity to exclude her from the ritually pure domains of hearth and marriage, and drinking water. Her anger is

focused on this reduplicated aggression: the first as physical assault on a woman's body and sexuality; the second, a prolonged and unbearable panoptic gaze by the community over her body and mind. (24)

However Bagchi does not discuss the end of the novel, Pramod proposes to Sutara, her sister-in law's brother. The novel ends on a positive note, but is it realistic? Jyotirmoyee Devi does not let her tale have a grim ending; a liberal man who is going to the west for further education absorbs Sutara into the same society. Sutara's new struggles are left unsaid by the author.

Sunil Gangopadhyay is famous for his *Purbo-Paschim* (1990), which traces the lives of various Hindu and Muslim families affected by partition, it is a chronicle of cultural and social exile. *Arjun* (1961) is a typical refugee novel. The backdrop is a jabardakhal colony in Dumdum, situated in the outskirts of Kolkata. The houses are made of mud, bamboo and tin. The high caste Hindus are either unemployed or engaged in occupations those are below their dignity. Arjun, the Brahman hero of the novel has somehow managed to acquire a respectable occupation, though he had to work in a teashop for some time, he has become a research scholar. Biswanath Dasgupta, a vaidya, has opened a laundry; his family members are abused as washermen. Purnima, a young girl has become a sex-worker; Lavanya wants to complete her graduation and become a school teacher but her dreams are shattered when some local goons molest her. The novel ends when some houses in the colony are burnt because the original landowner claims the land.

Like Manto's Toba tek Singh Arjun's brother Somnath is the symbolic madman who always says that India and Pakistan will become one once again. Somnath becomes insane when he witnesses the raped, naked and mutilated body of Amala, a young widow in their native village of

Faridpur (now in Bangladesh). The woman who was looked upon as a mother figure is assaulted along with the motherland. Somanath's madness is both symptomatic of a child whose mother is assaulted and the patriarch who failed to preserve the sanctity of women in his society. Arjun does not crave for an idyllic past; he gives up the opportunity of a rosy future by refusing a scholarship to study abroad. He clings to the heroics of colony life itself.

Jibananda Das's novels share the contemplative vision of civilization and modernity as we find in his poetry. In *Jalpaihati* (published in 1982, written in 1948). He analyses the decay and corruption of Bengal on the eve of partition. Jalpaihati is a small town in East Bengal, the parallel locations are Kolkata, the colonial center and Jalpaihati where Hindus are not accepted now. Nisith is a professor of English, he does not get a job in Kolkata. His son Harit is a communist but his zeal is not praised; it is of no use either in Kolkata or Jalpaihati. The author analyses the intellectual futility of the nouveau riche. Politics and communalism are topics of tea table discussion. Throughout the novel there lingers the shadow of Ranu, a girl kidnapped during the riot, people only whisper about her whereabouts. Someone says that she has been found in a mosque. The author does not seem to be deeply affected by partition. He gazes at the darkness of the modern condition with a sense of detachment.

*Khoabnama* (1996) by Akhtarujjaman Illias is important to us because it traces the growth of Muslim league in Bengal. The league campaigns by saying that Pakistan would be an El-Dorado, a communist state unlike the Hindu society, which has rigid class structures. People are promised that they will be free from the oppression of Hindu zamindars but the power passes from rich Hindus to rich Muslims. Various political parties destroyed the prevalent unity of Hindus and Muslims. The writer takes a leftist stand. He blames the rich and the powerful



politicians for creating rifts for their benefit. The parties even appropriate the culture of both the societies for pamphleteering. The narrative is woven in a fabulist pattern. The language is lush and sensuous reminding one of the treasures that undivided rural Bengal was. Khoab or dream is that of food which will never be available to the poor.

*Nilkantho Pakhir Khoje*(1971) by Atin Bandopdhyay is the most famous of all partition narratives. It traces life in rural Bengal from the 30s to the year of partition. Manindranath the elder son of the landlord is mad, he wanders through vast expanses of nature. Isham is the sane shepherd of the village. Their desire to stay rooted to the soil is paralleled by a young widow's desire for sex. Desire for nature, love and sex gets converted to desire for food. Hindus and Muslims stay in harmony until riots break out; ultimately Hindus are forced to migrate to west Bengal. The novel also announces the end of feudalism. The Sinha (landlords) family does not get a square meal in Kolkata. Shona the youngest in the family, had been addressed as 'korta' or the lord in his native village, he is now slapped by the captain in the shipping company when he forgets to call him sir. The novel ends on this note of humiliation, Shona sticks to the job because he has to satisfy his hunger.

The short stories discussed in this dissertation are quite different from the novels discussed above. Nostalgia, a basic feature of these novels is almost absent in the stories discussed in the following chapters. Most stories narrate incidents of paranoia, dislocation and violence but I have categorized the stories under a few broad headings for critical inquiry. The second chapter discusses stories on violence, third analyses patriarchal fear and the changes in the position of women during and after the partition, the last chapter tries to read stories on partition and communalism in the present socio-cultural context. I would also like to

mention that some themes of this genre have been left unattended by me, for instance, the problem of changing hierarchies after the partition of Bengal as in Narendranath Mitra's *Palanka* or the problem of Bihari refugees as we find in Prafulla Roy's *Anuprobesh* I have chosen the works of nine authors, while Bibhutibhushan Bandopadhyay, Rameshchandra Sen and Manik Bandopadhyay wrote in the early and middle decades of the twentieth century, Samaresh Basu, Narendranath Mitra, Santosh Kumar Ghosh and Said Walliullah wrote during 50s 60s and 70s. Atin Bandopadhyay and Abhijit Sen have published various novels and short stories since the 70s.



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## CHAPTER-II

Acts and words of violence was common during and after the partition of Bengal but the strains of violence were multifarious. The affected group (which largely consisted of the Hindu refugees from East Bengal) was caught between a dubious past and bleak future. From oral/fictional/cinematic narratives we gain that most refugees were left clueless at the sudden spurt in violence between the two communities; they felt that such an enmity was unprecedented. Dipesh Chakraborty in his *Habitations of Modernity* writes that Hindus had marginalized Muslims as poor outsiders in the Hindu nationalist imagination; they were unaware of the repressed politics of the Muslims. Sandip Bandopadhyay in his essay "Riddles of Partition: Memories of Bengali Hindus" (*Reflections on Partition in the East*) writes that most Hindu refugees blamed an anonymous third force for the catastrophe. Some people took stands - for instance, Hiranmoy Bannerjee in his book *Udbastu*, discusses the problems of Hindus who chose to remain in their native place after the formation of Pakistan. According to his respondents, the few Hindus in villages were tortured socially and mentally, the greatest victims were women. However, Bangla fiction does not blame either of the communities; in most stories there is an aesthetic coordination of communal relations- if it starts with hatred, it sinks into a communally harmonious statement at the end. The 'third' force can be identified in many stories as the oppressive and insensitive state. The city of Kolkata was hostile to the refugees; so there is a social and cultural battle between the 'ghotis' or the natives of West Bengal and the homeless refugees called 'bangals' or the migrants from East Bengal. Thus the 'ghoti' society is another marked enemy in the fiction written by refugees. Partition resulted in such an emergency that life, livelihood, and honour were at stake. All relations including those of family, friendship, society, untouchability and enmity were called to

question. The situation overall was hostile, be it on individual or social level. This chapter deals with stories, which deal with the symptoms of hostility and enmity and crime generated during the partition of Bengal. The main texts discussed in the chapter are *Acharya Kripalini Colony* by Bibhutibhushan Bandopadhyay, (1896) *Pather Kanta* by Rameshchandra Sen, (1894-1973) *Gantabya* by Samaresh Basu (1924-89) and *Ekti Tulsi Gacher Kahini* (Translated by the author as *The Tale of a Tulsi Plant.*) by Syed Waliullah (1922-71)

1

Rachel Weber, in her essay "Recreating the home: Women's Role in the Development of Refugee Colonies in South Calcutta" (*The Trauma and the Triumph: Gender and Partition in Eastern India*) writes:

During times of political and social upheaval, for example, the division between public and private spaces becomes radically altered: private life becomes the subject of national discourse and the home takes on a new significance as a site of political activity. The reorganization of space becomes especially important when discussing the displacement which occurs when people leave or are forced to flee their homelands. (63-64)

