Partition and the Muslim Woman:
Nation, Gender and Identity in Select Fiction of Qurratulain Hyder

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by

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INTRODUCTION

This research thesis, "Partition and the Muslim Woman: Nation, Gender and Identity in Select Fiction of Qurratulain Hyder" is an attempt to look at these issues in three of her novels (*River of Fire*, *My Temples, Too* and *Fireflies in the Mist*) and in three of her novellas (*Street Singers of Lucknow*, *Housing Society* and *Sita Betrayed*).

The question, rather questions, that can be asked are: Why Partition? Why Qurratualin Hyder only? Why Muslim women's identity, gender, issues of nation, nationhood etc?

Partition is chosen because it was an epoch-making event, a watershed for historical reckoning, like classifying events as something that happened before Partition, and something that happened after it. It was the beginning of new nation states, reorienting a lot of people's national consciousness (from Indian to Pakistani and, later, Bangladeshi). As a character Deepali Sarkar says in *Fireflies in the Mist*, Mr Jinnah was not only the father of Pakistan, but father of Bangladesh as well (332). Partition was a huge event in a physical sense also. It was the largest migration of people from one part of the subcontinent to others. Millions perished, thousands were abducted, raped and worse. The survivors were left with deep physical and emotional wounds that refused to heal. The bitterness it left behind still poisons India-Pakistan relations. The survivors had to struggle for decades to find their feet in their new homelands. They had to live with the pain as the major Urdu writer, Intezar Husain, who migrated from Meerut to Pakistan at 25 and wrote the classic, *Basti*, says to Meena Menon: "The first Partition was in the Mahabharata… and then it was me when I was exiled. Only the Pandavas and I knew the pain of leaving one's land. The Mahabharata is such a narrative of that pain" (1).

Quite a few Urdu writers (as in other languages too) have written on Partition besides Hyder and Husain: Krishna Chander, Saadat Hasan Manto, Hyatullah Ansari, Abdullah Hussein, Ramanand Sagar, Khadija Mastoor, to name just a few. However, the choice of Hyder is because she is most consistently and enduringly focused on Partition. Over a writing career of nearly six decades, Partition remained a frame of reference for her.

"Nation"'s reason for being here is rather too obvious: how a civilisation permutes into two, and even three, nations and how national identities undergo change. "Muslim woman" is there because she did not demand Partition, but had to pay for it more dearly than the Muslim man. The fact remains that women across religious denominations were the worst sufferers. Hyder's women are mostly Muslim because she had been writing about India's (and Pakistan's) Muslim milieu. Naturally, Hyder's is a gendered perspective on Partition from a Muslim point of view.

In her last novel, *Chandni Begum* (not included in this thesis project), Hyder talks about Muslim men going to Pakistan, leaving behind their wives in India and sending letters of divorce from there. Such women were reduced to utter helplessness. If they happened to be from the landed gentry, they had greater difficulty because the properties of men who had migrated to Pakistan were confiscated by the Indian government as enemy property. Daughters of such families in India lived as penniless spinsters. Chandni Begum's father went away to Pakistan and divorced his wife from there, which brought great misery to the mother and daughter. Chandni Begum's short, unhappy life is an example of what the Partition did to Muslim women.

In *Housing Society*, Manzur-un-Nisa's husband, Jamshed sends her a letter of divorce before going to Pakistan. A pining Manzur-un-Nisa dies in her youth after Jamshed takes away their daughter to Pakistan. The enduring sorrows of these women are directly attributable to the Partition. Such stories of betrayal of their wives are exclusive to Muslim men. Naturally, the victims had to be Muslim women only as there were fewer inter-religious marriages then.

Women had little or no agency as Ritu Menon points out in *No Woman's Land*; the Partition was an all-male enterprise and women were "powerless" as far as conceiving and implementing this misadventure was concerned (3). Women had to pay the price of this project disproportionately as their bodies had become an extension of the contested terrain. Their bodies and souls were held at ransom to score a point over the enemy.

At that time women were mostly part of the private and personal domain, while Partition was played out in the public and political one, lorded over almost exclusively by males. Compared to Indian women as a whole, Muslim women were more firmly cordoned off from the public arena. The only Muslim women visible in public were those of the poor, disempowered classes who had to work in rich homes, fields and factories. They were not part of political decision-making.

Towards the end of *Fireflies in the Mist*, the heroine Deepali Sarkar says:

> The cross-currents of the politics of Bengal's Hindu *Bhadralog* [sic] and Muslim gentry gave birth to East Pakistan, and the internal politics of West and East Pakistan created Bangladesh. Individual personality clashes and temperament and actions of political leaders build or destroy entire nations (332).

And all these actors, by definition, had to be malevolent males. In fact, Partition's roots ran deeper than usually suspected. After the crushing of the Sepoy Mutiny and the complete erasure of Mughal power, jostling for power began between Hindus and Muslims. The latter did not have the strength and confidence that comes from numbers.

Eight to nine decades before India's freedom it was possible for many to imagine that sooner than later the British Empire, too, would vanish like the Mughal Empire and India would be left to Indians. Over the decades, as the voice for India's independence became stronger, Hindus generally became more assertive vis-à-vis Muslims. This gave Muslims a deep sense of uncertainty, a feeling in which a later separatism found its roots. Bangla literature of that time, like the novel *Anand Math*, intensified Muslim anxiety about their place in a future India. The worst part of it was that a conscious cultivation of anti-Muslim sentiment was woven into the warp and woof of the freedom movement in Bengal. As Deepali Sarkar says, in *Fireflies in the Mist*, about the Bengal revolutionaries: "The British branded them as terrorists. Indians called them revolutionaries. Many among them were anti-Muslim as well" (332).

At a later stage in this research one had begun to be bothered by a recurring doubt: Is the theme a little too protracted? Nation, gender and identity were so closely interlinked that they seemed merely different aspects of identity. After all, everybody has a gender identity and a national identity. Partition was wrought on the basis of religion, which too, had to be a marker of identity. Everything seemed to have something to do with identity. So, could we have done with a shorter version like "Partition and Identity"?

However, as the work moved ahead the doubt receded and the conviction grew that the rather fuller sub-little, "nation, gender and identity" allowed greater freedom and scope to look at the issues in detail. As far as, an unstated but important marker of identity, religion, was concerned, it was a relief that in Qurratulain Hyder it was not a querulous, divisive monster, but a quiet, soothing and synthesising influence that seemed to allow different groups to live together in peace and fellow-feeling. It was like Indian nationalism that holds people together rather than like Muslim or Hindu nationalism. In any case, there was not much religion in Hyder.

Nation is as much a historical idea as it is a social and cultural idea. After the advent of the British a new chapter in Indian history began and a new social and cultural consciousness flourished. At this point articulation of ideas about nation and culture started. It was a time of awakening of nationalist feeling among Indians, mostly upper class Hindus who had been beneficiaries of the new British education. European ideas of "nation" had become accessible to classes educated in the English system of education, in which Muslims were lagging, because 'western' educational activity among Muslims was relatively less prominent than among Hindus. Though Mohammedan College (now Aliah University) was set up in Calcutta by Warren Hastings in 1780, Hooghly College (now Hooghly Mohsin College) was established by Haji Mohd. Mohsin in 1836, Mohammedan Anglo-Oriental College (now AMU) was set up by Sir Syed Ahmad Khan in 1875, and many other such institutions all over India were set up in between these major colleges, aimed at inculcating formal English system of education amongst Muslim youth, when the discourse on nation began in earnest, Muslims were not able to participate in it, because they were relatively unfamiliar with the new landscape of ideas. The nationalist

story that emerged was exclusively a Hindu story. The nation was a Hindu idea, the national homeland was represented as a woman, mother goddess, clad in regular sari and blouse, worshipped with great devotion like any other goddess. Before the British, the goddess Bharat Mata was not known. And where was the Muslim component of the nation? It was not there because it worshipped a different deity. So, how was it accounted for? It was the Mother's oppressors to be got rid of as quickly as possible. In the construction of a nation, myth, culture, story-telling and creative narrative come in handy. "Nationalism", writes Timothy Brennan in his essay in *Nation and Narration*, "is not the awakening of nations to self- consciousness; it invents nations where they do not exist" (49). For such inventiveness, familiarity with Western education and Western ideas of nation was a requisite, in which Muslims failed to keep pace.

> Myths and folklore are created and manipulated to fit in with newly-minted nationalistic discourses to give them a colour of timelessness, tracing the key ideas to times immemorial and to attain the authenticity and dignity of hoary cultural traditions of the forefathers. Myths act as a charter for the present- day social order;… and magical belief, the function of which is to strengthen tradition and endow it with a greater value and prestige by tracing it back to a higher, better, more supernatural reality of initial events (Brennan 45).

The telling and retelling of "nation" is not easily available in Muslim stories of the 19th century. People still talked about the value of the country and patriotism, instead of nation. To validate patriotism, Indian Muslims referred to an apocryphal tradition of the Prophet that says: "*Hubbul watan, juzu-al-iman*" (love of one's country is an integral part of faith). An injunction of the Quran quoted later in this thesis says that Muslims are required to fight alongside their non-Muslim compatriots from the predominantly non-Muslim territories in which they were living against invading Muslim armies from Muslim lands. They must not join their coreligionists on the other side. However, what the Muslims believed and practised was still about country, not nation. It was not strange, therefore, for men like VD Savarkar and MS Golwalkar to confidently construct India as "nation", excluding Muslims. As early as in 1923, Savarkar, in his book *Hindutva* wrote:

> Christian and Mohamedan [sic] communities, who were but very recently Hindu in majority of cases had been at least in their first generation most willing denizens of their new fold, claim though they might a common fatherland, and an almost pure Hindu blood and parentage with us cannot be recognised as Hindus; as since their adoption of the new cult they had ceased to own Hindu *Sanskriti* [culture] as a whole. They belong, or feel that they belong, to a cultural unit altogether different from the Hindu one. Their heroes and their hero-worship, their fairs and their festivals, their ideals and their outlook on life have ceased to be common with ours (qtd. in Islam 59).

The idea of two nations is often traced to the 1905 partition of Bengal, the consequent 1906 establishment of the All India Muslim League in Dhaka, and the first President of the AIML Sir Sultan Muhammad Shah Agha Khan III's presentation to Lord Minto of the "Muslim Bill of Rights" in 1906, leading to the Indian Councils Act of 1909 which formed a separate electorate for Muslims, but it is actually statements like the above that the dreaded two-nation theory can be traced to. Delivering the presidential address to the 19th session of Hindu Mahasabha at Ahmedabad in 1937, Savarkar said categorically, "…there are two nations in the main: the Hindus and the Muslims in India" (qtd. in Islam 60). After the 1923 book, whose excerpt is quoted earlier, this seemed to be a more unequivocal statement about two nations within India. Between 1924 and 1931, the first Muslim "credited" with talking about Pakistan, and thus "two nations" was a Cambridge University undergraduate student, Choudhary Rahmat Ali, who wrote a pamphlet, *Now or Never*, dated January 28, 1933. Pakistan was an acronym for Punjab, Afghan Province (NWFP), Kashmir, Sindh and Baluchistan. Ali wanted an independent Muslim nation state to be carved out of India (Khosla 5). Interestingly, this did not include East Bengal, today's Bangladesh. This was also different from the poet Iqbal's 1930 idea of a Muslim state consolidating the above provinces as part of a great Indian confederation that would allow Muslims some freedom and protection from Hindu political, cultural and capitalist dominance. This shows by the mid-30s of the last century, if not earlier, a Muslim counter-narrative of nationhood was ready. By then mutually exclusive articulations of Hindu and Muslim nationhood were crystallised and deepened. A larger quote from the 1937 address by Savarkar given below shows the hardening of positions:

> [A]s it is, there are two antagonistic nations living side by side in India, several infantile politicians commit the serious mistake in supposing that India is already welded into a harmonious nation, or that it could be welded thus for the mere wish to do so. These are well-meaning but unthinking friends who take their dreams for realities…. Let us bravely face unpleasant facts as they are. India cannot be assumed today to be a Unitarian and homogenous nation, but on the contrary, there are two nations in the main: the Hindus and the Muslims, in India (qtd in Islam, 60)

This single paragraph mentions "two nations" twice. Thus, when the Muslim League first talked about the "two-nation theory" two years later, it was not being original. A year further down the line, in 1940, came the Pakistan resolution on the basis of this "theory". From Savarkar's address in Ahmedabad it took only a decade for the second nation state, Pakistan, to become a reality.

Babasaheb Bhim Rao Ambedkar wondered at the identity of positions taken by the Leaguers and *Hindutva* votaries though for entirely different purposes:

> Strange as it may appear, Mr Savarkar and Mr Jinnah instead of being opposed to each other on the one nation versus two nations issue are in complete agreement about it. Both agree, not only agree but insist that there are two nations in India—one the Muslim nation and the other Hindu nation. They differ only as regards the terms and conditions on which the two nations must live (qtd in Islam 61).

Ambedkar points out the illogic in Savarkar's position: "Mr Savarkar admits that the Muslims are a separate nation…. He allows them to have a national flag. Yet he opposes the demand of the Muslim nation for a Muslim national home" (qtd in Islam 62). Ambedkar writes, according to this *Hindutva* rhetoric: "Hindu nation will be enabled to occupy a predominant position that is due to it and the Muslim nation made to live in the position of subordinate co-operation with the Hindu nation" (qtd in Islam 62).

This clearly shows that the "two-nation theory" had a mixed parentage. Neither Muslims nor Hindus could claim the exclusive ownership of this horror. This also shows the potential of the idea of nation to play havoc with people's lives, if we have not already seen it in the World Wars and other wars of the 20th century. Like the two World Wars, Partition was nation at adverse play, a senseless juggernaut that could decimate entire populations and devastate survivors.

Hyder personally subscribed to the Sufi version of Islam (she became a disciple of Sufi Arif Miyan at Majgavan Sharif near Lucknow) and her major characters are like her in this respect, but reading her works written in the background of India's Partition, one always has the feeling at the back of one's mind that all the difficulties arise from religious differences. However, reading one of her major novels, *Fireflies in the Mist (Aakhir-e-Shab ke Hamsafar*), which is also about Pakistan's partition, one gets the clear feeling that there are other markers of identity also (and causes of identity conflict) than religion, like language and ethnicity. In *Fireflies* the cause of division is ethnic and cultural difference rather than religion as East and West Pakistan had the same majority religion, Islam. Even the ethnic, cultural and linguistic difference may not have been a sufficient reason for the second partition. It was accentuated by a deep feeling of Bengalis that they were being discriminated against, despised and dominated by West Pakistanis. They felt that their language and culture were looked down upon, Urdu was being forced on them and Bangla was sidelined, and their natural resources were exploited by West Pakistan. Gargi Chakravartty in her remarkable book *Coming out of Partition: Refugee Women of Bengal* writes:

> The central government, led by West Pakistan, tried to impose "cultural domination over the Bengalis by destroying their cultural distinctiveness". The Constituent Assembly of Pakistan, in February 1948, decided that the members of the Assembly were to make address either in English or Urdu. Jinnah, in his convocation address at the Dhaka University on 24 March 1948, declared Urdu as the state language. This announcement generated a spontaneous upsurge of protest by students, the intelligentsia and politicians. The reiteration of the same

> declaration in 1952, by Prime Minister Khwaja Nazimuddin infuriated the students, who came out on the streets and were fired at by the police, causing deaths on 21 February 1952 – a day that came to be known as Martyr's Day. (126)

This could be the beginning of countdown to the partition of Pakistan.

Some of these complaints were also there behind India's Partition, but at that time everything seemed to emanate from religious difference as the second partition, that of Pakistan, had an ethnic basis. In fact, this was the third partition, if we count the partition of Bengal in 1905, which was later undone in 1911. Pakistan's partition showed that religion was not really the culprit it was thought to be; the real cause of partition in both cases was a feeling or fear of being despised and dominated by the more advantaged group. Chakravartty gives the same sense of being dominated and humiliated constantly by the larger hegemonic group among Indian Muslims that led Indian Muslim elite to demand Pakistan. She gives concrete examples of such constant humiliation of Bengali Muslims that made them opt for Pakistan in the first place: "For Muslim professionals, the upper classes, and government servants, Pakistan was the promised land. A desire to live with dignity made them move out of India" (121).

A particular aspect of Hyder's writing that seems to resist attempts at articulation is her sense, or rather apprehension, of time. Time is presented in her work like possibly no other. She seems to be living simultaneously on the morning of creation, in the middle ages, and at a particular moment in the 21st century (she died in 2007) effortlessly and comfortably. In one of her novels, *Chandni Begum*, hippies talk about "millions of years ago, the day we climbed down from trees, was the point at which all our problems began as humans" (174 Translation mine), or when their earlier versions began to move away from the state of nature. That wrenching feeling of nostalgia troubles the hippies in the second half of the 20th century, and Hyder too, it seems. Nostalgia is like a background hum of much of her writing.

In her works, Time seems to be a silent, unobtrusive, but highly influential presence. Time that can heal, Time that can hurt. The following excerpt from *Chandni Begum* shows the dramatic change in fortunes with Partition, which Time brings in its wake:

> In the bustle of the riverside mansion were included the shrill calls of parrots and mynahs, cooing of koels, the clack of red-headed ducks. Barrister Asghar Ali, the great jurist. (The barrister's wife) Bitto Baji, popular social worker. (Her son) Qambar Ali, student leader. The place was thronged by people of all castes and classes, from morning till evening. Earlier, taluqdars used to get down from their long cars in the portico in connection with their endless litigations. Hefty adopted children of Hindu Rajahs, often nicknamed "Baby", were frequent visitors, coming in buggies, resplendent in silk *kurtas* and spotless white *dhotis*, bedecked in diamonds.
>
> Suddenly, the scene changed (after Partition).The taluqdars vanished with their begums, cars, palanquins and buggies. Soon tongas and ekkas too, vanished. A flood of rickshaws and cycles swelled. Riding them came in clients carrying files to the portico. Their properties had been declared abandoned by government because someone in their family had gone to Pakistan. Quite a few of them used to come in cars (9, translation mine).

Her *magnum opus* (though Hyder often claimed it was not her most important work), *River of Fire* (*Aag ka Darya*) stretches over 2,400 years, seamlessly. *Fireflies* runs through the two partitions. Time is an aspect of Hyder that has been difficult to deal with, even though it gives a certain philosophical profundity to contemplations of life of her characters, the shifting nature of the world, of history, the ephemeral reality of individual life and everything in it.