The Bengalis are deeply attached to their *patrik vita* or their ancestral homes. Before the partition, East Bengal was primarily an agricultural land; so most Bengali Hindus owned a little plot of land. In some partition novels their previous status has often been contrasted with the problem of homelessness and *jabardakhal* or seizure-settlement. *Acharya Kripalini Colony* by Bibhutibhushan Bandopadhyay does not deal with the grim problem of the refugees; we can call it a black comedy, which forecasts the miseries of the Hindus. The major incident

takes place before the Radcliff line is drawn. The citizens of the bordering areas were suffering from severe uncertainty. The narrator belongs to East Bengal; he introduces himself as a helpless Hindu of East Bengal. He does not know whether his area will fall under India or Pakistan. His wife is pestering him to buy plots of land in or around Kolkata and "The people of West Bengal have suddenly become too eager to sell lands to the migrants from East Bengal." The rates are exorbitant. The narrator's wife relates that thousands of Hindus from Chattogram, Pabna and Noakhali (districts in East Bengal) are escaping to Kolkata. He wants to wait for Radcliff's verdict. Urvashi Butalia in her book *The Other Side of Silence* writes about the history of Radcliff's project. He was given three weeks to do his work and his committee was inefficient. The Indian members did not know the details of the land they were going to divide. The title of the story is an ironic comment on the Congress leader who headed the mission. After the announcement of partition, the All India Congress Committee (AICC) received a large number of letters from people bewildered with such a decision. Urvashi Butalia quotes a letter addressed to J.B. Kripalani on this issue:

What provisions have been made so far to get them settled honourably. Where should they migrate. In what numbers and in what manner. What they are to do with their immovable property. Will you be able to find jobs for every one, or some business for all. Are they to come like beggars, settle like beggars in your relief camps and depend and subsist upon cast away crumbs of your people in U.P., C.P., Bihar, and Bombay etc...for heaven's sake if you are not to render us

any material help, please go off, keep off  
and do off. (70)

Bandopadhyay writes that 15<sup>th</sup> August came and went but nobody announced the division. Meanwhile, his wife shows him an advertisement in the newspapers. The advertisement guaranteed all sorts of urban facilities in a colony located in Konnagar, a suburb near Kolkata. Acharya Kripalini Colony is supposed to have wide roads, lush greenery, electricity, water supply and girls' school. The narrator books a plot with Rs.50 and goes to visit the land. He reaches a doctor's clinic where he is not given any receipt. As he wants to see the plot, a porter takes him to see the land. He is shocked to see that the land is marshy; there is no river or road within a kilometer; it's a muddy area infested with mosquitoes. The narrator decides to stay in East Bengal. The story ends on a positive note, Radcliff's report comes out the next day. Their area falls under West Bengal. The tone of the story is very humorous, but the writer is very clear that both the government and the people of West Bengal are not going to be too helpful to the refugees. Why does the writer write about it casually? Are we habituated to hostility? In Satinath Bhaduri's *Gananayak* or *The Champion of the People* is about Aruakhoar Haat, a place that could fall either in Pakistan or Bengal or Bihar in India. People who live there are Bihari Muslims, Bengali Hindus and Bengali Muslims. The villain/protagonist is an outsider, a Marwari businessman Johurmali Dokania, popularly known as Munimji; he makes money by guaranteeing favours to every community in secret. In his essay "Manusher swapakkhe" or "On Behalf of Human-Beings" (*Bhed-Bibhed*), Manabendra Bandopadhyay raises a question, if the new Hindusthan makes a colony for Hindus in the name of Acharya Kripalini, then who sells the lands by exploiting the refugees? Is this the other unaffected community, which tries to make money by cheating people undergoing the crisis of displacement?

As discussed in the first chapter, the vision of a raped woman is the centre of paranoia and humiliation for a refugee; sometimes it is also accompanied by the shriek of a woman who is being raped. The migrant is fleeing with his/her own life; so, no one goes to rescue her. What is the exact feeling at that moment is it of fear or sympathy for the victim? *Pather Kanta* by Rameshchandra Sen deals with such ambivalent and ambiguous dynamics of the individual and the collective. It is a time of riots, displacement and disease. People are forced to participate in an exodus. Parashar, his wife Mohini and their son Yadav, are the members of such a family. Mohini and Yadav had taken shelter in a jungle when the riots broke out. Yadav has caught malaria in such an unhygienic condition. Along with the memories of fear, Mohini recalls the shrieks of a young barber who was being raped in the jungle. The story begins as they are on their journey. Parashar's tools have all been confiscated by the officials at the border. He is blaming his son for being his *pather kaata* or an extra hindrance in the journey. He scolds Yadav for playing with Muslim League's flag in past. Parashar knows that this is misplaced aggression. He did not foresee this displacement when he saw the activism of the league. They dread the *Ansars* or the Muslim enemy. The Hindu group meets a Muslim group of refugees coming from the opposite direction. As soon as they face each other, the wave of anger and frustration recedes because they are equally helpless, uprooted and impoverished. A situation of emergency is supposed to dissolve the differences of religion/caste/class but they disappear and appear during these incidents. Mohini wonders why they have met such fate in spite of holding a feast for the Brahmins.

They stop in a midway camp. While one family eats a meal, everybody stares at them. Some refugees even go and beg before them. Mohini asks about their caste before taking food from them. Brahminism finds a new avatar in this period of *Strange Meeting*. People are convinced

about an imminent riot because the Hindu informers have confirmed the news by touching a Brahmin's feet.

An epidemic of cholera breaks out in the camp. People are dying every day. A part of the camp has been turned into a crematorium. A few fortunate ones are being buried; some dead bodies are left unattended and undiscovered. It is near such a lifeless body that Parashar discovers a child sucking the breasts of a dead woman. Parashar takes the child with him. Mohini protests because the child's mother died of cholera. Parashar observes that when they lived in the squalor of the camp and grabbed food from each other, Mohini did not get the opportunity to think about it but the prejudices and rules of hygiene and pollution when the situation becomes relatively normal. When Mohini protests vehemently, Parashar says that he would get rid of all burdens if people disturb him. Mohini stops because she realizes that Parashar can abandon them at any moment. Everybody is the same for him; all of them are burdens. The hostility within the family is not due to the shackles of patriarchy, which is ever anxious about dishonour. It is rather a rejection of patriarchal rules; Parashar develops a detached disgust towards his kith and kin during his journey.

The story shows a number of strange reactions and reasoning in the human mind. As for the central action, Parashar blames his own son for being a burden but volunteers to take an extra human burden as he halts at the camp, the shelter where the concepts of survival and death are being redefined. The Hindu refugees' antagonism towards the Muslim subsides as they find each other in equally vulnerable condition. Though they are displaced on the pretext of religion, they continue to follow the rituals of caste and purity.



Manikuntala Sen, in her autobiography, *In search of freedom: an unfinished journey*, mentions the slogan of the displaced people: *Amra kara/ bastuhara* or who are we? We are the homeless. *Bastu* signifies the ancestral house, which is supposed to be guarded by the *bastu* snake. The homeless people resorted strikes and meetings in order to get their rights.

Abhijeet Dasgupta in his essay "The politics of agitation and confession: displaced Bengalis in West Bengal" (*Refugees and Human Rights: Social and political dynamics of refugee problem in India and north-eastern India*) relates how the refugees gradually moved towards the left when they were disillusioned with the poor rehabilitation measures of the Congress government:

Initially, after their arrival in West Bengal, it was the Indian National Congress that chalked out the plan of action for the displaced. Under the leadership of the Congress the displaced Bengalis followed peaceful, non-violent movements. From the mid-fifties, with the formation of the United Central Refugee Council (UCRC), a new turn in the movement took place. This triggered off a new politics. This was diametrically opposite to the 'pacifist political programme' of the Congress. The politics of agitation meant active resistance through dharna, processions, picketing, *hartal*, *gherao* and mass mobilization. These movements brought the refugees and their organizations closer to the left parties in the state. (95)

The leftist artists took to the depiction of this deprived people. A pattern of Marxist reading can be found in many stories and novels written during this period. In this section we are going to look at stories written by Samaresh Basu and Syed Waliullah, both of them were non-refugees. Samaresh Basu used to work in a jute mill; he was a

committed communist. Waliullah was a diplomat, looking at the problem as an outsider. Basu's *Adab* is one of the famous stories on partition, which depicts the poor people as victims of the violent repressive measures of the state. The author shows a Muslim weaver and Hindu worker caught in a riot. Both of them are the victims of the situation because a curfew has been declared in the city; they meet in a blind lane where both of them were hiding in two dustbins. The dustbins suggest that after utilizing their labour, the society has turned them into garbage. They develop on the brink of death, the Muslim weaver is eager to go home which has been affected by flood, he has not heard from his family for a long time. He wants to go home on the occasion of Id. They also exchange ideas on the issue of Hindu-Muslim violence; the writer shows that they are not a part of the aggression between the two communities. The police shoots the Muslim weaver, they think he is a 'daku' or a dacoit. Though the language of the story is very powerful, the analysis is very uncomplicated. The writer has chosen two poor innocent workers who are not at all communal, they develop a friendship in a classically melodramatic situation, and one of them becomes a martyr of the repressive state apparatus. *Gantabya* does not deal with incidents of violence, it is a story of 'gantabya' or 'destination'; it traces the movement of a group of migrants from East Bengal to West Bengal. Basu describes the migrants coming out of the steamer as a set of crows. The group consisting of carpenters, medical compounder, farmer, children, pregnant women and old women rush to the railway station to board the train to Kolkata. People in the overcrowded compartments look more like animals that are being transported for slaughter. Every step of the exodus is uncertain; the immediacy of each hurdle makes one forget the other thoughts of displacement, there is no space for nostalgia. It is only when the train crosses the border that people become aware that they will never return to their ancestral lands.

They stay in Sealdah station for seventeen days. Thousands of people stay in the same area on the charity of the government. They eat, sleep, and defecate almost without privacy; the old carpenter starts begging in the platform. They search frantically for a place to stay. They find an evacuated mansion. The leftist strains of the story can be read as he describes the migrants walking towards the building in a procession. The pregnant woman gives birth to a son in one of the rooms of the mansion; the first dress of the newborn is symbolically red. The police enter the scene again. They ask the occupants to leave the house because 'jabardakhal' is illegal. The story ends as everybody marches towards the police to protest. The conclusion of such a realistic story seems too literary. However the writer shows how the refugees resorted to communism and leftist modes of resistance. The writer justifies the violation of the law because it has failed to provide the bare means of survival to the refugees.

It is said that the Muslim refugees faced much less problems when they moved to Pakistan. In Akhtarujjaman Illias' *Khoabnama*, we find how the Muslim League campaigned for Pakistan by saying that it would be a communist Islamic state free from the oppressive class-structures of the Hindu religion. According to the author, nothing progressed in the new country; the rich became richer and the poor, poorer. Syed Walliullah, in his story *The Tale of a Tulsi Plant* writes about a new Pakistan where homeless refugees have found a home, which is alive with one of the sacred symbols of Hindu society, a *tulsi* plant. The story begins with the description of a second-storied building, a dream house with a garden. The house is illegally occupied by people who have moved from congested and unhealthy areas of Kolkata. The garden, the furnished rooms and electricity give the occupants a new life. It suddenly springs into life with these new dwellers; there is an atmosphere of festivity around. The period of fairytale is over as a group of officials come with a notice of eviction. The residents are sure

that the complaint has been filed by another group, who have failed to get a good house like them. Their justification is also based on their 'bhadralok' upbringing. They say:

We are poor clerks, but we are the sons of gentleme  
We have moved into the house, but the doors and  
windows have not been broken; nor have the bricks  
and stones been torn out to be sold in the black  
market. We know the law too. Who have made the  
complaint? If it isn't made by the owner, then it's not  
in the order. (3)

(Syed Waliullah. *The Tale of a Tulsi Plant*. Trans. Syed  
Waliullah. Short Stories from Bangladesh ed. Niaz  
Zaman.)

The event of displacement has reformulated some rules of the 'bhadralok' middle class, 'jabardakhal' or seizure settlement is not too illegal, but the occupants proudly say that they have not stolen anything from the house.

A *tulsi* plant is suddenly discovered in the garden of the house. A bitter wave of communal resentment swept the house. One of them said that no Hindu symbol would be tolerated in the house. 'Moddabar' is a radical Muslim, he shouts across to tear the plant from its roots but no one moves, they are afraid of its Hindu identity and sanctity. Though the plant sets off intense debates on the Hindu and Muslim responsibility for partition, images of a Hindu household fleets secretly across some minds. It brings back memories of Hindu households, which these Muslim men had seen in undivided Bengal. Someone waters the plant in secret; perhaps it was a gesture of guilt and gratitude towards the original Hindu owners of the house.

The question of crime comes up when a policeman comes again. This time they could not give any justification. They had somehow confessed to themselves that they were thieves leading a false life in a house, which belonged to someone else. The police say that this time the order was from the government. Communist Maksud just mutters, "Aren't we government people?" The house is evacuated within seven days. The *tulsi* plant is again left unattended. No one makes a rebellious effort to break the law here but the small act of transgression is punished. The *tulsi* plant now changes from a Hindu symbol to a symbol of forbidden shelter.

The stories show that various systems of reasoning and understanding prove to be meaningless when we face something uncertain or abnormal. *Acharya Kripalini Colony* questions the integrated Bengali Hindu identity, which did play a part in bringing about the partition of Bengal. Did the campaigners for partition really come out to help the refugees? In *Pather kaata*, the groundbreaking experiences of the road make people do strange things, but they are unaware of it. People still cling to rituals of class and caste when they beg for food. In *Gantabya*, the penniless refugees struggle against all hopes; *The Tale of a Tulsi Plant* relates the initiation and termination of a brief false life of luxury and comfort; the bubbles of a past that was secure were probably breaking. None of the stories possess epic grandeur; it is a different tragedy where the hamartia and hubris comes after the disruption of order. It was only after the people were ruined that they lost the vestige of morality.

## CHAPTER-III

Go where you will...  
Shall see sad feminine hands white-  
conch bangles  
Crying like conch shells in the ash-grey  
wind...  
She is there on my Bengal's shore.

Jibananda Das. Trans.

Shubhoranjan Dasgupta, *The Trauma and The Triumph...*

The partition of Bengal crushed this tender and domestic image of Bengali women. In stark contrast to Jibananda Das' metaphors of "kishorir chaal dhoa haat" or "girl's hands washed through grains"

( *Ruposhi Bangla*, my translation ) amidst lush greenery, the typical image of partition is that of a raped woman's corpse in the flotsam. 1947 brought women out of their andarmahals<sup>2</sup> the unfortunate ones were abducted and raped and the less fortunate/unfortunate ones crossed the sacred threshold to work and save their families from being starved. As Jashodhara Bagchi discusses in her essay "Freedom in an Idiom of Loss" (*The Trauma and The Triumph*), the refugee woman from East Bengal faced dual pressure, firstly there was the threat of being dishonored by people from the other community, and her freedom was restricted by her male protectors, the fathers, brothers, lovers and husbands. The woman assaulted by the 'other' community was hit twice by the patriarchal society. Even if she was accepted, her identity was kept under strict panoptic surveillance. Working women from middle class families suddenly transformed the traditional setup of their homes into a city household with modern problems; power struggle between husband and wife, female security and the contesting demands

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<sup>2</sup> Andarmahal-inner part of the house where women stay.

of office and home. In her book *Middle Class Working Women in Calcutta*, Bharati Devi writes:

It is indeed the middle class, which is obsessed more with the tradition, but at the same time aspires for modern values. And it is the particular regiment, which confronts more problems during the process of social change from tradition to modernity. (8)

Modernity or the project of modernization was nothing new in Bengal. There had been a renaissance in the earlier century. Education of women had been the chief agenda of this movement. The famous thinkers and reformers (male) like Rammohan Roy and Vidyasagar made some radical changes in the traditional Hindu Bengali society. The custom of sati was abolished, remarriage of widows was legalized and education of women was socially valorized. However, as Partha Chatterjee points out in his essay "The Nationalist Resolution of the Woman's Question" (*Recasting Women*), the subjects in question, the women did not have any voice in it. The reformers wanted to refine the Indian/Hindu society to strengthen its identity before the West. A few of the Western ideals were selected to enrich the Indian women by keeping their Indian-ness unblemished. As Partha Chatterjee argues, women were educated to feel superior to Western women who did not use their education to illuminate their homes but for material benefits (income) and the illiterate Bengali women from low classes who did not enjoy the benefits of education. The gulf between the inner and the outer worlds remained the same. Partha Chatterjee writes:

The world is the external, the domain of the material, the home represents our inner spiritual self, our true identity. The world is a treacherous terrain of the pursuit of material interests where practical considerations reign supreme. It is also typically the domain of the male. The home in its essence must remain

unaffected by the profane activities of the material world-and women is its representation. (238-9)

Women read and wrote books, attended schools wore stitched blouses and shoes, traveled in buses but their position remained the same until 1947 when women abducted and raped (in most cases it was apprehended) exposed the failure of patriarchy; so did the female breadwinners who sometimes remained unmarried to look after their families. There were no reforms or activist movements behind these changes, they occurred due to severe political, social and economic crisis.