Hyder often spares readers the trauma of Partition's bloodshed, rape, arson, grievous dislocation and mass murder, the loss of home, radical break from the past, kidnapping of women on large scale, their conversion to the faith of their captors and having to live with the captors as their wives, raising children and family with new identities. She does not

go into all that. She talks about people, mostly women, who are resilient, who overcome adversity and move on. Even though the Partition is a male project it is left to women to build homes and hearths away from home in unfamiliar lands, among unfamiliar people. They give life a much-needed sense of continuity. Even in the worst of circumstances some of the bonds built between faith communities over centuries still hold. People continue to know and care for their friends who have moved across the border, or who have remained behind as others have crossed the border, often willingly.

Hyder, acutely conscious of her own femininity, created some remarkable, heroic female characters like Rakhshanda in *My Temples, Too* (*Mere Bhi Sanamkhane*) who valiantly resists the idea of Partition, and Deepali Sarkar, who resists the partition of India, but is away (in West Indies) at the time of Pakistan's partition. However, she keeps alive her old ties with West Bengal and Bangladesh, where she was born, grew up and worked for Marxist revolution before getting married to a rich lawyer in West Indies and going away to settle there. She keeps in touch with friends in India and Bangladesh and visits them in the two countries every now and then.

Assertion of old ties, keeping pre-Partition relations alive in the three countries is an important point. Women seem to have a better appreciation of it. Kavita Panjabi in her essay "A Unique Grace" writes:

> Qurratulain Hyder later dwelt upon the threads of love and belonging that continued to hold people in webs of relationships across the divide so strongly that even decades after Partition the warp and woof of these threads continued to test the jingoism of the borders. (51)

Panjabi continues to talk about the noble efforts of common people across borders to celebrate their common humanity amid chauvinistic hysteria of vocal sections and jingoism of states. She says in lines after those quoted above:

> Akhtar-uz-Zaman-Elias, author of *Khwabnama,* the Bangladesh magnum opus of Partition in the East, said, even as late as the 90s, when his leg had to be amputated in a Kolkata hospital, "I have always claimed I've lived with one foot on either side of the border. Now I'm leaving one foot on your side forever and I've made sure it's the bad foot!" Transformation of painful reality into poignant reality was his hallmark, and the parodying of enmity in confident chuckles of intimate friendship his signature. Such tropes have become as much a part of our shared culture across the borders as has the chauvinism which they keep challenging (51).

Being a woman is a constant struggle. Improving the human condition, giving life its warmth and putting some order on chaos seems to be women's lot in Hyder's fiction and in life as it is lived. Women have been more concerned with retrieving humanity that was lost in the mass murder and mayhem of Partition.

In the raging fire of Partition violence and its aftermath dedicated women like Mridula Sarabhai, Anis Kidwai, Subhadra Joshi and many others were busy rescuing kidnapped women in the two countries under Mahatma Gandhi's inspiration and with the support of Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru. They were helping women resettle. Later as members of Parliament they were active in creating the right legal framework for women's safety, security and wellbeing in a free India.

A moving account of Indian women's struggle for a dignified life in India, Anis Kidwai's *In Freedom's Shade* makes instructive reading. These women, at great personal cost, tried to put life back on the rails.

There is a certain interface between the recorded history of Partition and its recorded memory, like Kidwai's work, on one side and fictional representation of the events on the other, like Qurratulain Hyder's work. The difference is that history is more about cold, impersonal facts, and literature is about human condition, human relations and human predicament, a flesh and blood account of life as lived in those troubled times.

Women's works have been of immense help in another way. Significant work by contemporary women like Urvashi Butalia and Ritu Menon have helped bring out the humanity of the victims and their next generations in India and Pakistan and attempted to close the circle of violence, resentment and revenge across the borders. Their work on finding a common ground between different kinds of perpetrators and victims (often the perpetrators were victims and victims perpetrators, in changing contexts).

It is no coincidence that this process is carried forward by the generation of women as young as in their 20s like the Pakistani author Anam Zakaria with her *The Footprints of Partition: Narratives of Four Generations of Pakistanis and Indians*. The book's dedication captures the essence of how generations of a partitioned subcontinent are still bound together in a single thread, echoing Hyder's idea of indivisibility of a civilisation: "To Muhammad Rauf and the countless other Indians and Pakistanis who have died with the aching desire to reconnect with the homes and lives they left behind in 1947.

Admittedly, what is presented here as the background of Muslim separatism is largely based on the Muslim side of the narrative. From this perspective, out of which arose the struggle for Pakistan as need for a "Muslim homeland," the seeds of Muslim separatism were doggedly nurtured by much of the freedom movement itself. Jill Didur, in her book *Unsettling Partition: Literature, Gender, Memory*, has the following to say on it:

> With the nationalist movement dominated by Hindu concerns, different groups within the Muslim community began to reconstruct their identity in order to maintain their share of power… Though the Indian nationalist movement claimed to be secular in its goals, it relied heavily on the revival of Hinduism. As Amrita Chhachhi and many other scholars have noted, "[m]odern literature in Bengali, Hindi and Urdu was often blatantly communal, depicting Muslims as foreigners and oppressive, lecherous tyrants, while Hindus were portrayed as heroes struggling for positive values" (108).

According to this line of argument, under constant badgering from the Punjabi Arya Samaji *Shuddhi* campaign, Bengali *Bhadrolok's* antipathy to Muslims, and openly hostile Maratha posturing, Muslims began a counter-mobilisation and created an alternative nationalist narrative (Indian Islamic nationalist narrative), which led to the Pakistan movement. The argument here is that Indian nationalism had no place for Muslims. Hence arose the need for an alternative Muslim nationalist discourse. However, Hyder supports none of these two mutually exclusive discourses.

Even if people know that they are being killed, uprooted and sent beyond the new borders for the sake of a new nation being created, new national identities were not fully formed around the time Hyder's characters are shown living in Pakistan after leaving India. They are yet to forget India and its memories and yet to intern the new national myths – important requisites for nationhood as proposed by Renan (19) and reiterated by Gynanendra Pandey (*Remembering Partition* 15). Yet, there are moments, like in *River of Fire*, when a character who is in India for a few days to retrieve some documents from his abandoned home, but not finding them, is returning to Pakistan unwillingly. He stays for a few hours in Delhi to meet his Hindu friends. He visits the National Museum, where a young Information Ministry official, Kumari Aruna Bajpai, is talking to visiting dignitaries from abroad telling them how great the Indian culture of Mohenjodaro and Harappa was. The Indian-turned Pakistani man corrects her silently, in his heart, telling her that Mohenjodaro and Harappa are not India, but Pakistan (414).

By raising such issues, and by tacitly agreeing to both the Indian and Pakistani positions on our cultural heritage, Hyder seems to subtly hint at the subcontinent's civilisational continuity and a probable re-unification at some point in future.

As of writing this on a mellow afternoon of November 2015, we see a dramatic rise in incidence of hate speech, hate crimes like lynching, murder of innocent persons, intolerance of religious and cultural diversity reminiscent of scenes in *My Temples, Too* in the build-up to Partition. One wonders whether such episodic convulsions are part of our civilisation.

In *My Temples, Too*, we see both trends in society, that is, a lot of people committed to national integrity fighting tooth and nail for keeping India united, while others are equally determined to divide it. A time comes when Congress, Hindus and even Gandhiji begin to support Partition. Others help with their violent acts against each other.

Even after Partition, persons like Hyder (may their tribe increase), whose numbers are by no means insignificant, have tried to keep the subcontinent's civilisational integrity intact even today as intolerant groups from Bangladesh to India and Pakistan are busy harming it with "passionate intensity". This seems to be a permanent struggle. Ravan, the apparent symbol of evil, who fought Ram, was not really destroyed. His incarnations are always there. Hence, the annual ritual of Ravan burning. Likewise, the demon of 1947 has not gone away from the subcontinent.

That both the trends of civilisational integrity and attempts at disruption continue is evident from Anam Zakaria's recently published *The Footprints of Partition* which includes several descriptions like the following by people in India and Pakistan:

> As Rauf handed his passport to a Sikh official behind the counter, anxious to see his response to a Pakistani passport, he saw the officer's expression change into one of excitement. Confused, Rauf turned to see what the official was smiling about, but all he saw were more Pakistani men and women waiting in the line to get their passports stamped. Rauf was still standing there apprehensively when the official exclaimed, "*Oye dekh, ye saada apna hai*" (26).

Rauf, the Pakistani on a visit to the Ahmadi religious pilgrimage site in Indian Punjab, Qadian, was wondering as to why the officer had called him *saada apna* (one of our own). Moving to the next counter he had another unforgettable experience when the officer here yelled out, "*Oye Pathoo, oye dekh saada banda hai, changi taran dekhi, koi kisi kism ki gal baat na hoye*" (37).

The officer offered him a seat while he completed the paper work. He had told everyone in Punjabi that the man was one of their own; he should be looked after well and he should have no trouble. He came to know later that he was "one of our own" because his passport showed him as "born in Amritsar" (37). The old bonds have remained in place and are seen every now and then the way Hyder said. However, the other face of it, too, stays strong. Zakaria also describes the lecture of an imam while passing by a mosque in Pakistan. He was telling the congregation to be prepared to fight Hindus (India) and Jews (Israel) conspiring together to destroy Pakistan (245-246).

The struggle to keep the cultural and historical unity of the peoples of South Asia continues as forces of division are busy doing their work. The vision of Hyder is a significant strand for unity even though she admitted in her acceptance speech of Sahitya Akademi award that she was no stronger than a bird that lifts its feet towards the sky thinking that it would prevent the sky from falling (Introduction, *Season,* xx).

Hyder was a remarkable story teller who could hold the attention of readers in her narratives with a large canvas, stretching across times and climes. She had mastered the techniques and tools of her trade. In the Ph.D. proposal I had pledged to take a look at her craft, which I have done to some measure in the pages that follow. Hyder's innovative craft involved the use of multiple devices like interior monologue, stream of consciousness, dreams, diaries, letters and documents. *River of Fire* has been criticised by Thomas Palakeel for its apparent "lack of a strong emotional core and a greater sense of space and time and relentless drama" ("Experimental Novel" 294). In *River of Fire* free resort to multiple language and literary traditions is yet another difficulty for some readers. She did the translation of most of her fiction herself as she did not trust other people with her work. The only exceptions are two novellas, *Sita Haran (Sita Betrayed)* and *Housing Society*. Her translations into English from Urdu are "transcreations" and mostly freshly written versions of the original, their plots frequently changed, the organisation of the books re-ordered, sometimes even characters changed. Naturally, no writer will trust anyone to "translate" her work in this fashion except herself.

The narrative of *River of Fire* stretches over four distinct periods: the rise of Chandragupta in the 4th century BC, the end of Lodhi Dynasty and the beginning of the Mughal Empire in the 16th century AD, the British rule over the whole of India in the 19th century AD and the period from the start of World War II to soon after Independence and Partition towards the middle of the 20th century AD, a span of 2,400 years. It is a single, continuous story, an organic whole, but it could also be read as four different stories about, in Kumkum Sangari's words, the "loyalty to the idea of civilization that was wider, deeper and more compelling than its division into separate nations" (Configural 42). The narrative forms and techniques employed for telling such a large story (or stories) are bewildering for readers expecting a traditional novel or even anti-novel. Sangari comes to the defence of this original and unique form that arches over several genres which:

> span much of the history of the Indian novel: a "researched" historical novel, a mutiny novel (an anti-dote to Raj fantasies), a regional novel in the *shahr-ashob* tradition (lamenting the repeated decline and destruction of Awadh), a political "discussion" novel (which evolved from the dialogues in reformist polemical treatises), a historical romance (an iconic replay of Anglo-Indian fiction), a courtesan novel, an urban Lucknow-centred "college" story, a fictionalised female autobiography, a cosmopolitan novel (on émigrés and expatriates) ("Configural" 22).

As if all that is not enough, Hyder uses oral literary genres: folk tale, myth, legend, epic, poetry and *dastaan*. Sangari says:

> [t]his reshuffling of narrative arrogates the familiar liberty of the *dastaango* : characters, situations, episodes can disappear, change or be reinflected, details can be dropped or added, some sequences abbreviated and others expanded depending on the mood and context of the narration. ("Configural" 25)

Dastaan being interactive and dynamic, the same *dastaan* can be narrated entirely differently by different *dastaango*, or in different periods, locales and cultural climes. It also changes with the moods and wishes of the listener.

Hyder's style is deliberately open-ended, free-flowing, defying diktats of the traditional novel form. But the point is that the ambitious scale, the profound vision and grandeur of *River of Fire* could not be accommodated within a traditionally predetermined format. Only constant authorial innovativeness could carry it forward. The turbulent flow of this river into the sea required a freewheeling narrative style. In fact, there is ample indication of this in the following musing of Talat well before the second half of the novel begins:

> "There are many ways of telling a dastaan" she said. "How shall I begin? I don't know which characters are more important. Where did this story start? What was the climax? Who was the heroine? How should she have ended up? And who was the hero? Who is the listener of this story and who is the narrator? (184)

Hyder was certainly the most widely and well-read Urdu writer. She was also the most widely travelled. Her scholarship and global exposure bring a remarkable profundity to even her stray remarks, authorial observations as well as to the conversations of her educated characters. C M Naim in his introduction to *Season* writes that a reader not familiar with Urdu culture might look incredulously at the section of *Housing Society* where two journalists recite

> … bits of a "Progressive" poem. But most Urduwallas do quote poetry all the time, and what the two reporters do is no different from what so often takes place in any gathering of Urdu speakers after "the night has spread its dark tresses" and nostalgia reigns supreme. (xiii)

Hyder was an accomplished story teller who made many documentary films and wrote the dialogue for the Bollywood film *Ek Musafir Ek Hasina*. Naim writes that the narrative flow of *Sita Betrayed* and *The Housing Society* is "staccato and rapid" (Introduction xiii). It is like a fast-paced film:

> It means, for example, that there are no moments of reflection and introspection, nor are there any authorial asides. What we do get are auditory flotsam and

> jetsam—snatches of forgotten songs, bits of poetry, even old doggerel—functioning very much like the musical sound-track of a movie. They help to recreate the 'reality' of the events as located in historical times—what in cinematic terms would be called the *mise en scene*. (xiii)

Her detailed knowledge of country life, local dialects, folk lore and common people's esoteric religious beliefs and practices made her a remarkable story teller who had great empathy for the poor and the weak. In *Street Singers of Lucknow*, also published as *A Woman's Life*, her female lead characters come from the poorest of the poor backgrounds, sometimes forced to street-walk to keep alive, yet they are most compassionate, noble and secular persons trying to live life with dignity. Their religious beliefs (of those who have such beliefs) are simple, accommodative of others, and their rituals are less formal. Similarly, when Hyder writes about academic life in the 4th century BC India, or about philosophy, art and culture, she does so with the confidence that comes from extraordinary scholarship. In the research on her craft all these and other considerations have been weighed.

Keeping the significance of her work it can be safely said that Hyder scholarship has yet to begin fully, this research work being a very small, unsure, faltering step in that direction. There is a miniscule body of writing on her, which sure is going to grow fast in years ahead. What follows is a modest attempt to read and interpret a part of her work in a given perspective.

Construction of Muslim Women's Identity

The received wisdom is that collective identity formation (also, communal identity formation) and re-formation began in the subcontinent in response to British colonial dominance. The advent of the British in Bengal in the 17th century and later, all over India, exposed a chunk of Indians to an alternative, and dominant, cultural pattern, dress, manners and morals.

The British launched "a planned substitution" of Indian culture with that of the colonisers through a new system of higher education in English medium that sought to turn middle and upper class Indians into Brown Englishmen in their taste, cultural preferences and general orientation. The British, as advised by Thomas Babbington Macaulay, introduced the new education law in 1835 which soon produced a generation of such Indians. This was a turning point in formation of a new Westernised identity of better off Indians. The process beginning from Calcutta was not very different in other areas.

However, by the second half of the 19th century, another trend also began when Indians got conscious of their pre-British identity and cultural moorings that seemed to have been forgotten or overlaid with alien ideas and practices. The retrieval of older, "original" cultural roots by Indians (like other colonised people) is normally regarded as a response to colonial dominance, but Gail Minault in her essay "Sayyid Mumtaz Ali and *Tahzib un-Niswan*" argues that this is not the whole truth:

> Historians have often explained religious and social reform in India in the nineteenth century as the result of the Western impact upon the minds of men. Others have recognized that this was entirely too simple an explanation for the intellectual and social changes that took place in India and other places that fell under foreign colonial rule. The equation of Westernization and modernization has given way to a search for the indigenous sources of social change. (70)

This was a larger phenomenon in the 18th and 19th century Bengal, followed by other areas from the 19th century. The reforms (and reconstruction of identities began, as noted above, earlier in Bengal and concerned the Hindu *Bhadralok* society. Reforms (and construction of new identities) began in north Indian upper-class women soon. Like reforms in upper-class Hindu society, the reforms among Muslims, too, focused on improvement of Muslim women's condition and expansion of their capabilities. Also, like the larger reform among Hindu women, this, too, was placed within a patriarchal format. Widow remarriage was part of the reform movement amongst Muslims too.

The roots of British-inspired change in identities would go back to the 18th century, but a firm and clear policy of British-guided Indian education was laid down as early as 1803:

> The officers of the British East India Company had started taking interest in the education of Indians even in the 18th century, but it was not until 1813 that a clear mandate in that regard was announced. That year, from the first time, a clause was inserted in the East India Company Act, declaring that "it shall be lawful for the Governor-General in Council to direct that ... a sum of not less than one lac of rupees (Rs 100,000) in each year shall be set apart and applied to the revival and improvement of literature, and the encouragement of the learned natives of India, and for the introduction and promotion of a knowledge of the sciences among the inhabitants of the British territories in India. (Naim, "Prize Winning" 44)

The initiative was expanded in 1835 with Macaulay's initiative and in 1854, with the Education Despatch from the Board of Control in London, directing the East India Company to, *inter alia*, establish regional departments of public instruction and institution of universities in the Presidency towns of Calcutta, Madras and Bombay. Naim continues, "[The dispatch emphasised] the importance of encouraging the study of vernaculars as the medium for mass education…" (45). He points out,

> [It] further advocated the promotion of female education and Muslim education, the opening of schools and colleges for imparting technical instruction, and insisted on a policy of strict religious neutrality. In North India, the effects of these policies were felt with the extension of British authority over Delhi and the North-Western Frontier Provinces after 1803, over the Punjab after 1849, and over Oudh after 1856. The abortive revolt of 1857 did not significantly slow down the process; the policies of the Company were affirmed and continued by the Crown. (45)

The north Indian upper-middle and middle-class Muslims responded to the British initiative in two ways as far as the education and training of their women was concerned. The elite later opted for modern college and university education after initial resistance

for their daughters, along with supplementary religious education at home in most cases, while the middle class emphasised religious education and training for a domestic life. The latter wanted to create the new woman who was educated in Islamic scriptures, could do basic arithmetic, had some idea of literatures in their mother tongue, could read (without necessarily understanding) the Quran (in Arabic) prepare the family budget, look after the running of the household (as the husband worked in some office or ran some business). This sufficiently enlightened and fully literate woman was capable of raising children who grew up to be educated, responsible members of society.