What happened to the men during this period? In the previous century, men from upper and privileged classes patronized the cause of women; in the twentieth century the fathers, brothers, lovers and husbands could not restrict the women because they needed the money earned by them for survival. Another important subject of study is the manner in which the women abducted and rescued were rejected or accepted by their male guardians, the politics of male behaviour at this juncture is indeed multilayered.

This chapter attempts to analyse four Bangla short stories which roughly deal with the changes in the position of women and its consequences during and after the partition of Bengal in 1947. The city of Kolkata will be a common reference and premise in this chapter because it changed predictably and unpredictably during the riots of 1946 and the influx of refugees from 1947. The themes of displacement, communalism and violence, female identity and independence overlap in these stories but for our convenience they will be categorized under the following heads-1. Communalism and the question of female chastity-*Sthaane o Staane* by Manik Bandopadhyay(190856) 2. Response to abducted and rescued women-*Hoyna* by Santosh Kumar



Ghosh(date of birth and demise not accessible) 3.Problems of urban working women-*Abotaronika* by Narendranath Mitra (1916-75)  
4.Problems of rural workingwomen -*Batashi* by Atin Bandopadhyay (1922-)

The area of study in this chapter is the displaced middle class refugee from East Bengal. Except *Batashi*, which depicts the story of a woman from the lower class, the characters from the rest of the stories belong to the same class.

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In her book *Bengal Divided: Hindu Communalism and Partition*, Joya Chatterjee complains about the riot-centric approach to the study of communalism in India. It is the Muslim population, which is blamed for its minority complex and separatist tendencies but according to her; the Hindu bhadralok communalism was equally responsible for the division of Bengal. Since the 19<sup>th</sup> century renaissance, the Hindus had projected a supposedly secular identity, which were oblivious to the voice of Muslims. Bankim Chandra Chatterjee's *Anandamath* has been a major nationalist text where the Muslims are seen as the enemies. Tagore's *Gora* shows a protagonist who is obsessed with the purity of Hindu religion. Views of Bankim ,Tagore or Sharatchandra did not have any direct impact on them but as aesthetic and social custodians of the community they certainly show the symptomatic thoughts of the society. The backdrop of *Sthaane o Stane* is Kolkata on the brink of partition, people exchange fears as they meet each other; loot, murders and acts of kidnapping are the order of the day. Manik Bandopadhyay has made a semi-Freudian analysis; he is not depicting villains or actual acts of violence but the strains of violence in normal Hindu

bhadraloks. Fear and anxiety is making people savage, it is a period of regression. The plot is quite simple: Narahari stays in Kolkata and his wife and children stay in East Bengal; though the city is becoming dangerous, he wants to bring them to Kolkata to settle properly. His in-laws pose a problem because Kolkata is very unsafe for women. The central action is that of a drawing room discussion which gradually turns into a quarrel. Before looking at the text we can glance quickly at *Chelemanushi*, another story by the same author, which is based on the problems of communal violence. In *Chelemanushi*, Bandopadhyay writes how two children from different communities manage to initiate and terminate a communal fight by imitating the elders. Indira a Hindu girl and Habib a Muslim boy are playmates. These two children bridge all possible gaps between their respective families despite their religious differences. As the atmosphere in the city gets tense the two communities avoid each other to prevent riots, and a peace committee is formed in the colony. The situation is so abnormal that even a regular fight between children becomes a serious affair; the author ironically writes that the local peace committee comes to restore peace between the children. Indira and Habib decide to play *riot-riot*. They start playing with a knife and a razor, it soon turns into a fight; because of the nature of the toys, bleeding was inevitable. It is claimed as a communal fight. As people from both the communities gather to take part in it; the two children are suddenly lost. They are found in the attic, which linked both the houses; their parents are scared to bring them out because their mere presence will unleash violence. They look at the crowded streets furtively. The word *chelemanushi* means childishness, the childrens' fight and its consequences show that the whole concept of aggression is childish and meaningless' it is so devoid of logic that small children can spark off violence in the adults.

*Sthaane o Staane* speaks about similar uncertainties and anxieties but the given situation is graver because the issue is that of female honour. In *Sthaane o staane*, the quarrel is not between Hindus and Muslims but between Hindu males belonging to the same family. *Sthaan* and *staan* share the same meaning in Bengali and Arabic respectively. The controversial area is of course Kolkata. The protagonist Narahari is a resident of Kolkata. He observes that it is not Hindus and Muslims who are fighting against each other but scoundrels or snakes that are indistinguishable in their savagery. He notices strange acts of intolerance in his in-law's house. One of his brother-in-laws argues that since Oriyas in Puri are attacking Bengalis, Oriyas in Bengal should also be tortured. He proudly narrates how they almost harassed an Oriya woman but it is their *bhadralok* upbringing, which prevented them from doing so. Narahari's sister-in-law puts her child to sleep by scaring him that if he does not sleep the Muslims will come. Narahari is advised not to travel much within Kolkata because if he enters 'their' settlement by mistake will be in great danger. Narahari wonders how the Hindus would react if 'they' enter a Hindu colony by mistake.

Sumitra's safety becomes a site of power struggle. Though Narahari is more refined than his in-laws, he does not shed a bit of his male ego in this question. The rival groups are now the *ghotis* and *bangals*<sup>3</sup> because it is for the migrant population from East Bengal that riots are breaking out. New posts of enmity are being discovered at every corner. Amal, the youngest of Narahari's brother-in-laws, suddenly says that according to a Muslim, the Muslims themselves are their enemies. This statement creates a deadly silence in the room, people realise that all of them are posing like each other's enemies in the discussion. Surprisingly, the

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<sup>3</sup> *Ghotis* and *bangals*-Refers to the natives of West Bengal and East Bengal respectively.

women remain silent; Sumitra can just make a noise with her keys to signal that the conversation needs to come to an end.

The silence of women in the story is obvious; the writer is either more occupied by patriarchal issues or has used women's silence to show that the subject in question is not given any chance to decide. Sumitra does not join her brothers or her husband in the drawing room. She tries to cajole her husband in the bedroom, when Narahari refuses to yield, she asks him to kill her before she is dishonored by a stranger.

Many families from East Bengal migrated for the single reason because female honor was under threat from the other community. Like other communities, Bengali Hindus too were obsessed with female honour, possession of women by Muslim would be humiliating to the males of the society, thus female honor becomes all the more the property of the male guardians. Though the author criticizes the unnecessary fears and suspicions based on stereotypes, the fear in this case is not unreal. Sumitra does not worry about her individual damage alone; her family's honour will be ruined if 'they' attack her. Bandopadhyay shows that the whole garb of civilization is flimsy; the city or the suburb fails to provide any assurance of civilized protection. The external threat does not unite the victims but creates barriers between them.

## 2

Men have always violated women; at the same time it's the man who should protect her. The progress of time has changed a little in the male attitude towards women. In his story *Lajwanti*, Rajinder Singh Bedi creates a jarring effect by blending the meaning of Lajwanti's name and her condition. Lajwanti is a plant, which curls up as someone touches it; it has always been associated with a coy and delicate woman. Indian society has always said that a woman is defined by her coyness and fragility. It is evident that she should be shy of her beautiful body, which attracts men; she should be delicate because she needs male

protection. The protagonist of the story *Lajwanti* is Lajwanti who is abducted by Muslims during partition. Her social worker husband is a part of the recovery movement of abducted women. He was a normal husband before, he used to beat and caress his wife on a regular basis earlier. There was a terrible change in his attitude after he brought his wife back from the Wagah border (where abducted women were returned). He did not touch her anymore, he was apprehensive about her body, which was touched by someone else, he had to accept her because of the pressure of his own social status but he could never be comfortable with her. He did not think about his wife's trauma but was himself shuddered by the fact that someone else had touched his wife. Arundhati in Ramapada Chaudhury's story *Karunkanya* did not want to return to her house because she knew that she would not be accepted easily. She comes back with a child, her family members are nice but cordial with her, and it becomes difficult to avoid the interrogations of the neighbours. She learns that her ex-boyfriend has abandoned his sister because she has 'fallen'; she was kidnapped in the train, as her family was moving towards West Bengal. Arundhati strives in vain for a few days and decides to go back to her captor. In her introduction to *The Trauma and the Triumph*, Jasodhara Bagchi quotes from the PhD dissertation of Nilanjana Chatterjee titled *Midnight's Unwanted Children*. Nilanjana writes on the basis of her interviews with various kinds of male refugees:

The chastity of married and unmarried Hindu women seemed to symbolize most potently, the honour, exclusivity and continuity of the community and to represent its site of transgression. Violence against Hindu women featured widely in the minority's complaints of ill treatment in Pakistan and as a topic of concern in West Bengal—the sexual possession of Hindu women by Muslim men being made to stand for Muslim domination, 'miscegenation', the loss and the humiliation of the male Hindu self. (4-5)

Santosh Kumar Ghosh's *Hoina or Not Possible* begins very normally. Arati is dressing up in front of her mirror, her fiancée Saroj is coming to visit her. She does not embody her lover's gaze but muses on it cynically. As she thinks about the sarees, which Saroj likes, the accessories, which he prefers, and the hairstyles, which he approves, it becomes clear that he is not different from the typical male guardian who has the last word about the women in the household. Arati has to try her best to impress Saroj because Saroj has rescued them from the filth of Sealdah station, has found jobs for her and her brother. Her mother is both excited and nervous about Saroj's visit; she does not let her enter the kitchen because that would spoil her looks. Her body is the only treasure, which she has, it has to be preserved and projected for survival.

The details of her location are given in between. Their house is made out of tin. It's a congested colony, which offers no privacy; personal matters and secrets have to be discussed openly. Saroj hates late arrivals for dates. He is unaware of the kind of the problems that women face in the city, they have to ensure their safety in a city which is hostile to women who come out of their house. It is Arati who takes the initiative to pacify him.

There is a sudden rupture in this rhythm when Arati's secret past comes to light. Saroj is reported that Arati was abducted and kept by the Muslims for two months; the source of information is a man from Arati's village who happens to know Saroj's sister. Saroj feels betrayed because he thought Arati is chaste and 'innocent'. This important fact was hidden from him. When he speaks to the specified informant for the second time, the man tells him that Arati is pure; there is no scandal against her. Saroj is convinced that he need not worry. It is strange that the subject in question, Arati, does not have any voice in it, it's a

stranger who decides whether she is pure or impure. Saroj collects his information from someone he does not know. Arati's reactions are not shown; perhaps her experience has made her aware of the fragility of female honour. She remains calm throughout the incident. The story has a dual ending, Arati takes a stand, she says that the blame is true, so a renewal of their relationship is not possible. The extent of her harassment has not been disclosed in the story; it could be molestation or rape. Saroj does not ask her about the details but apprehends the worst. On another level, Arati becomes alienated, if she decides not to keep her experience a secret, very few people will accept her. Their benefactor Saroj will not help them anymore.

Did the atrocities of partition force the women to shed their inhibition about the plastic concepts of chastity and security? How did her life change after she realized that male support would be of little worth? We cannot comment on it because the female sufferers of partition have been marginalized from the history of partition altogether. There has been very little historical or social research in this area. Jasodhara Bagchi, in her introduction to *The Trauma and the Triumph* writes that women assaulted during the partition refused to speak about their experiences.

### 3

Satyajit Ray based his *Mahanagar* on Narandranath Mitra's *Abataronika*. He used the new form of art to depict the problems of working women which was entirely new in the Bengali society.

The story highlights the dilemmas of the new group of working women in Kolkata. For the refugee women there are two new places of public encounter, the city and the work place. They start working due to the demands of the city. A family needs more than one working member in

drop a resignation letter in the office. Her professionalism is interpreted as her love for money. He is apprehensive about her friendship with an Anglo-Indian woman because they were unanimously branded as bold and licentious. He is envious of Arati's boss because he gets a major share of her time and hard work. He is shocked to know that Arati shares a meal in a restaurant with one of her male acquaintances. He cannot pester her for long because he loses his job. The family suddenly grows patient again. No one asks her to come home early now.

Meanwhile Arati was observing that the workplace has its pressures too. She is made aware of her lower middle class identity quite often. When she is late for a demonstration in a rich mansion in Alipore, the client tells her that it is only because of Arati is in need that she is forgiving her. In another house she is called a hawker. She resigns from her job when she realizes that women can easily be branded: Edith is absent on an important day, Mr Mukherjee says that she must be ill because she had to 'entertain guests' on the previous day. The connotation of prostitution was obvious. Arati protested against such an outrageous comment and said that she would resign if he did not withdraw his words. Mr Mukherjee finds it strange that Arati would leave her job for a woman who does not belong to her caste or religion. This time the victim is not Hindu refugee woman but another outsider in Kolkata. It is another refugee (Mr Mukherjee) who blames Edith, just because she is foreign to their community her chastity can always be questioned. Arati resigns and her family members regard it as an unwise decision because Saroj was jobless, besides Mr Mukherjee was sympathetic towards her because they belonged to the same caste, same religion and same region in East Bengal. Initially it was difficult for Arati's family to accept her new status, now it becomes impossible for her to survive in the male world where women have no respect.



to survive in a city. The new workingwoman faces the demands of workplace and family simultaneously; at the same time she enjoys her newfound independence. This external world soon shows its hierarchies as well. Narendranath Mitra explores such themes in his story.

Arati's in-laws were not a modern or progressive family. They migrated from East Bengal during partition. The family of nine live in a small rented house of a congested area in Kolkata. Though it was difficult to live in a city, they were besotted by its charms. It was Subroto who encouraged Arati to take up a job because it was impossible for him to run a family of nine people. Actually Arati replaced her father-in-law as an earning member, because he had lost his job before coming to Kolkata. Priogopal considers it as his own failure that his daughter-in-law had to think about 'material' objects. The job of a salesgirl was taken out of necessity, but it did give her a space of freedom. It is ironical that the main criterion for the post in the machine company was *bhadrota* or decency. They looked for cultured *bhadromohilas*<sup>4</sup> who could sell their products in the upper class families of Kolkata. Arati constantly heard blunt remarks from her family members regarding her work hours. She still tried to manage her office and home with equal sincerity. Her condition brings some modern changes in her bearing. She wears high heels, carries vanity bags and also becomes fluent in English as she develops friendship with Edith, her Anglo-Indian colleague. However her family was not ready to accept these changes so easily.

Subroto did not realize the consequences of his decision. Earlier he had been Arati's sole guide to the external world, now Arati was independent and firm. He cannot tolerate her late arrivals. He always asks her to

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<sup>4</sup> Bhadromohila-feminine form of bhadralok. They were educated women from middle class/upper class Bengali families .

*Batashi* by Atin Bandopadhyay is about a different profession of women. Batashi's husband is absconding, she has two children Nibaran who is ten years old and another daughter who is still weaning. Batashi crosses the border with the hope of finding her husband on this side of the margin. Her uncle refuses to take their responsibility. Nibaran hears them saying that her father has been slaughtered in the riots. Initially Batashi seems to wait for Nibaran to grow up as their male guardian. Crossing the border was difficult, sometimes Nibaran had to dress up as a Muslim, sometimes she had to act as a sex-worker, she searched for him...in roads, markets and colonies. Gradually all sources of charity came to an end.

Batashi slowly learns the art of survival. She becomes a beggar., Her profession demanded no less tact and skill than any standard work. She narrated the tales of violence which she had witnessed; there were two major stages of her narrative; firstly she mentioned the 'other' community with extra touches of drama; the masterstroke was that of Nibaran, in every new household he peeped through his mother's achal and said "People say that they have killed my father." Nibaran acts like a magician's wand, his orphan image melts with that of his bleeding father whom he continually constructs in his begging sessions. This works wonders for them. They received alms instantly. She also sung songs as a beggar, her world was the path, the open space which she traversed everyday. She managed to sustain her small unit in this manner and the wound associated with her husband's absence was gradually healing. She also reported the state of the native country for the refugees. She describes the beauty of the abandoned land and her experiences of witnessing riots, rapes and murders. Her freedom amidst birds, trees and roads substitutes the memory of Sadhucharan.

It is during this time that her escapist husband comes back. Sadhucharan confirms that she makes her living by begging. He asks her not to beg again. The absent husband is suddenly conscious of his identity, he says that Batashi is his wife and he works in a hosiery factory. They hold positions of respect. That would mean an end to her songs, her solitary walks; begging was like her pilgrimage, it was both cathartic and redemptive for her. It was for a brief period of time that she found this alternative life, but this freedom was an illusion. Sadhucharan thinks that it is due to his absence that Batashi took to begging; he is not supposed to understand that Batashi liked her lifestyle. It was a narrative of drama, action and memory and music, which sustained her family. The scope of her creativity is brought to an end.