To create that new Muslim woman, accomplished novelists wrote novels whose heroines provided the role model, others wrote detailed manuals for such women that contained information and instructions for them on every possible aspect of life which touched women as wives, mothers and members of the family:

> Writers who sought to defend Muslim culture through revitalizing family life by means of women's education include Maulvi Nazir Ahmed, whose novels *Mirat ul-Arus* (1869) and *Banat un-Na'ash* (1872) became the prototypes of a host of didactic social novels in Urdu. *Mirat ul-Arus* is constantly in print and was translated into English as the *Bride's Mirror* by G.E. Ward (London: 1903). Another writer of the same generation, Altaf Husain Hali, wrote *Majalis un-Nissa* (1874), a dialogue in story form advocating women's education.… *Majalis* was adopted as a textbook in vernacular girls' schools for several generations following its original publication and served as a prototype for numerous other edifying works for the education of women (Minault, "Sayyid Mumtaz Ali" 91-92).

By the first decade of the 20th century several women came into prominence as novelists and journalists. Sayyid Mumtaz Ali founded the influential weekly newspaper *Tahzib un-Niswan* in 1898 with his wife Muhammadi Begum, who went on to write several Urdu novels. This was followed by numerous similar Urdu magazines and journals for women. Nazar Sajjad Hyder (mother of Qurratulain Hyder) wrote novels entitled *Akhtarunissa Begum*, *Ah-i-Mazluman* (1918), *Harman Nasib* (1920) and *Jan Baz* (1935):

These are only a few of the early Urdu novels, of varying literary value, but important as sources of social history. A good survey of these often obscure works is contained in Shaista Akhtar Banu Suhrawardy (Begum Ikramullah), *A Critical Survey of the Development of Urdu Novel and Short Story* (London:1945) (92).

The body of fiction, personality development manuals, general instruction and etiquette books and articles, magazines, journals and pamphlets by men and women for the benefit of women, mostly in Urdu, produced between the second half of the 19th century till the beginning of the second half of the 20th century, meant for the edification of women was tremendous. The Muhammadan Educational Conference at Aligarh (which established a women's education section early in the first decade of the 20th century), Anjuman-i-Himayat-i-Islam in Lahore and Anjuman-i-Islam in Bombay were some of the foci of the movement for the construction of the new Muslim women.

There were two different strands in the movement: one worked for the exposure of Muslim women to the new Western ideas of sciences, arts, social and family organization without challenging too strongly the Muslim patriarchal order. There was a considerable number of women in this group who had abandoned purdah and adapted to the dress, table manners, literary texts and refinements of the wives of British officers of the ICS. These women belonged to the new class of Indians whose husbands were in the ICS, provincial civil services, judiciary and higher echelons of government medical or engineering services. Attia Hosain, Begum Ikramullah and Qurratulain Hyder's mother, Nazar Sajjad Hyder, were such women. "Memsaheb", Salman's mother in *Housing Society*, performs her duties of a graceful hostess to the British official Mr Johnson while at home she organises regular majlis on Thursday with the help of Buta Begum.

Qurratulain Hyder's father, Sajjad Hyder Yaldrim, was a well-known writer of Urdu and a civil servant. He was also a champion of women's education and emancipation. When the time of marriage came, he declared that he would not marry a woman who observed purdah. He would have a wife who could walk in step with him and struggle for the cause

of women's education and enlightenment. Nazar was one such woman. By 1910 quite a few Muslim women had emerged in larger towns and cities, who had abandoned purdah, had acquired modern education and were helping the cause of women's freedom and development. "Among these modern women, girls of the Tyebji family in Bombay were luckier as they used to roam free, without purdah, and often went to England," Qurratulain Hyder writes in her three-volume family saga *Kar-e-Jahan Daraz Hai*, (162).

Women like Nazar, Begum Rokeya (in Bengal) and Tyebji women (in Bombay) were not attacking Islam, but only such of its customs that they thought had outlived their utility. Nazar prayed five times a day, regularly read from the Quran and observed fasts during Ramzan. However, she was also a classical Indian music (vocal and instrumental) player of considerable perfection. The Hyder household used to have an expert music teacher in residence at their home and government bungalows where they used to live during the service of Sajjad Hyder. Nazar practiced her art with the resident ustad. Qurratulain, too, studied Indian music from early age and pursued an advanced course at Bhatkhande College of Music in Lucknow. Till then women of the Muslim elite did not do so.

Towards the dawn of freedom many Muslim women from the elite, particularly from north India, were equipped with modern education. Keeping in view the need of modern, well-placed, university-educated Muslim young men for wives of similar education and training who could move in society and mix with similarly placed women from other sections, including English women. Mumtaz Ali, who brought out the weekly newspaper *Tahzib un-Niswan* with his wife Muhammadi Begum in 1898, had made elaborate arrangements for her education: "…Mumtaz Ali taught her Arabic and Persian; an English woman came to teach her English; a Hindu woman, Hindi: and a neighbourhood boy mathematics". (Minault, "Syed Mumtaz" 78)

Meanwhile, the middle class and lower middle-class also gave a systematic education to their women, but it did not contain English, and often no geography or history. This education produced women who knew arithmetic, reading, home budget accounting, letter writing, religious texts and books of cookery. They were also taught basics of

health and nutrition and rudiments of Islamic law Sharia. An elaborate though simple, curriculum was produced to this end. In 1905 came Maulana Ashraf Ali Thanawi's exhaustive, single volume-monumental curriculum, *Bihishti Zewar* (Ornament of Paradise) that sought to teach every imaginable subject in a simple language that new Muslim homemakers needed to know to live a pious life as a Muslim wife, mother and daughter-in-law. Since 1905 it has constantly been in print in India and Pakistan. One of the largest-selling books in the subcontinent, available from big cities to mofussil towns and rural markets, for over a century it has been part of the dowry given by parents to their daughters at the time of their marriage in most of the middle-class and lower middle-class Sunni homes. The book begins from the Urdu alphabet, word formation, sentence formation, to letter writing and reading of simple texts.

Barbara Daly Metcalf, who has produced a "partial translation" of *Bihishti Zewar* with commentary under the apt title *Perfecting Women* (for that is what the book intended to do) writes in the preface to her over 400-page book:

> Among Indian reformist works, the Bihishti Zewar is especially important because it explicates reformist teachings for women. It presents in principle and in detail the normative rule for ritual and social life common to Hanafi Muslims then and now, and it attempts to shape a specific temperament of moderation, piety and control. By elaborating these teachings in a particular context, it offers rich descriptions of the everyday life of the relatively privileged classes in turn of the century north India, providing information on ways of thought and personal formation, as well as on family life, social relations, household management and encounters with new institutions and inventions. Throughout, nothing is more striking than the extent to which the work treats women and not as essentially the same, in context to European works directed towards women at this time. (preface vii-viii)

Maulana Thanawi was an *aalim* (religious scholar) from the Darul-Uloom at Deoband. He was part of a larger Deobandi reform movement. The main sources of response to the challenge of women's enlightenment were Aligarh and Deoband since the first decade of

the twentieth century, even though they had begun, indirectly, in the second half of the 19th century. The earlier phase sought to reform women by reforming men. The second began with the writing of *Bihishti Zewar* and the establishment of a women's college simultaneously at Aligarh.

It is interesting to note that Sir Syed was against giving Western education to women as he feared that if they talked about college education to Muslim women, the parents of male students studying at his Mohammedan Anglo Oriental (MAO) College at Aligarh (which became Aligarh Muslim University in 1920) would withdraw their wards in angry protest. He knew that his colleagues and he had been able to persuade parents to send their sons to the college against their reservations about the new-fangled ideas of the *firangis*. Adding modern education for women would be the last proverbial straw that would break the camel's backbone. Sir Syed died in 1898. Within the next decade the women's college was started by Sheikh Abdullah in 1905. By then the resistance to modern education for both boys and girls had weakened considerably and acceptance for such education had developed in other centres like Bombay, Lahore and Calcutta.

Incidentally both Sir Syed and Maulana Qasim Nanautawi, founders of MAO (later AMU) and Darul Uloom Deoband respectively were disciples of the same teacher at Delhi College. Sir Syed stood for cooperation with British rulers and modern education for Muslims while Maulana Nanautawi fought the British in 1857 and opposed Western education. Darul Uloom was established in 1866 and MAO college came up in 1875.

Response to the challenges of modernity came from both Aligarh and Deoband (along with other centres) in different ways. When the time of Partition came round Muslim women (upper, middle and lower-middle class north Indian) of broadly two types were there: those who had got a private education in Urdu, Persian, Arabic, Islamic Studies and arithmetic and were home-makers, and those who had got modern education at colleges, and universities.

Both types of women are there in Qurratulain Hyder's fiction. For instance, there is the wife of the collector, Anjuman Ara, a religious woman from inside, but an impeccable Memsaheb in her demeanour, an Indian woman who could socialise with the English wives of collectors who were Englishmen, on equal terms. Mrs Anjuman Ara Mirza at her dinner table:

> At the head of the table, Memsaheb wearing an off-white, silk, gold-bordered Parsi style sari from Surat and a fur stole brought at Whiteways of Calcutta, was busy cutting the roast. Her honey-brown hair was clustered over her forehead and ears in accordance with the recent fashion and she was wearing Western style earrings with gold chains on the end of which hung two large pearls…. Memsaheb was partly of British stock but she knew very little English, and before marriage she had been raised in strict *purdah* in her mother's home. But the servants, confused by her light complexion and western features, called her "Memsaheb" instead of "Begum Saheba". (*Housing* in *Sound* 133)

In the next few lines, the writer describes the milieu of Indian Civil Service officers' families:

> Johnson Saheb [the Commisioner] praised the hostess on her dinner service and Memsaheb told him that the Russian tableware had come from Peshawar where there had been a famous store with Russian crockery before the 1917 Revolution. After that Johnson Sahib exchanged views with Collector Saheb about the next day's hunt (134).

In Attia Hosain's *Sunlight on a Broken Column*, another Muslim ICS officer's wife, Zahra, is described in similar terms:

> Zahra had changed very much in her appearance, speech and mannerisms. I knew she had not changed within herself. She was now playing the part of the modern wife as she had once played the part of a dutiful purdah girl. Her present

> sophistication was as suited to her role as her past modesty had been. Just as she had once said her prayers five times a day, she now attended social functions morning, afternoon and evening (140).

It is no coincidence that London-based Hosain was Hyder's senior contemporary and the two knew each other and were on friendly terms. Both came from an elite background; both worked at the BBC, Hyder for a shorter period. Hyder's father was in Civil Service as was Hosain's husband, posted at the time of Independence to the newly-constituted Indian High Commission in London. The two had seen life in Civil Service, its daily rhythms and rituals and the ways of the Civil Service officers' *memsahebs*. They have portrayed the Muslim women of other classes as deftly. When the Partition came, Hosain did not accept it, like Qurratualin Hyder, with the difference that she was not forced to go to Pakistan even for a short while:

> My mind could not accept the division of India, nor could I have belief in the logistics and legalities which subsumed the ideals of freedom and independence. What then became of choices? There were not just two-India and Pakistan – but a third, Britain. There was to be renouncing of nationality; everyone from the Indian subcontinent had British passports in 1947. We had a legal right to be British citizens, which I exercised… I [also] respected and obeyed the laws of the country of my birth where I was recognised to have the rights of someone of Indian origin. (*Distant Traveller* 21)

Before coming to that, a few other points here. The reform movements were led by two sets of people, called, for convenience, modernists and religionists. The former created women like the two in above excerpts. Didur quotes Shahnaz Rouse:

> Both modernists and religionists focused their activity on the Muslim community, using religious identity as a primary basis for organizing resistance-cum accommodation to colonial rule. Culture – Muslim culture – was the raison d'etre of their efforts. In the public realm, membership in colonial institutions was

> accepted and even encouraged by both elements. Islamic identity, was, however, to be maintained in the private realm, i.e., the family. Both groups favoured education for women, but segregated education, emphasizing religious content and domestic training. Muslim identity and respectability seemed to reside in the "protection" (read segregation and seclusion) of women.… (*Unsettling Partition* 105)

Most upper-middle and middle-class women continue to get similar religious education and training at home supplementing their modern education. The two memsahibs quoted in the preceding excerpts had also got this home education and training in their girlhood. Such forging of "identity" of girls, and often boys as well, is a continuous affair in the middle and upper-middle classes. Boys are spared the feminine etiquette, cooking, sewing, embroidery and training in lady-like conduct, including slow, low-pitch speech.

Qurratulain Hyder's Muslim characters represent an entire spectrum of class, education levels (from West-educated to the literate and unlettered).In most of her upper-class women the religiosity of early years wears off and a certain secular, cosmopolitan and nationalist world view (like Mahatma Gandhi's and Nehru's) overlays the original religious perspective. The closest to come to the Nehru-Gandhi worldview is the heroine of *My Temples Too*, Rakhshanda. Her nationalism could more appropriately be likened to that of Maulana Azad's, Maulana Madni's, Dr Zakir Hussain's and General Shehnawaz's who opposed Partition and left defeated. Or, for that matter, like the British-educated Champa Ahmad's who chooses to stay back and live a life of promised prosperity.

Both Qurratualin Hyder and Attia Hosain, excerpts from whose novel *Sunlight on a Broken Column* were cited earlier, opposed Partition, but were defeated. Her properties looted and expropriated, dodging violent mobs, Hyder and her mother had nowhere to run, except to Pakistan, from where she went away to work in Britain. From there she was invited to India by Jawaharlal Nehru. She breathed her last in Noida, near Delhi, in 2007, away from her family in Pakistan, a full six decades after Partition. She had taken her mother to London with her and brought her back to India. The mother died in Mumbai, where Qurratulain worked with *The Illustrated Weekly of India*.

The case of Hosain was similar in some ways. She went to London with her husband in 1947 before Partition. She did not return to a truncated India as it was not the place she knew, and she had less reason to go to Pakistan as she was from Lucknow, not Lahore. She stayed in Britain till her death at the age of 85.

Rakhshanda, Zehra and the Collector's wife belonged to the same upper class of Muslims as did Hyder and Hosain. However, Hyder's women came from all classes, beginning from the elite to the middle, lower middle and poorest of the poor classes. The heroine of *Street Singers*, Rashke Qamar, is among the poorest of poor, who performs at *melas* and in streets for small change and (as alleged by her landlady) streetwalks to complement her meager income. Later, she begins to earn some more money by reciting Urdu poetry at *mushairas*, only to squander it on babas and fakirs who claim to trace the father of her daughter, who promised marriage, but disappeared. Waiting for him, the years slowly pass away and her daughter grows up. She learns that the man was sighted in the newly-created Pakistan. She goes there, taking along her daughter, illegally, without travel documents, intending to hand over the daughter to her father to get her married and settled before she returns to India. In Pakistan, she fails to meet the man, her daughter is murdered by gangsters. She returns home to Lucknow where she feels she belongs. There is another Muslim woman in *Street Singers*:

> Like the old woman Sharifan – a destitute widow who was saying her Isha prayer in a corner of the shrine…. She went through the ritual movements and kept repeating a few jumbled verses of the Quran, for she did not know how to say her ritual prayers properly. All her life, whenever she could get some respite from her backbreaking labour, she conversed with God in the same haphazard manner…. Technically, she should be the first to enter the gates of Paradise.(*Street Singers* 5).

There are Hyder's women like Sharifan and Rashke Qamar who live on the margins, and are almost ignored by patriarchy and allowed to live on the margins of society as if there is going to be no difference whether they are alive or dead.

At the other end is Jehan Ara, the nawab's daughter in *Fireflies in the Mist*, who is timid, quiet, well-behaved in a ladylike way. She is not a part of the revolutionary activities of her closest friends because she has been brought up as a member of a highly conservative society. The nawab, a patron of the Muslim League, and a highly cultured, polite person, is in the League because he thinks Congress Party, backed by Hindu Mahasabha, Hindu big businessmen and landlords cannot be considerate to Muslims. Jehan Ara got college education like her free-spirited friends Deepali and Rosie, but remains conservative. Her father says too much education is not good for women. He does not quantify how much is too much. Of all the young women in *Fireflies* Jehan Ara is the most firmly caught in the web of patriarchy. Instead of marrying Rehan, her cousin with whom she is in love (cousin marriage being common among Muslims) and going away with him, she marries a much older, fat widower with children, because her mother wants it. Her son, a Pakistan Air Force pilot, is killed in the war and her entire family, including her, is killed by Bangladeshi freedom fighters.

In many cases the Partition of India also loosened patriarchy's firm grip on women's lives. Young Muslim women going from what remained of India after Partition were snatched from their caravans on the long land route, or from trains by Sikh and Hindu marauders, raped and murdered or converted to the religion of the captors, married to them and kept in their homes as wives. The women who could finally reach Pakistan knew that patriarchy could not save life, limb or honour and it was merely an intrusion. The able-bodied men and women who ultimately reached Pakistan found the mad race for shelter, jobs, and even good education for their children a pretty steep climb. Women who were secluded in India were forced by the sheer need for survival in Pakistan to stir out and find a living. This unpleasant reality had a welcome effect also as it loosened the control of patriarchy on them. Thus a new Muslim woman was constructed with the Partition. This woman could go freely to college, even if it was a co-ed college. Chhoti Bitiya and Suraiya, two young women from India who had migrated to Pakistan, find adjusting to an upwardly mobile, opportunity-grabbing and money-grabbing elite extremely difficult. Yet, they settle into their new roles, which are quite different from their patriarchal stereotypes. The same happened to Hindu and Sikh women in India.