The area of discomfort in these four stories is that all the major male characters, Narahari (*Sthaane...*) Saroj(*Hoyna*), Subroto (*Abotaronika*) and Sadhucharan (*Batashi*) appear as villains and victims of patriarchy. Narahari is stubborn, Subroto is so insecure that he warns Arati's father to keep a check on his daughter, it needs strangers to convince Saroj and Sadhucharan is irresponsible. Unlike Punjab, There were no honour killings in Bengal, but similar obsessive fear controlled Bengali homes. Uditi Sen, in her seminar paper "The Bengali Middle Class Refugee Women: An Exploration of Images" writes that while several historical, autobiographical and fictional documents show that the fear of women's dishonour was one of the most important reasons for migration, history and fiction remains almost silent on the actual incidents of dishonour of women.

## CHAPTER-IV

1

...Chronologies are still qualified with 'before partition' or 'after partition; personal histories are punctuated with references to it, so much so that it sometimes seems as if two quite distinct rather than concurrent, events took place at independence and that partition and its effects are what have lingered in collective memory. Each new eruption of hostility or expression of difference swiftly recalls that bitter and decisive of social erosion of social relation between Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs and each episode of brutality is measured against what was experienced than the rending of the social and emotional fabric that took place is still far from mended.

(Ritu Menon and Kamala Bhasin, "Recovery, Rupture and Resistance" *Inventing Boundaries* (208)

"Eruptions of hostility" (as mentioned in the extract) between Hindus and Muslims in India have re-surfaced since the Babri Masjid-Ram janmabhoomi controversy in 1992. The Indo-Pak war at Kargil (1999) and the recent riots at Gujarat have 'recalled' the event of partition with fear and vengeance. This chapter wants to explore how the people suffering from memories of partition react in the times of Babri-Masjid, Kargil and Godhra. The literary genre in question is Bangla short fiction in West Bengal. The communal climate in the state is fair. There has not been any major riot in this state since partition. For the last twenty

seven years a Marxist government has ruled the state. This fact is supposed to reflect that most people in the state are against religious fundamentalism. While peace between India and Pakistan requires guns, bombs and lives of civilians and soldiers, relations between India and Bangladesh, especially that between West Bengal is cordial. Considering films as a mirror of popular culture, it can be noted that Bollywood makes numerous films on Indo-Pak relations; films like *Sarfarosh* (1997) by John Matthew Mathan, *Gadar* (1999) by Anil Sharma and *Deewar* (2004) by Milan Luthria cash in on anti-Pakistan diatribe while glorifying Indian patriotism. On the other hand, recent films made in Kolkata rarely dwell on subjects of nation or partition. The picture here is totally different; Bangla film industry draws a large amount of profit from the joint ventures of India and Bangladesh. These films are mostly a hash of mythology and melodrama, which often casts artists from both sides of the border. In early 1960s Ritwik Ghatak brought the agony of partition of Bengal into the celluloid; though they were acute and poignant portrayals of displacement and poverty that resulted from partition, as Sandip Bandopadhyay writes in "The riddle of Partition: Memories of Bengali Hindus" (*Reflections of Partition in The East*), he evaded the issues of communalism in his films.

Bangla fiction in West Bengal does not really reflect Hindus' anger towards the Muslims or the Muslims' anger towards the Hindus. Novels/stories/plays/films uphold ideals of communal harmony; the language and tone is idealistic and mellow. Perhaps there is something in the Hindu Bengali sensibility, which prevents the subject from being violent about the other community. Another pertinent reason could be that there is no creative spokesperson for voicing resentment against the other community.

Some sociological accounts speak on a different note. Hiranmoy Chakraborty, in his book *Udbastu* (1970) writes how Hindu refugees in West Bengal complained that men and women were threatened and harassed by the Muslims after the formation of Bangladesh.. Prafulla Chakraborty in his book *The Marginal men: The Refugees and the Left Political Syndrome in India* (1990), specifies that Hindus from Bangladesh are fleeing to India as the Muslims there are torturing them as the minority community. Bangladeshi Writer/activist Tasleema Nasrin complains about the Hindu writers of West Bengal in her recent novel *Dwikhondito* (2003). According to her, most Hindu intellectuals /writers of Kolkata are atheists but the Muslim writers in West Bengal always feel dominated by them. She blames Ananda Bajar Patrika for patronizing one Muslim writer at a time and neglecting the others. This secular magazine survives on tokenism. She also mentions that Hindu writers in Bangladesh suffer from the same fate. The word secular or secularism makes us circumspect, we instantly think that it is really difficult to be secular and secularism can be a facade for hypocrisy. This chapter discusses two stories based on secular ideals. Both the stories are written by Abhijit Sen (b1945) *Seemanto* (1983) or *The Bordering Wish* is about a refugee's experience in the India-Bangladesh border thirty-two years after he has left East Bengal. *Manusher Pichon Dik* (1993) or *Past* focuses on a woman whose past was shaped by the Khan soldiers during the Bangladesh war of 1971.

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For most people who live alongside it, the border between India and Bangladesh is a chimera. Flat, green fields stretch over a wide terrain. Dotted across them you can see men and women bent over in work, a stray goat or cow grazing

alongside. It is difficult to tell them from their appearance which side of the border the human being, or indeed the animals belong to. Somewhere between one field and another lies an imaginary line that marks the territorial boundaries of two nations: there is no fence or barricade to give it materiality. Every now and again a small triangular concrete pillar, divided and worn, a number and an arrow etched into it, announces the international boundary. In the normal there is no one to stop you violating across this so-called border.

(Urvashi Butalia, "The Nowhere people"  
*The Trauma and the Triumph: Gender and Partition in Eastern India*) (113)

*Seemanto* is situated somewhere near this border. It also narrates how people cross the border by violating the law on the pretext of a festival. The word 'seemanto' means border or limit. The story finds Bibhuti, a 45-year-old family man, standing on the border between India and Bangladesh, between his past and present and between the Hindu and the Muslim community. The story begins in a bus. Bibhuti is taking his son to see the border. As the border is indistinguishable from a distance, it urges one to dream that it does not exist. It excites him; it brings back memories of his childhood and adolescence and suddenly jolts him back to the bitter memories of uprooting and separation. Bibhuti starts hallucinating when his co-passenger Naren makes a communal comment. He comes to know that Naren too is a refugee. He

says that the 'sala'<sup>5</sup>Muslims cannot tolerate the mention of Hindus in Bangladesh. Bibhuti is very protective about his adolescent son's sensibility; he apprehends that his son will contract the virus of communal hatred. However, he tries to give him a benefit of doubt by thinking that Naren might be one of those directly harmed by The Muslims.

Bibhuti is paranoid about communal violence because he had witnessed it during his childhood. He had seen the gradual loss of faith in communal harmony in his father. His father had slapped a Hindu neighbour for hitting their Muslim servant, he had screamed at a Muslim labourer for averting his gaze when he saw him; but such efforts of protest were futile. Initially he took the idea of partition as something distant and absurd but the truth came to light with increasing hostility and the carnage of riots. They had to migrate to India. Bibhuti's experiences in Kolkata were similar. He has encountered angry mob that chased each other, he saw poor Muslims of Park Circus area running for lives.

His father's emptiness and the resulting aggression was painful enough, Bibhuti does not want his son to imbibe this poison. His father was against Muslims because the decay of relations caused him pain. Khoka's aversion to Muslims stems from different reasons. They live in a small town near the border where Muslims are almost non-existent. The town has never seen a riot but Muslim people find it difficult to rent a house here. Bibhuti is afraid of Khoka's history textbooks, which tell him very little about other communities. Some of Khoka's teachers are into staunch Hinduism, which considers Muslims outsiders. When a Muslim boy takes admission in Khoka's class, he tells his father that a 'mosla' has been admitted to their class. Bibhuti finds this word

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<sup>5</sup> Sala-a Bengali invective.



derogatory, he shouts in anger and resorts to physical punishment; but soon realizes that Khoka is only a product of the system. Thus Bibhuti tries to show him the other side of the microcosm. He narrates stories of his childhood, adolescence, riots in East Bengal and Kolkata and tales of people displaced by partition. He is going to the border with a mission so that Khoka can see his roots; at least from a distance.