Such ways of coping and the resultant dismantling of patriarchal control on women's movement outside home and the end of veiling before the males senior to one's husband was prevalent in West-Punjab among Hindu women till Partition. Anjali Bharadwaj Datta quotes Karuna Chanana: "Hence, partition, though it narrowed the physical spaces, enlarged the social spaces available to women" ("Gendering" 2229). Datta is writing of Punjabi refugee women in India:

> Partition pushed women into fashioning new survival strategies and opened up new avenues of education, training and employment for them and women acquired the status of sustainers, as boundaries between private and public shifted back and forth to accommodate this reorganisation. However, women's entrance into the public spaces was legitimized on the basis of women's domestic roles as wives, mothers and daughters. The questions associated with domesticity were evoked, like those of care, self-suffering and family obligations even as women's coming out was justified as the demands of the displaced nation, communities in need of survival and families bereft of a bread earner. ("Gendering" 2229)

This description of Punjabi (Hindu and Sikh) women refugees in Delhi could as well be a description of the Muslim refugee women in Karachi, like Salma Mirza and Suraiya, who are bread earners (the former has an ailing mother and a communist brother languishing in jail, while the latter has an old mother).

Though formal western-style education for Muslim girls in Bengal would have begun as early as the setting up of four schools for Muslim girls in Calcutta by Ms. Cook in 1822, and the 19th century shows a steady rise in formal education for Muslim women all over Bengal, even leading to the first Muslim headmistress of a school (Khairennesa of Sirajgunj Hosenpur Girls' School in 1895) and the first Muslim lady doctor (Latifunnessa who passed from the Campbell Medical School in Calcutta in 1895), for some reasons, the focus of many researchers of re-construction of Muslim women's identity in the nineteenth century has been largely placed on north India, and to some extent, Bhopal in middle India and Bombay in the south-west. Only the renowned author and reformer

Rokeya Sakhawat Husain, Khujista Akhtar Banu Suhrawardy (mother of undivided Bengal CM and later PM of Pakistan Husain Shaheed Suhrawardy), who was the first Muslim woman to pass the Senior Cambridge Examination and get a degree from the University of Calcutta, and Khujista's niece, Begum Shaista Akhtar Banu (later Begum Ikramullah), who had a PhD from London University, were among the Bengali Muslim women better-known in Muslim circles in the rest of undivided India.

In contrast to this penumbral view of Bengali Muslim women by the bulk of the subcontinent, Hyder's novel *Fireflies in the Mist* is a mine of Muslim women's personality "types" (even though the charismatic and most powerful female character is the heroine, Deepali Sarkar). *Fireflies* offers a close view of sections of Bengali Muslims, from the poor fishing community of the Sunderbans to the fabulously rich Nawab of Dhaka, from communist Muslims to pious maulvis.

The nawab has a cousin (daughter of father's brother) he wants to marry. The young woman also likes her cousin. But he is married off to an ill-tempered woman by his parents and his cousin is married to an indigent Syed maulvi on the false assumption that being a high-caste spiritual teacher, he is a fit bridegroom for a princess even if he is indigent. The cousin's wealth is appropriated by the nawab's estate. Always guilt-stricken by this turn of events, the nawab sends his cousin's son, Rehan (the hero) to study at London School of Economics, from where he returns after finishing his education as a staunch communist. His mother spends her entire life dutifully serving his father as a contented religious woman because she is brought up to be an obedient wife, even if her husband could have been one of the myriad servants in her parental home. This generation of elite Bengali Muslim women, born at the turn of the century, was often constructed by patriarchy as uncritical, blindly religious people who did not think about their rights. The nawab's daughter, Jehan Ara, niece of the nawab's cousin married off to the maulvi, is no more empowered. She studies at college with the revolutionary Deepali, is most considerate to her (and others), takes everyone as her equal despite great differences in stations and is impeccably well-behaved. She finishes college like everyone else, but can't think outside the patriarchal framework.

She likes Rehan (rather, adores him) and Rehan also has a soft spot for her. Even though the nawab is deeply annoyed with Rehan, whose espousal of communism is an act of provocation and even treason to him, yet he wants his daughter to be married to this man. As Rehan is away for some party work in some other area of the country (in undivided India) the nawab's wife rushes their daughter through marriage with a grossly unsuitable widower. Before the marriage, the nawab frantically tries to find Rehan who has gone incommunicado. Finally, the nawab accepts the marriage. Jehan Ara doesn't utter a word. Hers was the salient woman character type in the early parts of twentieth century.

However, Yasmin Majid, a friend of Deepali and Jehan Ara and an East Bengali maulvi's daughter, is far more outgoing and a Kathak dancer. She is completely unlike a maulvi's daughter and a full-fledged rebel. She stages dance shows all over the world. However, after the Partition of India she discovers to her horror that foreign Kathak connoisseurs prefer dancers from India, not someone like her, who is from Pakistan. This unfunny turn of events resonates with a similar situation in the *River of Fire* in which a character within days of Partition corrects (in his heart) another character who tells a group of Westerners how great was Indian civilization of Mohenjodaro and Harappa. The newly minted Pakistani corrects her in his heart: No, it is Pakistani. This is an example of partition reconstructing personalities. Also, Yasmin and Jehan Ara represent two Muslim women at two opposite ends of the spectrum.

Another partition, that of Pakistan, brings along a more fierce, assertive and confident generation of middle-class Muslim women in East Bengal, which becomes Bangladesh. Najma Najmus Sehar, a leftist gun-runner of the Mukti Bahini freedom fighters is risk-taking and proud to be a Bengali: A niece of Rehan and Jehan Ara from a poorer background, she does not think much of her earlier generation, except the visiting Deepali, who is her heroine, even though Deepali moved away from revolution years ago to settle comfortably in West Indies with her rich lawyer husband.

Thus, through her work discussed above, Hyder portrays Partition and weaves a rich tapestry of identities. An admirer of Bengal, east and west, she used to say that *Fireflies,*

set largely in Bengal through the Partition of India and that of Pakistan, was her favourite novel. She knew her Bengal and Bengali women. She visited the erstwhile East Pakistan even during her stay in Karachi. Hyder has created a powerful rainbow of female characters in diverse locales – from Karachi (Salma, Suraiya) through Lucknow (Rakhshanda, Rashke Qamar) to Dhaka (Yasmin, Najma).

There are a number of works on Qurratulain Hyder's writing available in Urdu: books, articles, her interviews, and PhD theses at least by two scholars. Most of them are concerned with her fiction, naturally. However, one PhD thesis, by Anwarul Haque, is on her non- fictional prose. Published in book form already, it is entitled simply, *Qurratualin Hyder Ki Ghair Afsanwi Nasr* (Qurratulain Hyder's non-fictional prose). Published by Educational Publishing House, Delhi (2014), the 485 page book tries to establish that in its essentials, Hyder's non-fiction writing carries the imprint of her fiction, like the use of creative imagination, elements of narrative, metaphor, clear portrayal of persons, wit and humour and allusions from literary canon. This book contains analysis of Hyder's articles, reportages, her translations and a collection of letters written to her by other writers published by her with an introduction. It also refers to a letter written by Sir Syed Ahmad Khan to her great grandfather, Mir Bandey Ali, in 1855, that is, two years before the 1857 uprising. Much of her non-fiction has the attention-grabbing qualities of her fiction writing style. The following excerpt from an article shows her seriousness about a liberal, feminist perspective and her readiness to accept the importance of Progressive Writers' Movement, of which she had never been a part. In an obituary to Ismat Chughtai, a literary adversary (and a personal friend) Hyder writes:

> To me the criterion of a good story is that one reads it repeatedly, and always wants to return to it. Some of the stories of Manto and Ismat are of that high standard.
>
> Once in a while I used to call her Lady Genghis Khan because she was a Chughtai (Mongol) horse-borne archer and warrior of the battlefield of Urdu, whose arrows always hit the bull's eye.
>
> The naturalness and spontaneity of her stories and the special flavour of her language (which is common to women of her clan) was largely because of her

> being born in that language tradition. Ismat Apa was an affectionate, outspoken, brazen-faced, humourous person (qtd in Haque, 154-155 My translation).

The following is an English translation of an excerpt from her reportage *Sitambar ka Chand* (September Moon) written after her visit to Japan to attend a world writers' conference in which writers from 128 countries participated. The report's title alludes to a Japanese national cultural festival celebrated from September 13 to 15, in which the Japanese watch the moon. The festival and associated rituals (observed in some neighbouring countries also) is an import from Shang dynasty China (circa 1766 BC). The excerpt from the reportage:

> The French are flamboyant; the English, taciturn. Steinbeck turned out to be like his books. He carries a facial expression of being permanently amused. Once he told us he had got so much used to writing that he does not allow his wife to write the record of household expenses; he does it himself. The Bulgarian writer looks as if he is coming straight out of the studies after playing a role in a Central European detective film. The Brazilian writer, too, looks like a Latin actor. Europeans and South Americans are vehemently chivalrous, as usual. The Anglo-Saxon writers are, well, Anglo-Saxon. (qtd in Haque, 191 Translation mine).

In the chapter on Hyder's translation Haque, *inter alia*, talks about the literary merit of her translations/transcreations/rewriting and re-creating of Urdu originals into English. In this research on her "non-fictional writings" the discussion on her fictional writing is included to consider her translation abilities, not her fiction writing as such, Haque explains. The relevance of the chapter on Letters *written to her* (and a letter each to her father and great grandfather) would have been thin if not for her "collection" and introduction which show her authorial competence.

Another PhD thesis in book form is *Qurratulain Hyder Tehriron ke Aiane Mein* (Qurratualain Hyder in the Light of her Writings) by Dr Akhtar Sultana. This 925 page

thick tome, published in 2005, is the printed version of a thesis for which she was awarded her doctorate in 1985.

Despite its forbidding thickness, it is not difficult to read through because what she says is mostly the impressions (as opposed to profound analysis) of other writers and critics on Hyder's works. There is no single unifying, definitive "theory" that can be said to be running from cover to cover, defining the book as an organic whole. The book has been organised in two sections: the first (spread over 244 pages) deals with Hyder's biographical details, and the second contains largely impressionistic writings on her short stories novels, novellas, reportages, articles and translations. This section also contains writing on her "intellectual and artistic style as well as a list of her publications and references." This book is largely an aggregation of available information. It has been published by Maktaba Sher-o-Hikmat, Somajigoda, Hyderabad. It can be a useful resource for preliminary literature survey on Hyder.

Nawai Sarosh: Qurratulain Hyder se Baat Cheet is an interesting collection of Hyder's interviews. It does not include many of her interviews, particularly those taken for radio and TV and those taken in Europe, America and other regions outside South Asia. Compiled by Dr Jamil Akhtar, this 432-page book contains 19 long interviews by different persons over the decades. Amusingly, Hyder often comes across as a peevish person who frequently snaps and barks at the lesser-known interviewers whom she addresses dismissively. Still, with all her quirks and idiosyncracies as evident in the following, she ultimately settles down to meaningful conversation:

> Jamil Akhtar: Well, as you have said, you have deleted some words and sentences (from *Aag ka Darya*). Do the Indian editions carry those parts or they are still deleted (from Indian editions also)?
>
> Qurratulain Hyder: Can't remember…can't remember at all…. I am fed up…. Move on…. (41)

However, in Pakistan, in a group discussion, she talks in a different vein:

Ahmed Ali Khan: Would you like to tell us about the trends in South Asian literature. For instance, what is being written in India's regional languages, like Bangla?

Qurratualin Hyder: Bangla literature has always been of a high standard.

Ahmed Ali Khan: How is the Progressive Writers Movement doing? At one time it was strong.

Qurratulain Hyder: Progressive Writers Movement is dead now. Among the old notables only Ali Sardar Jaffry and Kaifi Azmi are alive. However, in India's other languages, particularly regional languages, new trends are emerging. There is the literature of the oppressed classes, which is a reflection of their struggle for survival. The people known in India as Dalits are aware of their rights. Then there is the literature of people who have been directly involved in social and political struggles. Parts of literature created in this context are particularly very powerful. Then, literature produced in regional languages like Marathi, Gujarati, Malyalam and, in particular, Bangla, has great life and energy. In Hindi also, high-quality literature is being produced. Hindi short stories have great vitality even though poetry is weaker (288).

In another interview, answering a question regarding Salman Rushdie's remark in his anthology on Indian Writing in English by Granta where he said that the only noteworthy Indian literature is in English, or something to the effect, Hyder says: "[It] is probably because Rushdie likes to make sensational statements and provoke debate. And, where has he read literature in Tamil, Bengali, Malyalam. Or, in Punjabi, Gujarati?" (338)

As (rightly) claimed by the compiler, the interviews put together in this book fill gaps in knowledge about Hyder's worldview, her own ideas of what her life and work has been all about. They also allow a window on her mind that is different from other windows created by her fiction and non- fiction.

Qurratualin Hyder: *Shakhsiyat aur Funn* (Qurratualin Hyder: The Person and her Art) edited by Humayun Zafar Zaidi, is a thoughtful collection of new and old writings on the subject, published as a special issue of *Kitabnuma,*a monthly Urdu journal, in 2007 as a festschrift celebrating her life and work. This 236-page journal contains some of the finest and most profound writings on Hyder and her work. There are some of the most incisive and insightful articles included in this collection. Virtually every contributor is a formidably learned Urdu critic with a deep, enduring interest in Hyder's work. Some of them like, Sayyid Hamid, are her personal friends. Others, like the inimitable Urdu critic and man of letters, Shamim Hanafi, are persons whose opinion the usually dismissive Hyder would have listened to with respect, even though Hanafi belongs to the generation after her. There is Jamil Akhtar (the research scholar whose compilation of Hyder interviews, including his own long, stormy interview with her, referred to a couple of pages earlier),whose 16-page article entitled *Daftar-e-hasti mein thi zarrin waraq teri hyat* (in life's log, yours was the golden page).

Saiyid Hamid of the IAS at one time was looked upon as a probable bridegroom for Hyder after she did her MA in English from Lucknow University. Hamid had done his MA in English from Aligarh Muslim University five years before her. None of the two seemed keen on the idea, nor were they ever linked romantically. Yet, the two admired each other's extraordinariness and were friends till Hyder's last breath. In his article Hamid talks mostly about Hyder as a person, eschewing any analysis of her work, advisedly. Hamid felt strongly that critical enquiry should be left to trained critics and theorists. The following is a poignant description of his last meeting with Hyder:

> I met Qurratulain Hyder for the last time in Noida's Kailash Hospital. She had been admitted to the ICU. When I announced my name, she opened her eyes and stretched her hand towards me as a gesture of friendship and for solace. She said, "You are an *Allahwallah* (pious soul). Please pray for my health". I thought, God, since when I became a pious soul? However, I knew God answers even the sinner's prayers. God might keep me in the company of even more blessed souls than *Allahawallahs.* However, this time my prayers were not answered. (29 Translation mine)

In the next para he talks about the burial of the same person whom he had seen 62 years ago as a vibrant 19-year-old beauty in her bloom, pulsating with vitality, full of dreams:

> It is afternoon. Outside Jamia Millia Islamia's Jama Masjid, near the Muslim cemetery people herded in four to five groups were waiting for someone. They were waiting for Qurratulain Hyder. Sixty two years ago, Saiyid Hamid had waited for Qurratulain Hyder in Bulandshahr's Civil Lines, with eagerness and enthusiasm. Today, in August 2007, too, he was waiting for her cortege to arrive. He shouldered her bier and offered a few fistfuls of earth on her grave. (29)

Besides this personal account from a highly respected person among Indian Muslims (and among many others), there are incisive, profound and worthwhile articles on Hyder's writing by erudite scholars of Urdu, the foremost among them being Shamim Hanafi. He writes: "Qurratulain Hyder's sensibility demands, for its identification and interpretation, a simultaneous analysis at several levels and in different dimensions" (44). This slim, 236-page festschrift is an extremely valuable reference for Hyder students and scholars.

Another useful reference is Irtiza Karim's (ed) *Qurratulain Hyder:Ek Mutala.* This 592-page book is a collection of articles. In the compiler's note he writes, inter alia:

> From "Sheeshe ke Ghar" to "Roshni ki Raftaar" and from *Mere bhi Sanamkhane* to *Chandni Begum,* in her body of work she [Hyder] has populated an entire world of meaning, to enjoy which in full measure a history consciousness is inevitable. That is why critics have erred wherever they have ignored Hyder's historical vision.

Urdu Adab ki Aham Khwateen Novelnigaar is a 352-page book by Neelam Farzana. Three generations of women writers from Qurratulain Hyder's family on her mother's side are featured here: Qurratulain; her mother Nazar; and the sister of Nazar's father, Akbari Begum. Farzana observes that till Qurratulain Hyder's emergence, "the novel's canvas was limited. With her exquisite art, Hyder brought a universal sweep to it. Her novels embraced the universe of the human mind and the East and West with their

thought and philosophy to the extent that before her brilliance all other novelists dimmed" (8 Translation mine).

To name some other books, Asloob Ahmad Ansari's *Urdu ke Pandrah Novel* features Hyder's *Aag ka Darya*. This book ploughs a lone furrow, dismissing the highly-acclaimed *Aag ka Darya* as a work of "shoddy craftsmanship". Ansari is also peeved at Hyder for her virtual omission of medieval India which marked the highest achievement of Muslims (178). *Qurratulain Hyder Aur Novel ka Jadeed Funn*, a slim, 120-page book by Prof. Abdus Salam, seeks to analyse and evaluate Hyder's *Mere bhi Sanamkhane*, *Safina-e-Gham-e-Dil* and *Aag ka Darya*. A considerable part of the book is dedicated to understanding what the technique of "stream of consciousness" is as seen in Dorothy Richardson, Virginia Woolf and James Joyce. Then the professor proceeds to declare that literary critics who attribute the stream of consciousness to Hyder's writing are absolutely wrong as per the standard definitions of the technique. Prof Abdus Salam quotes Hyder's letter to the editor of *Saqi* magazine in which she said everything she wrote before *Aag ka Darya* was "bakwaas" (non-sense). The professor concludes, "even after accepting the flaws in her novels, none of them can be labeled as 'bakwaas'." (119) *Qurratulain Hyder ke Novelon Mein Tarikhi Shaoor* by Khurshid Anwar, as the title suggests, is aimed at finding "historical consciousness" in Hyder's novels, most of which are placed in a particular historical context. This 200-page book talks about the 2400-year span of *Aag ka Darya*, the historical situation around the World War II, India's independence and Partition in *Mere bhi Sanamkhane* and the historicity surrounding other works. Razia Abidi's 160-page book, *Teen Novel Nigar* discusses Qurratulain Hyder, Intizar Husain and Abdullah Hussein and some of their works rather cursorily.

Two Urdu magazines, *Naya Daur* (an Uttar Pradesh government publication), Lucknow, and *Urdu Duniya* published special issues commemorating Hyder's life and achievements. *Naya Daur* dedicated its February-March 2009 issue and *Urdu Duniya* its October 2007 issue to the subject. A number of articles in them were reproductions of old, short articles. *Naya Daur* reproduced from *Urdu Duniya's* special issue also.

No sustained, book length study of Hyder's work is available in English. The PhD thesis of Christina Oesterheld (teaching at the Department of Modern South Asian Languages and Literatures of South Asia, Heidelberg University) on Hyder's work is available in German only and the MA dissertation of Valerio Pietrangelo (the translator of *Sita Haran* into Italian) is available in Italian only. He had worked on *River of Fire* for his MA. The nearest one comes to having a book-length work in English is a compilation by Rakhshanda Jalil, *Qurratulain Hyder and the River of Fire: The Meaning, Scope and Significance of her Legacy*. A similar work is *Annual of Urdu Studies* issue of 2008 which devoted a section of the thick volume to Hyder who had passed away recently. This section carries a poem in Urdu by Zeeshan Sahil, some pictures of Qurratulain Hyder, a humorous letter in *Bambiya Urdu* to the editor, Umar Memon, articles in English by some of the better-known aficionados like Ritu Menon, M. Asaduddin, Khalid Hasan and Laurel Steele, among others.

Other edited anthologies in English on Urdu novel writing also carry independent writeups on her, or she is given proper space by the single author of the book. Some of the better-known articles in English are listed here: "Love's repertoire: Qurratulain Hyder's *River of Fire*", "Joint Narratives Separate Nations: Qurratulain Hyder's *Aag Ka Darya*", and "The Configural Mode: Aag ka Darya" by Kumkum Sangari; "The All Embracing Mind: Qurratulain Hyder's Art of Fiction", "The Exiles Return: Qurratulain Hyder's Art of Fiction", "Lost/Found in Translation: Qurratulain Hyder as Self-Translator", and "First Urdu Novel: Contesting Claims and Disclaimers" by Asaduddin; "Is Cosmopolitanism Not For Women?: Migration in Qurratulain Hyder's *Sita Betrayed* and Amitav Ghosh's *The Shadow Lines*" by Ania Spyra.

Qurratulain Hyder scholarship is a work in progress. Her international recognition is growing as reflected in JMG Clezio's dedication of his Nobel Prize in Literature 2008 to some of the most prominent writers, including Hyder. This work is a miniscule contribution to this blossoming Hyder scholarship.

CHAPTER ONE

My Temples, Too

(*Mere Bhi Sanamkhane*)

In a way, *My Temples, Too* (originally *Mere bhi Sanamkhane*) is a prototype of Qurratulain Hyder's *magnum opus*, *River of Fire* (originally, *Aag ka Darya*). She was 19 when she began writing *Mere bhi Sanamkhane* and published it the next year, in Pakistan. Its English translation came out about 6 decades later in 2004. Rajeswari Sunder Rajan in "Zeitgeist and the Literary Text" observes:

> Hyder, let us note, wrote in the very years that she is recording in the novel, a form of immediacy considered conducive to capturing the zeitgeist, even if its features might be recognized only in retrospect and through reflection. She manages this double temporal perspective primarily by seeing the times through the wrong end of the telescope, as it were, the present as the past of a future so changed and so bleak as to be an alien, foreign time and place. The novel is heavy with an almost prophetic sense of loss, explicable both as an actual foreboding that no one could have failed to experience at the time, as well as a foresight that a person writing even in the thick of these events seemed to possess. (450)

It shares with *River of Fire* a grand vision of India's cultural plurality and magnificence. Like the better-known later novel (finished when she was 33) this is about the great civilisational edifice built together by people of different faiths and ethnicities. However, unlike *River of Fire* (the story of which is spread over 2,400 years) this novel's story covers a period of only a few years.

A group of young persons, most of them from Avadh's dying aristocracy and rising professional classes, have a vision of a free, united, democratic India and work towards its attainment in their own way. The story begins at the end of World War II when Indian soldiers and officers are beginning to come home.

This is the time when the country is inching towards a long-awaited, and struggled for, Independence. However, as the euphoria over the coming national freedom builds up, other trends, ominous and frightening, begin to take hold. "Educated" people from the towns and cities visit villages and furtively talk to simple village folk, indoctrinating them into ideologies of communal hate. Gradually, their minds are poisoned.

Meanwhile, this city-based group of Hindus, Muslims and Christians is busy writing and staging plays on cultural unity and harmony, writing articles in their newspaper (which they run with their own meagre resources) about the beauty and strength of composite culture (*Ganga-Jamuni tehzib*). They fiercely oppose the Muslim League's Two-Nation theory, which is the foundation of a future Muslim state, Pakistan, carved out of India. They refuse to accept that India is two "nations" (Hindu and Muslim). From their own example as well as those of their families and the history of India, they know that the Two-Nation theory is not correct. They also work for the rehabilitation of victims when communal riots break out, still taking them as an aberration. They are sure that sanity will ultimately prevail and India and Indians will remain united. Alas, in their youthful idealism they do not realise that the country has moved inexorably towards a civil war and Partition on communal lines.

A point soon comes when communal killings spread over much of north and east India. Partition becomes inevitable. It is no longer the demand of the Muslim League alone. Even the Congress is convinced that Partition is the only solution. The novel reflects the historical reality of the time. At the peak of violence, Mahatma Gandhi, who tried hard to contain it and console the victims, was under tremendous pressure from the Congress to concede Partition. A moment came when Mahatma Gandhi, who used to say that Partition would be carried out only over his dead body, finally relented. Actually, these events were taking place as Hyder was writing. The same events are recorded in historical accounts as well.

Sucheta Mahajan in "Why Gandhi Accepted the Decision to Partition India" writes that at his prayer meeting of 4 June, 1947, Gandhiji explained that the Congress accepted partition because the people wanted it. Mahatma Gandhi said:

> The demand has been granted because you asked for it. The Congress never asked for it... but the Congress can feel the pulse of the people. It realised that the Khalsa as also the Hindus desired it. [A]s representatives of the country they can not go against public opinion. They derive their power from the people. (243)

Even at this stage the characters prefer to live in their world of make-belief. They are shocked and jarred out of their complacence when large-scale riots break out in the countryside where some of their sprawling estates lay. They are rudely awakened from their dream when refugees from West Punjab start pouring into Lucknow, the peaceful state capital that epitomised their cherished *Ganga-Jamuni tehzib*. It is the place they call home. They had never imagined that Avadh and the adjoining areas would ever witness such communal bitterness and hate and that mass violence will scar the face of the land. It was chaos and anarchy, murder and mayhem everywhere. It was a living nightmare:

> The world trembled and rocked and spun around in a frenzy. Flames leapt up to the sky and the space was filled with terrifying shrieks. Dark winds howled, the elements warred with each other in the echoing hollow of the firmament. The earth and the sky and the whole inhabited world and every little inch of the cosmos was blood-red. She opened her eyes in the dark and saw countless dead men falling everywhere, raining like the monsoon. Dead bodies floated here, there and everywhere on sweeping torrents of blood. The sky filled with vultures, millions of them. Jackals howled and wolves lurked in primeval jungles that were hidden within the souls of men, and men were turning into corpses every minute and every second, here there and everywhere. (155)

Things change so dramatically that the entire edifice of civilisation, built over centuries, seems to have come crashing down on those who were living at the time. The main characters, though still retaining their humanity and the famed civility of Avadh, are either killed or their sanity is shattered. Some go away to other lands, including to areas in the new state of Pakistan, and to London.

The heroine Rakhshanda (the most important character) is shattered so badly that she is reduced to a half-crazed young woman babbling barely intelligible words, trying to comprehend what had happened to the world around her:

> The door was flung open by a stray gust of wind. At the end of the gallery, the dark eyed Rajkumari Rakhshanda Begum of Karwaha Raj stood blinking, as if trying to recognise something in the dark. She was suddenly confronted with daylight and looked somewhat strange and absent-minded. The whole day had gone ... she muttered half-talking to herself and half addressing the stranger who stood facing her ... whole day has gone ... she spoke in a monotone. Then she bent forward and blinked again, trying to get accustomed to the daylight. (179)

War

The epigraph – a world war poem by the British poet Alfred Edward Housman: "Here Dead we Lie" sets the mood of the novel. It talks about the ideals and heroism of the young. They are ready to lay down their lives for the sake of the nation rather than pass their time in frivolity. But the utter sincerity, devotion and selflessness with which they commit themselves to their country is no match to the greed of the selfish, power-hungry politicians. The poem also hints at the meaninglessness of war which results in death and destruction. For the greater good of the nation, individual lives don't matter. The youth full of vitality, ideas and grand dreams is crushed mercilessly in the name of national service. One wonders if their death is more valuable than their lives would have been.

Rajeswari Sunder Rajan writes that many zeitgeist novels deliberately focus on the young who see themselves as a generation. Rakhshanda and her friends are called, "the Bright Young things of India, no doubt" (32). Incidentally, in *River* too, Kamal thinks of himself as "a member of India's Lost Generation" (406). Rajan elucidates :

> The allusion is to a significant body of English and American novels of the 1920s, those by Ernest Hemingway, F. Scott Fitzgerald, and Aldous Huxley for instance, whose protagonists saw themselves as a postwar lost generation, despite their abundant gifts. In following them, Hyder is mocking the self-conscious adoption of the burden of a generational identity by the young people, while at the same time signaling an intertextuality that places her novel within a recognizable international literary genre. As young people they bear an overdetermined subjectivity, youth being an attribute that explains and excuses the naivety, idealism, and occasional pretentiousness of their roleplaying, while bestowing pathos on their defeat and death when they occur. (451)

The first page refers to the end of World War and on the second is the suggestion of an impending civil war in India. Ram Singh, the batman, informs his master Dr Salim, that this is the talk of the town. He is weary of bloodshed and wants to go back to Lahore. Little does he know that within two years his native place would come at odds with his nationality.

The War changes fortunes for many. Lucknow's Lal Bagh is home to many Eurasian and Indian Christian girls. Some of these women have painstakingly learnt classical dance and become popular amongst the British, Canadian and American troops that pass through the city during the war. Now that it is over, they plan to join western style hotels or the film industry (22). Queen Rose tells Rakhshanda that during the war, they could afford a servant but not any more (141).

Dr Salim, Peechu's classmate at Allahabad comes from a middle class background. He is the son of a court munshi and the "seventh child in a family of ten" (33). He is in demand as a doctor in the army especially because of the war. Blessed with good looks and now money, he has become a Civil Surgeon when he meets Rakhshanda's group. Peechu is Rakhshanda's brother.

Irfan Kunwar's property has steadily been declining but in 1945, the yield has been rich. He sells his timber to army contractors and invests in more land. He has been an idealist and doesn't believe that Hindu-Muslim unity might be weakening.

Though the World War has ended, there is serious trouble brewing in India. Kiran is becoming famous as a journalist writing news stories about events like the Calcutta killings of August. Violence is not depicted directly in this part of the novel. But, the news in papers and the teleprinter shows that there are riots in Calcutta, Noakhali, Bihar and Punjab (73).

War gives Peechu an opportunity to offer his services to the Air Force. But, he doesn't go for the interview because of his mother's strong objection. He is troubled by an impossible, hopeless, "unethical" attraction towards his friend Hafiz's wife. Eventually, he joins the Indian Police Service.

Rakhshanda, Ginnie and Diamond organise charity shows to help the victims in Calcutta. Queen Rose, on the other hand, has no such philanthropic ambition. For her, dance show is a matter of livelihood.

Communal riots affect the country's economy. Kunwar Sahib is distressed at the news of violence. His fortune is rapidly going downhill. Timber rates are decreasing and the share market in Calcutta spells doom (91).

Peechu has left for Shillong and is not very communicative. Rakhshanda spends the winter of '47 in her village Manather. She feels she doesn't really belong to the elite set

who enjoy their parties and picnics in the various clubs and gardens of Lucknow. Rather, she feels one with the peasants who work for her family. Most of them don't belong to her community. Yet,

> Their dialect and their songs, their little cowsheds and huts – this was the world that had produced her, too… This earth created and preserved her, Brahma and Vishnu. The cycle of creation lay resplendent in front of her, the entire process of living and loving and dying. (124)

She immerses herself in the welfare of her peasants. She is informed about the loans these people take from the local co-operative and visits the village dispensary. On learning about the killings in the North West, she realises that the mad riots are a bigger reality than the peasant's movement. Their efforts would come to a nought because without peace there is no prosperity:

> How was her Mutual Help going to help these damn fools who would willingly let themselves be exploited in the name of religion by the next leader who chose to make this village his target? (126)

Manather cannot remain unaffected by the religious venom for long. One day, the Kunwar's loyal munshi informs him that his peasants have revolted. They are backed by greedy Thakurs who want him to go to Pakistan. Rakhshanda may not be safe there so she should leave for Lucknow. She has been disillusioned in any case.

In summers, there are riots on the estate. Now, for the first time ever, they are accompanied by ten armed footmen. Rakhshanda is aghast to experience this change. They have lived like a big family calling each other uncle and brother following the village tradition. They have celebrated Holi, Ram Leela, Diwali with great pomp. They have learnt their Persian grammar from Kayastha tutors. For centuries the place has been peaceful. Now, the city dwellers feel that the rural folk need lessons in nationalism and communalism.

Matters are not so bad initially. When bitter Punjabi refugees come, one of them thrashes a Muslim shopkeeper: "Even then local Hindus didn't take part in the rioting – it was a fight between outsider Hindus and local Muslims" (132).

An entire generation's tragedy

Urdu literary critic Abdul Mughni calls *Mere bhi Sanamkhane* an entire generation's tragedy (29). Some of the most important characters belong to a small princely state, Karwaha Raj, in UP. The heroine, Rakhshanda, is the daughter of Kunwar Irfan Ali and Saltanat Ara Begum. Rakhshanda's two brothers – Peechu and Polu – and their friends have made the Karwaha Raj's city house, Ghufran Manzil in Lucknow, the centre of their activities.

There is Rakhshanda's friend Ginnie Kaul, the daughter of a prosperous family of Kashmiri Pandits. Another is Kiran Kumar Katju, a journalist of Kashmiri extraction. Hafiz comes from a similar feudal family and has an English wife, Christabel. Salim is a doctor who has returned from service in the World War II, in which he has moved around different battlefronts across Africa and Europe. Another young woman, Diamond, is also a member of the group. To all these people life seems to be full of promise as India is to attain freedom. Life in Lucknow on the banks of the Gomati is an idyll, till everything comes unstuck.

Peechu, a young officer of the Indian Police Service, is butchered and cut to pieces by a mob of rioters at the Shahdara railway station. Peechu dies on duty. Similarly, Kiran Kumar Katju, the journalist, is killed by another set of rioters in Kashmir. Christabel, whose marriage to Hafiz has gone sour, goes back to England in the midst of the turmoil.

Peechu has a crush on Christabel. For this part of the story everything ends with his death and the departure of Christabel for England. Salim, who had developed a soft corner for Rakhshanda, who in turn had some friendly feeling for him, gets married to

Rakhshanda's cousin from the middle class. Salim goes away to Britain for an advanced course in tropical medicine. Ginnie whom Kiran loved dearly, is about to be married off to a rich man from Bombay. Earlier she had gone away to Vrindavan to live as an ascetic.

While many of the former rajas and zamindars still mourn the end of landed aristocracy, Rakhshanda's and Peechu's brother, Polu, adjusts quickly to the change by becoming a farmer and working in his own fields. He buys tractors and organises farmers. He stays back in India to live as an active, productive member of the farming class instead of holding fruitlessly on to old, aristocratic ways, or moving on to Pakistan. He sees his life in the new India with all its troubles and potentials. This new nation has to be built with dedication and labour, and Polu is prepared for it. He opens a school to teach Hindi, which would be the main language of the new nation.

As all this happens around her, Rakhshanda is stunned and lost for an explanation why things went so dramatically wrong. The Urdu version of this novel, more nuanced and detailed as it is (it has 459 pages compared to 182 pages of the English version) takes a line from a couplet of Iqbal as its title:

Tere bhi sanamkhane *mere bhi sanamkhane*
Donon ke sanam khaki *donon ke sanam fani*
(You have your temples, as I have mine
Both of them have clay idols, both equally perishable)
(Translation mine)

Social Document

The novel is a rich social document as it describes in detail about the feudal class of the times. Kunwar Irfan Ali has very little to do. He loves Urdu and Persian texts including his Avicenna. He enjoys his gold-and-silver hookah. Like all prosperous men of his time, he spends his summers in Nainital and Mussorie. He has been the Vice President of the British Indian Association. He is associated with the University like the other taluqdars of

Oudh. He was amongst the first to buy a motor car and phonogram in the town. Maintaining a huge number of people on his declining annual income is a drain on his resources, but he has to follow tradition:

> [He] still gave pensions to the retinue of his father's old scribes, ex-managers, footmen and poor relatives. Many old families employed maidservants who were the descendants of the 'Abyssinian' slaves of the old kingdom.… Zamarrud and Almas were their last specimens (19).

Kunwar Rani Saltanat Ara Begum as the wife of an aristocrat "presided over flower shows, gave away prizes at badminton tournaments, and attended Government House At Homes" (9).

His jaws drop down at his son's decision to become a government employee: "No one in his family had ever worked before, and his genealogy went back hundreds of years" (15). Hunting, shooting, fishing was associated with the upper classes. Rakhshanda's elder brother Polu loves this sport. Hafiz had killed a couple of panthers the previous year (34).

The rich had lot of influence in their area. Though the scheduled stoppage of the small-gauge train at Manather was only a couple of minutes, Kunwar's manager would often tell the guard: "The zenana of Karwaha Raj are boarding this train, please don't leave in a hurry…. It was like a family affair …" (29). This request was conceded and the train would remain there for some more time.

Parallels

There are parallels between the story and the personal life of the writer who has shared some of the sorrows and sufferings of the "idols," or characters destroyed by humans themselves. In her family saga, *Kaar-e-Jahan Daraaz Hai*, Hyder has described how the mindless violence and lawlessness of 1947 had forced her family to relocate in what was Pakistan now, but was India only a few weeks ago.

She left for Pakistan with her mother soon after Partition when the riots were at their peak. The train in which she was going to Lucknow from Dehradun was attacked by rioters. Two heavily-built American nuns bolted the compartment from within and hid Qurratulain Hyder behind them. Her mother, wearing a sari and looking like a Parsi or Anglo-Indian, kept sitting with the nuns confidently, for detecting her as a Muslim was not easy. (452)

They decided to go away to Pakistan as Muslim properties were being encroached upon and captured by refugees from West Punjab and Muslims were being attacked and killed in Dehradun where Hyder had a magnificent home. Her well-off parents had houses in other cities of India as well. Qurratulain's elder brother was already in Pakistan with his family. He had a job there and wanted his sister and mother to go and live with them in Pakistan instead of risking their lives in the India of that time. They travelled from Lucknow to Delhi and took a flight to Lahore, reaching there safely, but considerably impoverished.