He finds a poor Muslim couple in the bus. The conductor harasses them because they do not have passports, nor do they have the money to pay tickets. The story takes a melodramatic turn as Bibhuti comes to their rescue. He also comes to know that they have raised a Hindu girl who married and settled on this side of the border. The man informs him that there will not be any problem in crossing the border without a passport because it was the day of Id. On this day people from both sides of the border meet each other at the check post. Bibhuti witnesses the festive scene of his dreams. It was like a fair; as the border between India and Pakistan is barely visible, the difference between Hindus and Muslims had almost disappeared. He just hopes that his son learns not to distinguish between a Hindu and a Muslim.

The author does something politically incorrect; he supports the violation of law. Unlike the border between India and Pakistan, the India-Bangladesh border is very porous. Migration, especially illegal migration is still an ongoing process in these regions. In this case we can refer to the common reason given by a refugee: "Why do I need a passport to go to my own country<sup>6</sup>?" Since a lot of migrants consider the partition to be the decision of an outsider, the laws of boundaries do not register in their mind. The military guards in the story are looked upon

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<sup>6</sup> The sentence is taken from the numerous oral narratives I have heard in my life (that of a second generation refugee). The usual response is either as mentioned above or "I will not visit my own country with a passport and a visa."

as the representatives of the state, the third force that divides the people for their own benefit. In the light of the present problem of illegal emigration, this act seems irresponsible, but a refugee who has left his country in dismay can always react in such a manner. Secondly, most Muslims in Bibhuti's memory are poor and distressed; it is evident from his narration that they belonged to a family of feudal lords in East Bengal. His heroic efforts to rescue the Muslim couple compel us to think that this incident is added to the story with a sentimental purpose. In *Dwikhondito*, Tasleema Nasrin writes that being secular does not imply that one will be critical of one's community and make the minority appear as a victim, such an attitude weakens the minorities.

At the same time, we can perceive that Bibhuti is not against any person for being fundamentalist, he becomes nervous and angry at the slightest show of communal hatred because he has seen the worst of it. Though his liberal humanistic philosophy seems escapist, we have to consider that he has not really interacted with Muslims for the last thirty-two years. This distance makes him uncritical towards them. He craves for his childhood in undivided Bengal.

## 2

*Manusher Pichon Dik* or *Past* was written after the Babri -masjid-Ram janmabhoomi controversy in 1992. The word 'manusher' means 'of human'; 'pichon-dik' means back - which can be related to themes of past, origin as well as that of regression. Radhika, the protagonist of the story is anxious about the fact that her son Ananda does not know his past. He is twenty years old and is instigated by the present Hindu cause-that of conquering Ayodha. The members of his ashram convince him that he is an incarnation of Lord Ram. They are in awe of his Aryan features, his fair skin and strong limbs and glowing eyes, which make him the true descendent of Ram. Ananda has to get back his 'birthplace'. His family tries to stop him in vain. Ananda gives delirious

speeches on the oppression of Hindus in Maldah, Murshidabad, Ayodha and Mathura. The writer veils the birth of Ananda's birth in a mystery in the first part of the story. When their last efforts fail, we come to know that Radhika was captured by the Khar<sup>7</sup> soldiers during the Bangladesh war of 1971. She was raped by numerous soldiers in the camp. She was pregnant when she came out of the camp. Ananda's Aryan features are actually inherited from the soldiers who were not Hindus. Mafizullah Kabir in his book *Experiences of an Exile at Home: Life in Occupied Bangladesh* writes that according to Dr .G. Davis, a surgeon who spent six weeks in Bangladesh, of 400,000 women known to have raped during the nine month war, 200,000 women fell pregnant to Pakistani soldiers.

Ananda's actual birthplace is a dark cavern of horror and perversion. Radhika relates his story with blood and cough, she says that Ananda was born in a dark den; no one knows who his father is. Throughout her life she wanted to redeem herself by clinging to Ananda but he has inherited the regressive element of his father/fathers. The story bears strong resemblance to Tagore's *Gora*. In *Gora*, the protagonist Gora is a staunch Hindu; he believes that it is only Hinduism, which can free India from the clutches of the British rule. It should be mentioned that the novel is situated in the nineteenth century, long before the phase of communal violence. Gora considers woman as the finite form of Bharatvarsha, mother India who has to be worshipped. The novel is based on dialogues and debates on religion and patriotism .At the end of the novel, Gora comes to know that he is Irish; this knowledge leads to his self-discovery. He learns to look beyond specific communities and develops faith in human beings as a whole. As he is in love, he also realizes that motherhood is not the only image of women. In sharp contrast to this, *Manusher Pichon Dik* is not about a glorious spiritual knowledge. The protagonist is not Ananda but Radhika loses who loses her faith as she discovers that her son has grown up to be a fanatic. In

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<sup>7</sup> Soldiers of Yahyaa Khan who tortured the civilians of Bangladesh in 1971.

the discourse of nationalism, woman is defined as the mother of the nation. In his book, Partho Chatterjee writes that the woman is said to be the inner domain of the society, the *andarmahal*, which is free from the impurities of the external male world. In times of national, social or communal crisis, it is the woman who is uprooted from this fragile space. She is raped, converted or paraded naked. It is the woman's mind, body and womb, which bear the inscription of the enemy. Radhika or Radha is the classic example of adultery in Indian mythology; here she has been forced into several sexual encounters with strangers. She has no agency in choosing her child's father. Radhika has entered into a vicious cycle of perversion and aggression from which there is no escape. Sen makes us aware of the bleak future of communalism where religion becomes an excuse for hatred. It is the woman who bears this seed of hatred in her body. Thus the story begins and ends with Radhika's tears.

Abhijit Sen does not interrogate the political position of Ananda, (*Manusher Pichon*) nor does he analyse the Hindu zeal of Khoka's teachers (*Seemanto*). In the former story he clearly describes Ananda's ideas as imaginary and false. In *Seemanto*, he is afraid that Khoka will absorb the poison of his education system. It can be concluded that both the stories are individualistic; the author has limited his views to the sphere of his own experiences. *Seemanto* was written in 1983, it has an optimistic conclusion; Bibhuti prays that his son would grow up on secular ideals but *Manusher Pichon Dik* ends with despair and gloom; there are a lot more Anandas in the country now. By this time the author must have lost his faith in the new generation. The latter story also responds to the critics' complaint that Bangla stories are not vocal about the atrocities of partition; it not only relates the acts of harassment directly, the author has also shown the worst consequence of such a tragedy.

## CONCLUSION

1

The Bengali writers unlike their Punjabi and Hindu counterparts have tried to undermine the violence that had erupted during the period in question. On the other hand there has been a tendency among the Bengali writers to sentimentalize the issue by focusing on a feeling of deep nostalgia and an attempt by many of them to construct an imaginary space called East Bengal...by sentimentalizing the issues or by creating certain stereotypes are they not reducing the impact, lessening the evil and therefore making it acceptable?

Jayanti Chattopadhyay "Partition and Bangla Fiction" (*Partition: literary responses*) (141)

Alok Bhalla in "Objectifying Troubling Memories: An Interview with Bhism Sahni" (*Inventing Boundaries Gender, Politics and the Partition of India*) calls the partition of India a 'civilisational break'. He asks Bhism Sahni whether barbarism is a permanent feature in human beings. The referral point is of course the barbarity, which Indians witnessed during the holocaust of Partition. Bhism Sahni replies that barbarism in human beings is a temporary feature and it emerges due to certain unfortunate circumstances. Partition literature in the North has consisted terrible documents of the moment when savagery was unleashed. Be it Bhism Sahni's *Tamas* or Khushwant Singh's *Train to Pakistan* they take a direct look at the unreal violence of this period.