Used to living in large, well-furnished homes with huge gardens and kitchen gardens, spacious guest rooms and servant quarters in India, her mother and she lived in the small flat allotted to her brother in the new country. It was in that situation that Hyder wrote *Mere bhi Sanamkhane*, whose basic idea was completely opposed to the founding principle of Pakistan, the Two-Nation theory.

Nation and Nation State

At one level *Mere Bhi Sanamkhane* is about nationhood, breakdown of an old nation state and creation of a new one out of it, leaving the original one truncated and traumatised. The process is rife with mutual distrust, recrimination and monumental violence. New national memories take time to accumulate, old national memories die off gradually. Life regains normalcy only slowly.

From the beginning it is obvious that the Partition is an exclusively male project. Women are there only to suffer the consequences and try to build life from scratch in a new location. In her *Kar-e-Jahaan Daraz Hai*, Hyder talks about how her family, used to living in sprawling homes back in India, slowly built a life in a small, cramped flat in Karachi. (462)

The story begins as the largest war between nations – World War II – comes to a close. The prologue, set somewhere in the Middle East, has this: "Outside, a military truck disappeared into the growing dark. A Russian bomber flew overhead, vibrating the rickety windows of the hotel's wooden structure.... The war had ended. Everybody was waiting to go home–England, USA, India" (v).

The presence of Shia pilgrims from Lucknow and Ladakh at this hotel in Iran also shows that the war is over. No sooner than this most humungous violence of World War II between nations tapers off, forebodings of a similar slaughter within India are felt. Here is batman Ram Singh talking to his officer in that foreign land:

> "Sahib, when are we returning home? What will happen now that The War is over? Mahatma Gandhi says we are going to be free and Jinnah Sahib says the Muslims must have Pakistan.... and some people said the other day ... that there will be a big war in India itself." (vi)

Nation states are created in blood, defended with more blood, attacked and sought to be destroyed with great violence. The ominous rumblings of a new nation state arising from the tectonic shifts caused by India's communal faultlines are heard in the two-page prologue. Entwined with the idea of war – both outside and within – the theme of nation is spread out from the beginning to end. A few pages later, army doctor Salim, who has returned from the war, and Oshir Lahiri of Santiniketan, an incurable romantic and painter, take a few shots of whisky and Oshir as usual talks about "Soul and Art and Peace and Beauty". They doze off on the army mess sofas when. The next scene describes a group of young students:

> The wind suddenly dropped and in the strange quiet that followed, they sang *Jana Gana Mana* in the boathouse and felt elated. The girls squatted on the wooden floor and on upturned boats. The boys stood around and talked animatedly in groups. This was a motley crowd of young student workers from all kinds of backgrounds. Feudal Middle Class Peasant. They were liberals, and fire-eating revolutionaries, and mild, scholarly left-wingers, vegetarians and pacifists. (5)

The mood is upbeat. Everybody is looking forward to freedom and national development. The "chief occupation (of these people) was day-dreaming. They talked of New Life and New Values and New Society and they were into Modern Art, Group Theatre Movement and Folk Culture Movement. Their lives were a great big, exciting, very full-blooded Movement on the whole" (5). The air seems to be thick with expectations of a "New Life" that Independence would bring. Life as a newly-independent nation will require "New Values" on which a "New Society" would be built. Their "day-dreaming" is about great national aspirations.

Before communal identities get strong and assert themselves as counterfeit national identities (Hindu and Muslim) a sense of calm, goodwill and continuity of life hangs in the air:

> The stillness of high noon became intense. The peaceful lands of Karwaha Raj were bathed in the rays of a dim winter sun as the Ghaghra flowed on. It had flowed like this when King Ram Chandra and Queen Sita had ruled here; it flowed on while Nawab Bahu Begum's barges sailed on its waves, and it was flowing today with the same indifference. The little village of Manather had slept by its banks for hundreds of years. An old sufi monastery stood on top of a hillock outside the village. The monastery's compound contained the graves of the ancestors of the Karwaha Raj family. There were houses of Thakurs on the other side of the settlement. (25)

As Independence draws close an idea parallel to Indian nationalism comes into circulation. It is the idea of "Muslim nationalism," which says Indian nationalism is not inclusive as it is merely Hindu nationalism in disguise. The heroine, Rakhshanda, and her group stick with Indian nationalism and their newspaper, *The New Era*, represents this position.

The Muslim League newspaper, *The New Muslim*, representing the Two-Nation theory, is edited by Syed Iftikhar Ahmed. The crude and villainous editor of this newspaper can stoop down to blackmail. He tells Rakhshanda, the *New Era* editor:

> Your political party and your magazine and your ideals, etc. are encased in a house of glass which can come tumbling down any moment... Your lands and your father's influence in the Legislative Council, and everything. Because the Muslim nation knows very well what course it has to take now. It refuses to be hoodwinked by a handful of Muslim nationalists like you. (13)

Rakhshanda's family is worried that the Muslim League, led by rabble-rousers like Iftikhar, can cause trouble at their estate. They fear that Iftikhar would instigate Muslim rioters in the villages to rise against the Karwaha Raj. The family wants Rakhshanda to slightly tone her publication down to avoid a clash with the Muslim League, but she refuses the request. The secular, nationalist voice of Muslims must be heard at all costs.

Rakhshanda, a staunch nationalist, spars it out with her brother Peechu of the Indian Police Service:

> "But Roshi, I do think that you will have to alter the policy of *The New Era*–just a little bit, but it is very imperative, for the sake of father and also for the sake of Karwaha Raj...."

> "Peechu," she uttered in a shocked voice, "What are you saying, a change in the policy of *The New Era*...?"
> "Do you realise what a hold Syed Iftikhar now has in the estate? The Muslim peasants can very easily be inflamed against Father."
> "But, Peechu are we going to sacrifice our principles for the sake of a rotten, measly little estate....? Are you in your senses?" she said tearfully. (59)

People like Rakhshanda are too weak to fight the storm. The creation of the new nation state, Pakistan, is not a clean job. The Two-Nation theory does not adequately take care of the complexities of life. In Lucknow, Hindus from Punjab are still "aliens" among local Hindus, who feel comfortable with Local Muslims rather than the refugee Hindus:

> The local Muslim, according to the Two-Nation theory, was one with the Muslims of Baluchistan and East Bengal with whom he had nothing in common except religion. It was all very confusing. Nobody had the time for a scientific analysis or a level-headed study of the real cause of this communal trouble. (127)

Riots ensue when Hindu Punjabi refugees beat up a local Muslim shopkeeper. Initially, it is a fight between Punjabi Hindu refugees and local Muslims which the local Hindus, still identifying with local Muslims, stay away from. The identity politics of Partition seemed confusing and unclear to many. Yet this politics, woven around religious difference, leaves the landscape desolate. Mosques and temples, symbols of religious separateness, look stark as carrion-eating birds drowse on top of them, signifying great manslaughter:

> All day long vultures drowsed on top of temples and mosques. The domes of the mosques looked dreadfully white in the heat of the sun. The temples with faded saffron flags and tired looking golden spires stood waiting, as it were, for the end of time. Kites flew low on deserted houses. (59)

These areas where "King Ram Chandra and Queen Sitaji ruled" were tranquil and nobody had any exaggerated sense of her own religious identity, or what is better known as "communal feeling."

Historically, the "community-based mobilisation" began in the 1920s with *tabligh* and *tanzim* (religious preaching and organisation), *shuddhi* and *sanghathan* (purification and organisation). Gyanendra Pandey quotes RSS founder Dr KB Hedgewar:

> Hindu society living in this country since times immemorial is the national society here and the main responsibility of this country rests with this society. The same Hindu people have built the life-values, ideals and culture of this country and, therefore, their nationhood is self evident ("Nationalism versus Communalism" 60).

In the 20s the ideas of nationalism growing quickly were also exclusive and communal in nature. Pandey elaborates on the evolution of the Two-Nation consciousness:

> Thus there arose the idea of a Hindu Raj, which would reflect the glories of the ancient Hindu civilisation and keep Muslims in their place, to be matched in due course by the notion of a Muslim Raj, to protect the place of the Muslims. The Hindu-Muslim problem became "the question of all questions" (Gandhi), it "dominated almost everything else" (Nehru). ("Nationalism versus Communalism" 60-61)

Nationalism articulated in a religious language is communalism and nationalism articulated in a secular language is true nationalism. What we witness in *My Temples, Too* is nationalism gone communal.

Similar descriptions occur in historical accounts as well. They are only more precise and concrete. Gyanendra Pandey, in *Remembering Partition: Violence, Nationalism and History in India*, says on Partition violence:

> The singularly violent character of the event stands out. Several hundred thousand people were estimated to be killed; unaccountable numbers raped and converted; and many millions uprooted and transformed into official "refugees" as a result of what have been called the partition riots. (Introduction 3)

Despite the brutalities and the rise of new nation states, India's division s not a successful project as it turns out that the great *Ganga-Jamuni tehzib* cannot really be partitioned. In the novel, in a dispatch for the *New Era* from New Delhi, Kiran writes:

> The Partition Plan is to be announced very soon. Stop for a moment and think of the problem that we are going to face. Apart from new emotional adjustments, we will have to decide how are we going to divide our culture. For instance, we must decide what is Hindu music and what is Muslim music, what is Hindu dance and what is Muslim dance, and so on. Besides, the rivers that rise in the Himalayas and the Indian states and the corridor between East and West Pakistan and the problem of .... (59)

The proposed corridor between East and West Pakistan (passing through India) shows that it is not just the indivisibility of culture that the Partition failed to address but also the difficulty of physically dividing India neatly into two states. Pakistan, dependent on a corridor passing through India (which India had no reason to concede) had no physical integrity right from its birth. The Partition idea was unworkable from the beginning.

The Partition is unkind, sometimes even to its most ardent supporters. One of its hapless victims is Syed Iftikhar, the editor of Muslim League newspaper, *The New Muslim*, who does not get favourable attention from Muslim League leaders at the time of Partition. He decides to stay in India. Because of his fervent espousal of Pakistan as the editor of the League newspaper he finds that he is a pariah in post-Partition India. Even Muslims do not sympathise with him. He goes to meet Congress leader Pandit Govindballabh Pant to

declare his loyalty to India, but he does not get a reassuring response. In a way, Syed Iftikhar epitomises the predicament of those Indian Muslims who supported the League, but being in areas left in India got caught in a cleft stick of two opposing nationalisms. The following is a conversation between the hapless Syed Iftikhar and a fellow Muslim who has all along been against Partition:

> "You demanded it (Pakistan), did you not? Hindus are going to pay you back in the same coin. That particular feudal culture that you wanted to preserve doesn't exist in the place where Pakistan has come into being. It was the peculiar product of this area, and..."
> "But the country of Pakistan..." Syed Iftikhar would argue –
> "Pakistan, my dear sir, is not a country, it is a state of mind. You must go there if you cannot reconcile to the new set-up. You cannot live here and have divided loyalties" (146)

That is nationalism at adverse play for a section of post-Partition Indian Muslims. Those who were like Syed Iftikhar had got their right dessert, but those who had hardly any inkling (the majority of Indian Muslims) could also be suspected of having divided loyalties. The Pakistan project being an elite affair, common Muslims had little to do with it. Rajeswari Sunder Rajan writes:

> [T]here is a very real and unresolved question within the novel of the legitimacy or otherwise of the contemporary politics of Marxist revolution, Muslim-minority identity, and Pakistani nationalism that engaged different sections of a society in ferment. However dismissive her protagonists might be of these widespread political struggles, Hyder is aware that the alternative values represented by the "chosen few"—liberalism, secular tolerance, noblesse oblige—are in the final analysis limited, elitist, and for the most part ineffectual. While futility and failure might give her character nobility, they simultaneously and inevitably function as a critique.... Equally, the very real passion underlying popular movements—peasant

> insurgencies, the Muslim League, and the struggle for national independence—and the indisputable validity of the causes they stand for cannot be dismissed in every instance as false consciousness or as motivated by self-serving scramble for power. Despite her fastidious apolitical sensibility Hyder is troubled by this realization and what it implies about the alienation of her class from the mood of the masses. (448-449)

The clash of two contesting ideas of nationalism fills the land with corpses and colours the rivers red with human blood. These ideas of nation are sometimes based on ridiculous logic. The Hindu colleague of the Muslim IPS officer, Peechu, tells him:

> Lahore is safe for you, you know. I personally think you should finally opt for Pakistan. Delhi is safe for us, we are Indian and you are Pakistani. Our national language is Hindi, yours is Urdu... We wear top-knot on our heads and you are beef-eaters. We are two separate nations, divided by beef and top-knots. (166)

Gender

The novel is interspersed with stereotypical and clichéd comments mostly from young adults about the other gender.

When Ginnie finds out that the man she had fallen in love with is already married, she is heart-broken. Rakshanda consoles her: "They all look at women from one point of view and they are all united and single-mindedly in that point of view" (81). She warns her to remember that "Man by nature is Promiscuous" (81).

When Rakhshanda finds out that Salim who had caught her fancy has been visiting a dancer, she is infuriated. She drives him in her car at a dangerous speed. His frightened expressions delight her: "The fool doesn't know that his neck is not worth breaking" (84). Despite her advice to Ginnie against men, she feels miserable.

After her breakup with Salim, Rosie reflects: "Who said men knew the meaning of love and could understand a woman's devotion? Ha! Self-centred vain egoists… They merely looked for bodies, all of them" (115).

Society women, during one of their gossip sessions, discuss how Salim, the Casanova, had suddenly ended up marrying the unglamorous Qamar Ara: "'Men, my dear' said another 'are dogs masquerading as humans, fit only for the annual kennel show. Even the best of them…'" (119).

The omniscient narrator tells us that the regular, mundane, pleasant, sober partner doesn't excite people. It is the extraordinary, volatile, ethereal experience they are looking for: "There was nothing daring or sinister or thrilling about falling in love with a nice, homely, ordinary boy like Kiran Katju. These girls took their admirers' devotion for granted…" (79). Ginnie is attracted to a handsome man from Rampur because "he didn't belong to the world, was impossible to attain and was altogether 'too divine'…" (79).

Kunwar Irfan, who is unaware of Rakhshanda's disillusionment with Salim is surprised at her sudden agreeing to marry Anwar :"Could he still say that with all his experience and his wisdom, he could understand women?" (92)

Rakhshanda says not all men are wicked, for instance her admirer, Anwar :"There's a good kind-hearted, uncomplicated man for you. He has a lot of good qualities, like pedigreed dogs and Siamese kittens" (95).

One of Anwar's skeptical friends warns men to stay on guard against females: "All girls have their own price, ... they themselves only care for riches and fame and flattery and glamour. They're astonishingly mercenary, taken in by a fellow's importance and success" (148).

Like most of Qurratulain Hyder's works, this, too, is more keenly focused on women. The heroine, Rakhshanda, is a rare all-India girl, comfortable everywhere she happens to be. A secular person, who sees beauty and meaning in every faith tradition, Rakhshanda is a born nationalist, steeped in the different cultures and folklores of the country. She is familiar with the smell of the earth after the first rains, the land, its people, flora and fauna. The very idea of partitioning India is abhorrent to her.

Despite all her strengths she is a romantic at heart. She cannot reconcile to the idea of the country's Partition. When the Partition does come she is barely able to cling to her sanity. Here is a bright young woman who struggles valiantly for the country's unity, but in moments of crisis she acts like an emotionally vulnerable person.

Rakhshanda is a woman of the Muslim feudal class who is broadly sympathetic to the common people. She is also undecided about her choice of a future spouse or a male friend. She is much like Hyder in this respect, too. Hyder had chosen never to marry.

There are women from different religious groups and classes in the novel. Rakhshanda and her friend Ginnie Kaul have a lot in common: a common secular nationalist worldview, common love of the land, common aspirations for a free, united India. Rakhshanda chooses to stay single, unattached to any male while Ginnie also, at the height of her marriage preparations dismays everyone by deciding to go away to Vrindavan to live the rest of her life as sannyasin. Thus, in a way, they are alike in choosing to stay single. They are women of the new India who went to college in the early 40s of the 20th century.

Rakhshanda and Ginnie have attained a level of emancipation that women of earlier generations had not attained. Rakhshanda is also fascinated by the Eurasian dance girl Rosie's liberated life-style, even though others think Rosie is a "half-caste" girl whose profession too is looked at with contempt.

Among the young Muslim women of the novel is Qamar Ara, the poor country cousin of Rakhshanda, whom the latter helps in getting a college education. She is brought to Lucknow, where she graduates from a Muslim women's college. Unlike Rakhshanda she is moored to Muslim middle class values. After her marriage to Salim she goes to England with him. On the ship's deck she meets Rakhshanda, who introduces her to Christabel:

> She smiled happily at Rakhshanda and looked intently at the English woman's slacks. How funny, she thought ... going about dressed like a man. But it then occurred to her that she was on way to England herself, and suppose he told her to dress like this? It would be her duty to obey. (153)

"Duty to obey" one's husband might not have occurred to the upper-class Rakhshanda, but for her cousin Qamar Ara this middle-class value seems a natural choice. Qamar Ara still remains the middle-class Muslim woman. In fact, in her emphasis on "duty to obey" the husband she is like a majority of women from the subcontinent.

Women are traditionally associated with the kitchen. Though Roshi's friends may not take up full time cooking , they enjoy occasional entry into the kitchen. When Gainda, a servant, invites them to fry puris, they happily go into the house. Observing them, Kiran feels : "Wherever there are girls there is sincerity and warmth and life and light" (67). He remembers Ginnie's mother asking Roshi to send her, her new cookery book because Ginnie required it. So, he assumes that all women need to cook food: "Whether they are daughters of Knights of the Indian Empire or self-styled bahus of the nation, they all need the cookery book" (67).

Firoz, a young man, tells the group that Shehla Rehman is focusing on refining her culinary skills rather than writing poetry ever since she learnt that young men prefer women who cook good food over those who were intellectually inclined. (76)

Kiran doubts if the girls would be assertive enough to choose their occupation in life or their husbands: "You little bourgeoise squirrels, I know how you will end up, how your dreams will die a natural death in a fat, bald important husband's drawing room …" (151)

Zeenat Riaz, like Uma of *Fireflies,* comes from an affluent family. She is well educated and is a rebel against the moral and social standards of society. She champions the "Intellectual, Economic and Social freedom of Women" (63). She owns a second hand car, has her own telephone number and her admirers suggest she could win the elections to the Provincial Assembly. She epitomises a charming "career woman" (64). But despite her accomplishments and popularity amongst intellectual and artistic men, she worries about her advancing age. She defies it by wearing heavy make up. She feels insecure amongst young girls. So they are excluded from her parties (107).The anxiety about waning beauty is characteristic of several of Hyder's women.

Blueprint of her later novels and characters

Shehla Rehman is similar to Champa of *River of Fire* in some ways. They come from a genteel family. Their fathers are lawyers. These ambitious young women transform themselves by adopting a new name (Shehla) and learning new skills like a foreign language (Champa) and dance (Shehla).They are popular in their groups and choose to remain unmarried. Both of them are snubbed by the aristocratic characters who look down upon them as social climbers. Rakhshanda is like Talat of *River*. Both of them are from well-off families, well-educated, write for newspapers and are idealists. Hyder too worked as a journalist.

Khurshid, Rakhshanda's cousin, is like Rehan of *Fireflies*. He is a communist, lives with mill workers, helps slum dwellers and is paid a paltry salary by the party. Like Rehan, he is in love with his rich cousin while being critical of the lifestyle of his wealthy relatives. He gives up his country and ideals later for personal benefit. Another Comrade is Khurshid of *The Housing Society* who sacrifices his life, family and love for his beliefs. He is admirable for his integrity and the strength of his conviction. Kunwar Irfan is like

Nawab Qamrul Zaman in his love for books and his lavish lifestyle. However, the former is a nationalist while the latter supports the League.

Hyder's preoccupation with time begins from this novel. Rakhshanda is delighted to have Salim in her group. She begins to think of their future: "How have these pieces assembled here in this jigsaw puzzle? Soon something will happen, pieces will scatter and become part of a newer pattern. We won't be here anymore, this time will pass" (51). Zeenat Riaz thinking about her mundane daily routine laments the passing away of time: "God, why did you let me become an old maid…? (63) Peechu in an emotionally volatile moment has told Christabel to divorce her husband and marry him. She has a soft spot for him but she turns down the proposal. She tells Rakhshanda that the problem with time is you can't roll it back: "…the moments never come back…" (90).

One can also see how time gets given an eternal twist at certain places. Like Rakhshanda watches Kiran coming towards her. She is feeling low and tells herself: "Do you recall what Krishna said to Arjuna, that time destroys its own creations?" (94) Ginnie is elated when she goes out on a picnic with her friends to the banks of Ghaghra. Realising the ephemeral nature of life, she reflects: "Ram Chandra must once have stood on this very spot, looking exquisite and dignified…. We stand here now. In an instant another few thousand years will go by, an instant which we pompously call centuries" (111).

Identity

In *My Temples, Too* some identities are fluid, like of those who are moving on to Pakistan, a new nation state with a fresh start at national history and national identity. Some cling to their old national identity fiercely, but are forced by riots and loss of property to move on. Then there is the heroine, Rakhshanda, a young woman born in India like her ancestors, and determined never to change, come what may. "Glamour Boy", one of her friends, gladly moves to Pakistan, leaving behind a large estate in India. He takes the change of nationhood like a change of clothes.

Syed Iftikhar's case is more precarious. He was a committed advocate of Pakistan till the day of Partition, but later realised that Pakistan may not really need someone like him. He stays back in India and tries to convince everyone who cares to listen that he is an Indian, but no one seems convinced. He is a nowhere man, if we can call him that. Rakhshanda's two brothers, Peechu and Polu, are like her: they want to live and die as Indians, whatever the cost. Peechu of the IPS is killed trying to control a riotous mob in Shahdara and Polu gives up his estate happily to live as an Indian farmer.

Hyder brings in an element of integration of cultures. For instance, the Iranian new year Nauroz a cultural festival is celebrated by people from diverse ethnic and religious backgrounds. For Zoroastrians it is a religious festival. At Ghufran Manzil, Kunwar Irfan's place, it is celebrated with a lot of zest. The servants give it a local colour by celebrating it like Holi, another spring festival and celebrated in March: "There were big feasts, the chandeliers and lotus shaped lamps were lit, and the servant-girls threw coloured water on each other. They had waited all year for the day when they could drench Peechu and Polu Bhaiya with red and green water" (48).

Hyder reiterates that vermilion is used by Muslim women too. On learning about Qamar's marriage to Salim, Diamond imagines her in her wedding finery with "vermilion in the parting of her hair" (120).[1] Diamond, who is educated at Mussoorie's Woodstock School, "thinks and speaks like an American" (95).When Christabel tells her that Diamond calls him her superman, Anwar is surprised and says that the latter is an incorrigible romantic who may never find her ideal because her dream partner should combine the good looks of all of Hollywood's heroes plus at least half of the intelligence of Peechu and Vimal (95).

Being religious and progressive isn't at odds in Hyder's works: "Ginnie, officially a progressive and a rationalist among her friends, was deeply religious like most of them"

[1] Mir Sajjad Ali in his book *Islam and the Indian Muslims* writes that the sufi saint Sharfuddin Maneri had allowed Muslim women to wear sindoor as a marker of their married status. Sufis "endorsed the absorption of local social rituals" for their aim was peaceful co-existence and love amongst all people (213). Mohsen Saeidi Madani elaborates that the Muslim women of upper class replaced sindoor with afshan, a golden powder or sandal dust (*Impact of Hindu Culture on Muslims*, 143).

(54). Vimal writes 'Om' before every piece he writes as his mother had instructed him in childhood. On growing up he became an agnostic, then a communist for three years, but his childhood habit persisted through this phase (173). Rakhshanda, like Ginnie, likes visiting shrines (21).

Hyder's fascination with names is seen in this novel, too. Roshi's gang loves renaming people according to their traits. So, Anwar is called Glamour Boy, Salim is Longinus, Lieut Jehangir Qadir (one of Roshi's suitors) is Dimwit, and Vimal is Chattopadhyay because he is brilliant. However, names make people vulnerable during communal strife. After the Partition Hindu and Muslims are targeted wherever they are in a minority. To escape identification: "They had removed the nameplates from their houses, and tried to pass of as Hindus when they were attacked in trains and on the streets" (144).

An embittered Sikh Captain whose family is brutally murdered during communal riots is travelling in the same train as Polu and Rakhshanda. Revenge weighs on his mind. However, faces alone don't reveal the religious identity of the enemy. He ascertains that the two are Muslims when he noticed a brass *lota* in their luggage. But he was perplexed because their suitcases were marked as the Rajkumar and Rajkumari of Karwaha Raj:

> Capt. Ajit Singh Ahluwalia of 9 Jat Regiment was no scholar of history and was hardly expected to know that the nawabs and kings of Oudh had granted Hindu titles to their Muslim feudatory noblemen in the past and that these two young people were the descendants of those barons. (130)

Gender, like nation, is a constituent of identity, which we have discussed in earlier pages.

Technique

Hyder makes use of impressionistic technique, when she concentrates on the inner life of the main character rather than on the external reality. Fleeting impressions from a subjective point of view are given, thereby slowly "revealing" the "truth". Often effects precede the causes. Cedric Watts has rightly called it "Delayed Decoding". He writes that the author uses this method "to prevent a sense impression and to withhold naming it or explaining its meaning until later…. This takes directly into the observer's consciousness at the very moment of the perception, before it has been translated into its cause" (172).

Some examples to illustrate this point are: Oshir Lahiri, the painter, stealthily watches a woman dancing on the lawns of Almora's Culture Centre. He makes her sketch and calls it the Rhythm of Life. He is quite taken by the woman but we don't know who she is. About 13 pages later, we get to know that Rakhshanda has also been to this place. On page 87, there is talk of her relationship with Dr Salim. Earlier, somebody tells Lahiri that his "rhythm of life has become very unrhythmic" (87). But it is only on page 98 when Dr Salim is reading a letter, it is revealed that the painting is indeed that of Rakhshanda: "He found cosmic meaning in it whereas it was merely a hurriedly done pastel sketch of the Rajkumari of Karwaha Estate" (98). It is difficult to get it in the first reading.

Similarly, Kunwar Rani, Peechu's mother is infuriated that he is in no mood to marry. His refusal is affecting Rakhshanda's prospect of marriage too (as their proposed spouses are siblings). Kunwar Rani keeps muttering "That White Witch" (72). Peechu too feigns ignorance. A couple of pages later, we learn that he is in love with his best friend's wife who is married in England. But, we don't know if the girl is white. Peechu tries to avoid her. It is after piecing together information like the lady is called Christabel and is returning to England, do we fully realise that she is the woman Kunwar Rani is angry with. Another hint comes when Rosie, an Anglo Indian, is likened to Christabel: "Her blonde hair was fiery in the rays of the red sun. Another Christabel … another Christabel … the winds seemed to shriek in the garden downstairs" (118).

On page 38, we are told that Qamar Ara's brother has gone to meet her in the hostel. However, it isn't Khurshid as she expected. The ayah informs her that "He is dark-

almost black this brother of yours" (38). To her, the stranger is Rakhshanda's friend. Much later, when she gets married to him, she reminisces when he had met her at the Muslim School and what the ayah had said about his complexion (122). Till very late we don't know that the dark stranger is Dr Salim.

Dreams

Hyder's use of dreams and nightmares foreshadow future events. The end is reflected in the beginning. It provides structural and thematic unity. In the first chapter, Rajkumari Rakhshanda dreams that she has gone to some place where she is surrounded by unfamiliar people:

> She was alone, deserted by her friends. She looked around desperately, but Ginnie and Christabel and Diamond and Kiran and Vimal and her brother Peechu, every one of them had dumped her and vanished. She was frightened and longed to come back home but home wasn't there. (7)

Indeed, after Partition almost all of her friends and brother Peechu die or leave for another country.

Day-dreaming is one of Zeenat's favourite pastimes. She feels upset that Salim leaves without even giving her one phone call. Her infatuation for the young man is revealed through her wishful thinking. She imagines what could have been if she were a doctor and a decade younger. She would then be assisting him in an operation theatre. She would then go out with him to cinema in the evening. Perhaps, she feels a tinge of sadness for remaining single. Hafiz Ahmads have invited her on a picnic:

> "We will be very glad…" only *she* was 'I' forever. Nobody would share her life and be 'us' or 'we' with her…" (108).

Hyder uses stream of consciousness to delve into the psyche of her characters' minds. Once while Rakhshanda is baby-sitting for Christabel, Salim drops in. She pretends to be

engrossed in a magazine. However, her stream of consciousness shows that she is bored and distracted. The doctor's interior monologue reveals that he is fascinated by her but knows that there is little in common between them. Rakhshanda's subsequent stream of consciousness akin to a dream (her eyes are closed) shows that she has fallen in love with Salim: "Leave me alone with my teeny-weeny happiness and I shall spend the whole night thinking how very fortunate I am… How happy we were tonight, she continued thinking luxuriously (56)."

Information is imparted through letters also. Diamond's epistle from Pakistan conveys the ways in which she finds affinity and differences between the new land and her birthplace. More striking is the news that books are being burnt as fuel. The residents have had to leave their home and precious belongings while trying to save their lives. She writes that the people of Lahore have great taste in books and clothes. They love Urdu literature. The refugees are in a dismal state as in India.

The author reports about Chowdhry Shamim's long letter to Rakhshanda to blackmail her. He warns her to change her political opinion or else he would expose her private life and that of her friends. He says he has got hold of photographs which if made public would ruin their image.

The background and the gaps in information are often filled by the third person narrator.

Style and Translation

The Urdu version has more clear clues to the different layers of signification barely touched upon in the English version. The Urdu version's title has a subtle sub-title: "*Trasheedam, Prastam, Shikastam*" (I sculpted an idol, I worshipped it, I broke it).

Abdul Mughni's take on the subtitle is that people of India sculpted together the idol of a civilisation, worshipped it, only to break it ultimately. (28) *Ganga-Jamuni tehzib*, built

over centuries and cherished for long, lay bleeding, mortally wounded by its makers and its admirers.

The destruction of the temples and idols, both "*mere*" and "*tere*", brings everything to a stand still, to a sense of gaping void, a nagging feeling that the moments of the time gone by have been wasted. This is like the good not surviving at all and innocence having drowned in "a blood-dimmed tide". Abdul Mughni calls the India of the moment of Partition a "wasteland" of the kind described in the eponymous poem of TS Eliot – a terrain where the fine values of life have withered away (29).

Mere bhi Sanamkhane has been organized in three chapters: the first *Chali Jaye Mori Nayya Kinare Kinare* (My Boat Sails Close to the Bank); the second is *Dhanste Sahil* (Sinking Banks); the third is *Manzile Laila* (Laila's Destination, a metaphor for dark night). Irtiza Karim writes: "the boat that sails close to the land comes to a destination where the bank is sinking and it is a dark and foreboding night … This foreshadows the events in the novel, the struggle for Independence, some ray of hope here, dark despondence there" (564).

Similarly, for Akhtar Sultana, *Mere bhi Sanamkhaney* is like the narrative of Adam and Eve's fall from grace and banishment from paradise. It is a reflection of that original catastrophe (411).

The existential angst enveloping the entire narrative (Urdu version) is encapsulated right after the title and sub-title in a couplet by Anis Dehlavi:

Anis dam ka bharosa nahin thahar jao
Chiragh le ke kahaan saamne hawa ke chale
(Anis, stop. You don't know what comes next / don't go out carrying a lamp in a storm)

Framed in the backdrop of worldwide death and destruction (symbolised by the return of soldiers from faraway lands after the butchery of World War II) the novel not only

depicts the apocalypse of Partition, but also the decline of Uttar Pradesh's old feudal, jagirdari and zamindari system and its cherished values.

Literary critic Syed Ihtesham Hussain has described this novel as "a deft portrayal of a dying culture and the extinction of a certain class" (qtd in Akhtar Sultana 419). Other Urdu critics, too, have talked about the "delirium and death" of an entire culture.

The culture that was caught in a delirium was "such a cool, comfortable world" (*Mere bhi Sanamkhane* 27) of small princely states, Lucknow's charmed life of musical conferences, writers' meetings, artists' getherings, the Gomati's majestic flow and groves of mangoes and *jamuns*. And above everything else the loving people of Avadh. *My Temples, Too* is an elegy on the passing of such an enchanting and lovely world.

The original Urdu version of the novel is more nuanced. The English version, being considerably shorter, has fewer details. Urdu by its nature is more suited to describe the colours, textures, flavours and smells of life in the UP of pre-Partition days. Yet, what the English version loses in it nuance it gives back in precision and compact prose.

Stylistically, this novel is simpler in its structure and narrative style compared to Hyder's later novels. It generally uses the authorial third person narrative. Sparingly, she uses a style that is close to an internal monologue.

A Sikh army officer is returning from World War II. He has heard about the atrocities on Hindus and Sikhs in Western Punjab that is going to be part of Pakistan. He is fuming with anger and impatiently waiting to reach Punjab when he will kill every Muslim in sight. He is unhappy to be travelling in the same railway compartment in which the "Muslim" Rakhshanda and Polu are travelling:

> Those low down curs, those pigs, those beasts had abducted Kamla and raped her and killed Inderjeet, they had murdered Gargi before Uncle's very eyes and they had killed his brother Mohan Singh. They had wiped

> out his entire family in one night and then set fire to their beautiful house. He was not going to spare a single Muslim. The moment he reached Amritsar, he would shoot at sight. He was going to kill...kill...kill... .(131)

By getting under the skin of the character Hyder creates an effect of an internal monologue out of random, flowing stream of consciousness.

Note: *Mere bhi Sanamkhane* has been published by different presses. Two relatively recent publications do not have the couplet by Anis, the tripartite division of the novel with Persain subtitles, and the Urdu subtitle of the first part called "Chali Jaye Mori Nayya Kinare-Kinare". Since the second and third subtitles in Urdu are there, one guesses is they have been reprinted from old copies of the novel whose pages were missing. The publishers may not have cared to consult the author or her kin after her demise. These two editions are Lahore: Sang-e-Meel Publications, 2014, and Delhi: Educational Publishing House, 2004. My references are from the edition published by New Taj Office, Post Box Number 1749, Delhi. It does not have the year of publication. The Urdu copy I have used is from Sardar Jafri Collection, Jamia Millia Islamia. The pages are yellow and brittle, perhaps a sign of it being amongst the earliest Indian editions.

CHAPTER TWO

River of Fire

(Aag ka Darya)

The title *Aag ka Darya* is derived from Jigar Moradabadi's famous verse:

Yeh ishq nahin aasan, bas itna samajh lije
Ik aag ka dariya hai aur doob ke jana hai

Love is not easy; do understand this much
It is a river of fire and you must drown in it, to go ahead.
(Translation mine)

The English version, *River of Fire*, covers four historical periods like the Urdu novel: the expansion of the Mauryan empire under Chandragupta and the spread of Buddhism in the fourth century BC; the end of Lodhi Dyansty and the beginning of Mughal rule in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries; the late eighteenth century inception of East India company rule till its fortification in the 1870s, and the turbulent 1940s-50s including Partition and independence.

Each epoch contains three central characters Kamal, Champa and Gautam, with partly altered names and characteristics. It isn't exactly a story of simple reincarnation as more characters crop up in the later phases with two persons reflecting the characteristics of one or one person embodying the traits of earlier two persons. It is a complex mix, yet recognisable because of similar situations.

Gautam Nilambar is a student at Shravasti in the first part. He is also a sculptor, dancer and actor. In the third period he serves the British government. Then, he quits his government job and becomes a teacher.Finally, he becomes a wealthy publisher while in the fourth he is a bureaucrat living in London and New York.

Kamal appears in the second phase. He is the son of a Persian mother and an Arab father. He arrives in India through Central Asia and Kashmir. He then visits Jaunpur, Kashi and Ayodhya. He perceives himself as an alien initially, but soon his Indianisation begins. He is employed by Sultan Hussain Shah. In course of time, he is influenced by Chishtiya sufis, Buddhist philosophy and the preachings of Kabir. It is tragic when Sher Shah's soldiers kill him on charges of treason for one of his sons is employed with the Mughals.

In the third phase, he is split between two characters: as a poor Bengali boatman, Abul Mansur, and Kamal as an upper class landowner in Oudh. In the last phase, he is a Cambridge educated nationalist Muslim who is disillusioned when he returns to a changed India. His lands have been confiscated under the Land Reforms Act. His ancestral property is unjustly labeled as evacuee property. He has no job and no home. He is forced to migrate to Pakistan much against his conviction.