In sharp contrast, fiction on partition in East India focuses more on the act of displacement and various stages of struggle, which the refugees go through. Jayanti Chattopadhyay and Dipesh Chakraborty ("Remembered villages: Representations of Hindu Bengali Memories in the Aftermath of Partition" in *Inventing Boundaries*) are of the view that Partition literature in Bangla is more about nostalgia and an "imaginary space called East Bengal"; nostalgia is not the only theme in this genre, rather it is the most popular theme in Bangla partition literature (if I use the term now). Novels nostalgic about life before partition, like *Nilkantha Pakhir Khoje* (1986) by Atin Bandopadhyay and *Purbo-Paschim* (1990) by Sunil Gagopadhyay have remained on the bestseller list. Prafulla Roy's *Keya Patar Nouka* and Shankha Ghosh's *Shupariboner Shari* are novels in which the refugee goes back to Bangladesh; they do find prelapsarian bliss in that country. It is not a binary affair as mentioned in the excerpt, that is nostalgia instead of violence, but there can be no gainsaying about the fact that temporary /permanent traits of criminality especially that of murder, rape and abduction have not been dealt with directly in Bangla fiction. Be it Arundhati in Ramapada Chaudhury's *Karunkanya*, or Kulsum in Akhtarujjaman Illias' *Khoabnama*, they are assaulted by outsiders who are satanic or insane fanatics. Their space in the stories or novels are peripheral, the authors never define their motives. Partition literature of North India seems to concentrate mainly on the arbitrary potentiality of violence. Mushirul Hassan in his translation of *Siyah Hashye* (translated as *Black Margins* in *Inventing Boundaries*) writes that Manto mentions that he wrote *Siyah Hashye* in order to put into frame the 'single-minded dedication' with which people killed, looted, raped and repented afterwards. The characters in *Siyah Hashye* are mostly looters and murderers. In Manto's *Sharifan*, a father wants to rape a Hindu girl of his daughter's age because his daughter was raped by Hindus. In Amrita Pritam's *Pinjar*, (translated as *The Skeleton*) Puro was abducted

by a Muslim. Her marriage and family life with this man is actually described and not put into deliberate oblivion. It is strange that though direct confrontation of such incidents are avoided, in Bengali short stories the authors are concerned with the patriarchal fear of women being defiled by the other community. The politics of this fear is a common theme, *Sthaane o Stanēa* text discussed in this dissertation is based on this theme. Victims of rape and abduction are given prominence but the perpetrators of violence remain in the dark. Bangla short stories do deal with themes of sins that we commit everyday, that of hypocrisy, jealousy and selfishness. Authors do support illegal acts: 'jabardakhal' or seizure-settlement is championed in stories like Samaresh Basu's *Gantabya* or Sunil Gangopadhyay's *Arjun*. Prostitution is shown as inevitable end in Ritwik Ghatak's classic film *Subarnarekha* and Salil Sen's *Notun Ihudi*. While the pitfalls of relationships are exploited with ruthlessness, the details of murder and rape could not percolate the sieve of 'bhadralok' sensibility. The refugees demanded their rights through agitations, strikes and protests, violation of law in some cases were permitted through the survivor's ideology, which was highly influenced by leftism. But it appears that acts like rape and murder are gross: they could not be narrated aesthetically.

Refugees in Kolkata tried to remonstrate through the media of plays and songs. They demanded better rehabilitation. Did short stories on partition dream of a social change? Dominic Head, in his conclusion to *The Modernist Short story: A Study in Theory and Practice* writes:

The overt literary artifice of the short story, its emphasis or technique, tallies with the concerns of the modernists their pursuit of social ends through forms of social experimentation. The importance of forms not as aesthetic end in itself, but as the means of defining broader contextual goals...(185)

The issue of 'social end' is important, as the framework of the study is sociological-the reflection of social catastrophe in fiction. Few novels/short stories on the theme were written during the event. Lack of proper rehabilitation was a common complaint of the refugees but it was not reflected radically in fiction. Stories based on life in refugee colonies were not written before 60s and 70s, much after the dislocation of 1947. We also have to consider that migration from Bangladesh to India has been a continuous process till date. Such stories would also carry some social or political views regarding the incident. Jason Francisco, in "In the Heat of Fratricide: The Literature of India's Partition Burning Freshly" (*Inventing Boundaries*) writes:

...not that the anthologized literature is outwardly polemic-most of it is not-but the majority of it is necessarily politicized. And this is good: the partition was an event so great in its human consequences that its literature rightly forces us to reckon sides and to choose. It is after all, the litterateur's job, to raise the event psychologically and emotionally, to tie us into complex of choices and pain...(382-83)

The question is not only the debate about the previous coexistence and sudden eruption of violence between the Hindus and the Muslims. The 'complex of choices' in this case can be interpreted as the choices regarding the ethics of human situations. Is Mohini's (*Pather Kanta*) selfishness justified? Was it right for the refugees in *Gantabya* to violate the law? Can we support Subroto (*Abotaronika*) for asking Arati to leave the job? There is no moral restriction in any of the stories discussed in the dissertation. Partition transformed the society at such a random manner that the thin veneer of decency and generosity was lost.



Patriarchs drew lines for women in their household because they were paranoid about their 'sanctity' and 'honour'. In *Seemanto*, Bibhuti's co-passenger in the bus complains that the 'sala' Muslims cannot tolerate Hindus in Bangladesh. In the same story, people cross the border illegally in search of their daughter. In this sense these stories uphold an essentially modernist situation where it is wise to withdraw judgment.

2

How can we study partition literature? The dichotomy of such a genre lies in the fact the author or the reader's memory is emotionally charged. The question of violence is raised but is perturbed by the critic's personal memory of the same. For instance, Alok Bhalla, in his introduction to *Stories of Partition Vol 1*, writes about his own memory of partition violence, and the need to compile such an anthology for the present generation. He then categorises the stories in the following manner:

Stories, which are communally charged

Stories of anger and negation

Lamentation and consolation

And Return of memory

(viii)

Saroj Cowasjee, in his introduction to *Orphans of the Storm: Stories in the Partition of India*, writes:

Any attempt to categorise stories into groups which depict murder, rape or compassion has its limitations, for good stories cross boundaries and have more than one theme.

(Xv-xvi)

Jason Fransisco, while reviewing these two books in “In the Heat of Fratricide...” (*Inventing Boundaries*), groups the stories as those of *rupture, repair and protest* Fiction has to be categorized into groups if it has to be analysed, especially when it is written in the backdrop of such a decisive event like partition. The categories have to be better defined. Alok Bhalla has focused more on communal politics in his essay, Jason Fransisco ‘s division of themes that of rupture, repair and protest seems too theoretical. Urvashi Butalia had already complained in *The Other Side of Silence* that history did not write about the misery of women during the partition. The editors of the respective anthologies do not discuss the portrayal of women in fiction separately. Coming back to partition literature in Bangla, it has received nominal critical focus. Manabendra Bandopadhyay, the editor of *Bhed-Bived* (an anthology of short stories on partition and communalism in two volumes) arranges his stories chronologically. In the essay “Manusher Swapokhe”, (“On Behalf of Human Being”) in *Bhed-Bived, Vol 2*, he focuses on communal enmity and the state’s power to inflame it. Themes of betrayal, selfishness and problems of women are also discussed, but the tone is more of a personal concern for bridging gaps in communal and individual relationships. As the title suggests, *The Trauma and the Triumph: Gender and Partition in Eastern India*, deals with gender problems related to the partition of Bengal but creative fiction is only a small part of this book. Jashodhara Bagchi analyses *Epar Ganga Opar Ganga* by Jyotirmoyee Devi and The Trilogy of Sabitri Roy; Shubhoranjan Dasgupta introduces Ilias’ *Khoabnama* to the readers but there is no essay on the general trend of the themes in partition in Bangla literature. We need critical essays and books, which questions the stereotypical images of Bangla Partition literature and make the reader’s aware about the other important themes in this genre.

Literature on the partition of Bengal, rather Bangla short fiction on partition is not a homogenous genre. The primary aim of this dissertation has been to make some broad categories in this area (though it is problematic) and to bring attention to some themes, which has so far escaped the critic/reader's gaze. As mentioned in the first chapter, I have tried to arrange stories according to certain themes. In chapter 2, there has been an attempt to show numerous ways in which people reacted during partition. While the narrator in *Acharya Kripalini Colony* accepts his helplessness and the threat of hostility without any rhetorical outburst, Parashar in *Pather Kanta* wavers crucially between duty and escapism. *Gantabya* documents a mass protest but *The Tale of a Tulsi Plant* does not indulge in illusions to change the unjust order. Chapter 3 focuses on four kinds of situations, which women have encountered during and after partition. Characters like Arati (*Hoyna*) and Arati (*Abotaronika*) are not unknown to us, the victim of physical violation or the middle class working woman trying to adjust between her family and workplace have been discussed more than often. On the other hand, *Sthaane o Staanet* touches upon the alienation of Sumitra who has no power to speak for her security, it's only the male members of her household who decide on her behalf. *Batashi* (*Batashi*) tries to bring a new perspective to the representation of Bengali refugee women. The stereotypical female struggler stems from the middle class but she belongs to a lower class, her vocation and 'profession' is entirely different from others. In chapter 4, I have tried to locate the ideal secular story in Bangla, though I have questioned its politics, I have tried to give it a space of its own. I hope that my work will generate an interest in the themes explored in this dissertation.

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