Champak, the heroine, appears over the four epochs – from Mauryan times to post-Independence India – as Champak, Champawati, Champajaan and Champa Ahmed. In the first she is the daughter of a minister in Shravasti; in the second, she is a beautiful and intelligent sister of a Brahmin priest in Ayodhya; in the third she is a sophisticated courtesan from Lucknow; and, in the fourth a highly-educated modern woman in Varanasi and Moradabad.

Nirmala in the first part is a princess who is captured in a war. Later she escapes and becomes a Buddhist nun. In the second part her renunciation finds an echo in Champavati. She is also present in Ruqqaiya Bano the learned aristocrat who is captured in a war and thus separated from Kamaluddin, her lover. In the third story she is reflected in Annabella, the illegitimate daughter of Maria Theresa and Cyril Ashley. Annabella becomes a nun. In the fourth part Nirmala is a brilliant girl from Lucknow who goes to Cambridge for higher education. She loves Gautam but is dismayed at his attraction to Champa. Not trusting him enough, she turns down his marriage proposal. She dies of tuberculosis in England leaving her friends heart-broken.

Hari Shankar in the first part is a prince who travels widely, then gives up his fiancée and kingdom to become a Buddhist monk. He is absent in the second story. In the third, Munshi Hari Shankar is a clerk who informs Gautam about Lucknow. He believes that purdah is a status symbol that also guards against unbridled freedom of women. In the last part, Hari Shankar Raizada is the son of a barrister and an alter ego of Kemal Reza. He holds a prestigious job in America. Unlike Kemal he gets a government job in India on his return home.

River of Fire is the river of time which flows ceaselessly. The epigraph of the Urdu novel is extracted from T.S. Eliot's 'Four Quartets'. This set of four poems has time, universe and the divine as central themes. It talks of how worldly experience is imperfect and leads to dejection. Time is in a flux and problematic while eternity is magnificent and blissful. In all the poems, the end becomes the beginning and things move in cycles. This poem serves as Hyder's vision of history which isn't monologic and travels in multiple directions. Though the epigraph has been translated into many other languages, Hyder dropped it from her English version. Asaduddin writes, when Kumkum Sangari asked her about the omission, she dismissed the matter by saying it may have been accidental. ("Lost/Found" 244) One cannot be sure about the matter.

Time becomes a character when Champa is experiencing the blues after Nirmala's death:

> Time said: Recognise me. I'll never stop hounding you.... You cannot go beyond me....All decisions are made, all intentions become actions because of me, and through me.
> You shall face more trouble but I'll teach you how to deal with it. Make peace with me. (352-353)

In Hyder, time is both linear and circular. It can bring either progress or set in decline. Circular time is manifested in the four stories that show a great degree of similarity. In the first one, Gautam dies while trying to cross the river Saryu in full spate. In the last story, another Gautam Nilambar is watching the river Sarju flowing. The two Gautams

are separated by over two millennia but the river is the same with a slightly altered name. The recurring names suggest that human suffering, love and loss are universal. So is the function of river whether it is called Saryu or Sarju, Gomti or Ganga.

Thus, the more things change, the more they remain the same. Past can never be fully eliminated by the present. The cowherd who chances upon a coin from the slave dynasty with Razia's name inscribed on it calls it "a memento of Kaal – Time" (61).

Nation and National Narratives

Qurratulain Hyder's magnum opus *Aag ka Darya* was first published in Pakistan in 1959, that is, twelve years after India's Independence and Partition. For the subcontinent it (Independence-Partition) was a moment of great rejoicing, and of great mourning. It was a moment of paradox. The cause of celebration was obvious. The mourning was about the loss of India's unity and territorial integrity, as well as the monumental loss of life, the dislocation and rupture that this moment epitomised. A massive body of Urdu literary writing – fiction and poetry – was generated that tried to grasp, analyse, contemplate, report and come to terms with this moment. For instance, Faiz's "Dawn of Freedom". Talat, in the novel, translates it for her friends:

> This blighted dawn, this darkened sun. This is not the morn we waited for. We went forth in the desert of heaven, hoping to reach our destination of stars. We hoped that somewhere, we would come ashore from the placid river of the night, that the barge of sorrow would end its cruise. Whence came the early morning breeze, where did it go? The wayside lamp does not know. The night's burden has not diminished, the hour of deliverance for eye and heart has not arrived. Face forward! For our destination is not in sight. (275)

That historical watershed and epoch-defining event left hundreds of thousands dead, devastated and dislocated. Quite as many were dazed and left groping for what it all ultimately meant: what was meant by history, nation (and nation state), identity, gender and religion.

For a lot of people (especially women) this could also have meant some contemplation on what it meant to be a woman in such a violent, hate-filled, fratricidal milieu. These questions must have crossed the minds of many women as they seemed to be worse off than men. After all, men were not abducted, forcibly married (or, worse, raped and left to fend for themselves, if not killed right away), coerced to change their religion and live the rest of their lives with an acquired identity and an imposed persona that was different from what they had known about themselves so far.

Most men and women were flustered, or filled with rage, or both. At that point in time came Qurratulain Hyder's *Mere bhi Sanam Khane* (later translated by her as *My Temples, Too*) that sought to come to grips with the great rupture, a breach in the timeless idea of India that was constructed over millennia by people of diverse ethnicities, languages and faiths. At the end of the novel, the Muslim heroine, once a modern, energetic and optimistic young woman, is reduced to a stunned, incoherent and raving wretch whose vision of a free, united, thriving India has been belied by the blind force of history.

Aag ka Darya is Qurratulain writing back, writing back to reassert her idea of India that remains, and has remained, a civilisational unity, impervious to the redrawing of maps, redistribution of populations and deployment of armed forces on newly delineated borders. A novel with such a wide canvas, spanning millennia, and filled with the intimate, authentic rhythms of life in India across the ages must have taken her a decade to plan, organise and write. That is, prepare her valiant response to the colossal futility of trying to partition something that cannot be partitioned.

In so doing she was subverting the very rationale for the creation of Pakistan and the logic of the Two-Nation theory, the pernicious idea that Hindus and Muslims were "two nations" that could not co-exist because they were antithetical to each other. She saw a synergistic pattern in Indian civilisation, a pattern best visible in Sufi-Bhakti stream that drew sustenance from this civilisation's genius for synthesis.

In *Aag ka Darya*, and its translation *River of Fire*, she goes beyond the relatively new, post-Westphalian idea of nation to the far more older and stable category of civilisation to assert the futility of artificial divisions. Even though the act of "Partition" is a *fait accompli* now in the sense that there is a new nation state, carved out of India, she refuses to give in.

She is aware that nations and nation states cannot be wished away even though a single civilisation envelops them, she goes on questioning the very sanity of the divisive discourse. In her acceptance speech of Jnanpeeth she observed that she was like the small bird which thinks it can hold the sky and prevent it from falling to the earth:

My concern for civilisation values about which I continue writing may sound naïve, woolly – headed and simplistic .But then, perhaps, I am like that little bird which foolishly puts ups(sic) its claws, hoping that it will stop the sky from falling (*Seasons*, Introduction xx).

The questioning and subversion of virulent "nationalism" and its unreasonable ways is in full play in *River of Fire* (as well as in *Aag ka Darya*, from which its transcreated version is a little different). A central character, Kamal, who is an Indian at heart, but is forced to migrate to Pakistan by the sheer force of Partition, in his letter from Karachi to his friend in India, questions the logic of deploying Urdu in the argument for the creation of a Muslim nation state out of India:

> In the demand for Pakistan, Urdu was most thoughtlessly declared to be the language of a "separate Muslim nation", so in India it has almost become a non-language. The word Urdu is now associated with Pakistan and creates an emotional block for most Hindus. (375)

Of course, Kamal was writing his letter immediately after the Partition, when the dust had still to settle behind the looted caravans of people travelling in opposite directions (most Hindus and Sikhs from what was India till then, but was Pakistan now, to a truncated India, and many Muslims from what remained of north India, to the new "Muslim" nation

state). Hyder saw nation as a limiting idea, limiting things to territorial boundaries and narrow loyalties, while civilisation was more open, enduring and timeless.

The aversion to Urdu in India could have given way to appreciation in later years, but deploying it in the campaign for Pakistan remains as illogical as ever. It made no sense then, makes no sense now. Hyder was not alone in this conviction. In the service of "national" goals a beautiful language was demeaned.

Aag ka Darya was an instant success in Pakistan and continues to be the largest selling novel there according to some accounts, (Rumi, R. 51) even though it questioned the agglomeration of themes – religion, language, putatively "distinct" ways of Hindus and Muslims – on which the idea of Pakistan was built.

In February 1948, in response to a Hindu member's suggestion that Bangla be permitted in Pakistan's Constituent Assembly, Prime Minister Liaqat Ali Khan said:

> Pakistan is a Muslim state, and it must have its *lingua franca*, a language of the Muslim nation. The mover should realise that Pakistan has been created because of the demand of a hundred million Muslims in this Sub-continent, and the language of a hundred million Muslims is Urdu. It is necessary for a nation to have one language, and that language can only be Urdu and no other language. (Ahmed, A. *Mirror* 13)

In the above-mentioned lecture, Ahmed goes on to show the hollowness of the Pakistani establishment's claims about Urdu and the untenability of the Pakistani stand that Urdu was "the language of a hundred million Muslims of the Sub-continent". This claim did not hold good even for Pakistan, much less for the subcontinent. Within a quarter century of this pronouncement, new nation was created out of Pakistan which had Bangla as its national language, the same Bangla that did not qualify for a "Muslim" nation's language in 1948. Nation, true to Hyder's belief, turned out to be unstable compared to civilisation. Ahmed continues,

> [O]nly three years later, in 1951, the Census Report of that same government which had been headed by Liaqat Ali revealed that only 7.2 per cent of the Pakistani population thought of themselves as Urdu speakers. In that same year, 1951, the Indian census revealed that only 38 percent of Indian Muslims considered themselves Urdu-speaker; even in UP only 48 percent returned Urdu as their language in that census. The overwhelming majority of Indian Muslims – 62 percent – spoke some other language; in Pakistan, the proportion of Muslims who did not think of themselves as Urdu-speakers was of course much higher, at roughly 93 percent. The irony here is that the percentage of Muslims here who thought of Urdu as their language was much higher – five times higher, in fact – in India than in Pakistan; comparative statistics also showed that the absolute number of Urdu speakers in India was also roughly four times as great as in Pakistan (*Mirror* 13).

Ahmed discusses the problematic character of the categories involved like "Urdu-speakers" and "mother-tongue" later in the lecture. These issues are intertwined with the idea of nation or nationhood that is somehow at adverse play vis-à-vis the Urdu novelist Hyder's world view. From her perspective the Pakistan stance on Urdu is a blatant attempt at misappropriation of her language.

On her part, Hyder not only questions the newly-minted national narrative of Pakistan on its basic assumptions like religion being at the core of nationhood and Urdu as the language of all "Muslims in the Sub-continent", but subverts the Two-Nation theory in other, significant ways as well.

The Pakistani national narrative foregrounds "Muslim nation of the Sub-continent", but *River of Fire* is about the growing and enduring nature of the "composite" civilisation of India that has been built by generations of peoples of different ethnicities, languages and faiths. Civilisation is at the centrestage in her novel rather than religion.

Soon it was published with equal acclaim and was as warmly received in India as in Pakistan. Since then it has held sway in both countries, despite the fact that her views did not always flatter the Establishment in India, much less so in Pakistan.

In a way, she could be Edward Said's ideal public intellectual who has an essentially adversarial relationship with the Establishment, even though the Establishment is seen to be sustaining and honouring her. In Said's view, in *The World, the Text and the Critic*, the public intellectual resists and challenges "the collective weight imposed by nation-state and national culture" (qtd in Ashcroft and Ahluwalia 129). As said earlier, *River of Fire* is more about civilisation than nation, and about an inclusive, mellow, synergistic culture than its crude jingoistic version.

The novel's immortal characters – Gautam, Champa, Hari Shankar and Kamal – appear over different ages to meet and separate. Their great erudition, learning and cultural attainment somehow elevates them above the doctrinal disputations of official religions, and the petty quarrels of priests. The obverse of it is also true: their ability to synthesise the best in Hindu, Buddhist and Muslim traditions draws from the syncretic mores of India. In later ages, these characters imbibe the virtues of Sufis and Bhaktas, still later learn the arts and culture of Europe. For Indian civilisation it turns out to be an ever-evolving phenomenon.

That official religion is at a discount here and the traditions of Shakya Muni and other protestants and people's versions are at the centrestage again makes the same point: the division of a civilisation is a self-defeating, injurious enterprise.

The Kamal of the last phase of the novel (part of whose letter from Karachi is quoted earlier) expresses distress at the way Islam is bandied about and belaboured by coteries of politicians and mullahs to further the project of partition and to sustain the tenuous Two-Nation theory. In the same letter to his friend in India Kamal writes:

> Islam has become useful for politicians. It is being presented to the world as an aggressive, militant, even anti-culture religion. Its promoters are not concerned with Islamic humanism, or the liberalism of medieval Arab scholars, or Iranian and Indian poets and Sufis. (375)

Looking at newspapers today, and reading news from Pakistan, one finds an amusing resonance: Hyder knows her Pakistan rather well, as she does her India, of course. She seems to make some distinction between the essentially modern idea of nation and the far more older feeling of love for one's motherland. The new nation of Pakistan seemed somehow to be an oddity, which was not India. Yet it was India, as the Pakistanis were civilisationally, not Iranians, Turks or Arabs. If anything, they were Indians beneath their skin, pretending to be somebody else.

Kumkum Sangari in "Joint Narratives" remarks:

> In *Aag ka Darya*, for the first time a woman writer, Qurrantulain Hyder, annexed over 25 centuries of Indain History as a subject matter. The grand nationalist visions of a pluralist civilisation had till then been a male domain elaborated, among others, by Rabindra Nath Tagore and Jawaharlal Nehru, while women had been for almost two centuries the subjects of colonial, nationalist, or sectarian histories, often invented and usually patriarchal. (1)

Sangari hints at the overarching Indian civilisation that is impervious to the division of its territory in "separate nations" that still have a "joint narrative". The other point is that "for the first time a woman writer, Qurrantulain Hyder" is presenting the "grand nationalist vision of a pluralist civilisation that till then had been a male domain".

To the gender question, that of a female writer moving into the male domain, and allied issues we will come later, but the point here is the "joint narrative" rather than "separate nation".

The claim that *River of Fire* is a transcreation by Hyder of her *Aag ka Darya* makes some sense as it is different from the Urdu original in quite a few not-so-insignificant ways. The difference between the two works will be discussed in the technique part of this study. However, this is to indicate that a Pakistani writer, Khalid Hasan's, acclaimed English translation of bits of *Aag ka Darya* have appeared in some writings that should further elucidate her perspective on "religious nationalism", or the cynical deployment of Islam in the argument for a new nation state carved out of India.

Discussing *Aag ka Darya*, Pakistani writer Raza Rumi quotes the following from Khalid Hasan's translation of passages from the novel in which "[t]he modern Kamal, an Indian who becomes a Pakistani", writes:

> Islam! Islam had a rough ride here. If the Pakistani team begins to lose at cricket, Islam is endangered. Every problem in the world is reduced to this word Islam. Other Muslim countries resent that the sole contractors of Islam are these people from Pakistan. Everything is upholstered with narrow-mindedness. Music, art, civilisation, learning and literature, are viewed from the perspective of the mullah. Islam, which was like a rising river whose majestic flow had been augmented by so many tributaries to turn it into a cascading force, has been reduced to a muddy stream which is being enclosed from all four sides with high walls. ("The Enigma" 65)

Rumi continues, [as Kamal] "attempts to understand a new nation state and a fractured society, the results are chilling. The seeds of Islamism and its hideous manifestations had been sown long before the barbarism of today, which is its ripened and bitter fruit" (65). Religion and language, at terrible play in the Pakistani national narrative, get an accommodative, inclusive character in Hyder's novel.

To drive home the point Rumi quotes the following from *Aag ka Darya* (Hasan's translation):

> The joke is that those who raise the slogan of Islam with the loudest voices have nothing to do with the philosophy of this religion. The only thing they know is that Muslims ruled Spain for 800 years, that they ruled Bharat for a thousand years, and the Ottomans kept Eastern Europe subjugated for centuries. (65)

It is quite clear that Hyder's idea of "nation" is inclusive as opposed to an exclusivist, hegemonic and oppressive nation. *Aag ka Darya* in its worldview is the binary opposite of the idea of Pakistan.

It came at a time when alternative nationalist discourses were still being constructed in India and Pakistan. It was the time, more so in Pakistan, but also in India, for memorising new histories and forgetting a lot of the old. As Gyanendra Pandey so succinctly puts in *Remembering Partition: Violence, Nationalism and History of India*, the creation of a new history requires a lot of remembering, as well as forgetting, to fit in with the "unity of the collective subject-community of nation" (15).

Hyder's vision of a millennia-old civilisation, a composite culture and inclusive nationalism in *Aag ka Darya* did not gel with the Pakistani national narrative but fitted snugly the Indian version.

References to local / "national" versus foreign / foreigner begin to appear right from the beginning. As early as on page 7, Harius Sancarius, "the Greek", appears. He talks about his roots in Ionia, Greece, and how he brought his "cargo boat from the Gulf to the River Indus," where he left it in charge of his "Phoenician crew to explore the land mass to the east." This "Yavana" is the first *mlechha* (literally, dirty), that Gautam Nilambar has seen. A Yavana in the 4th century BC was an lonian (and, by extension, any Greek, European, or any foreigner). A *mlechha*, too, could be any white or lighter-skinned foreigner.

This term was xenophobic as it meant "dirty foreigner", often the despised other. (This term resonates with other, more xenophobic expressions). Of course, Harius Sancarious

turns out to be the fugitive prince of Taxila who went out to study, but did not return even in the eighth year, after graduation. This is also the point of time at which the story begins. He had chosen to become a wandering philosopher, attracted to the new way of Buddhism, but not enough to be a monk, not yet.

By page 9 the Greek disguise (complete with knee-length tunic, leather belt and leather sandals) is blown away and he is found out to be the "good old Raj Kumar Hari Shankar, better known as the Missing Prince of Kaushal Desh". Till then he has described how he had "bought a horse from a Scythian" and brought dry fruit, "uncooked, straight from the orchards of Gandhara" (Qandahar, Afghanistan). He has assured Gautam Nilambar that by eating his (Hari Shankar's) dry fruits, Gautam would not lose his caste as it was uncooked, the legal pollution being in the cooking by a *mlechha*.

As early as page 4, "poor Champak, the chief minister's daughter, had no choice but to discuss matters of intellect with visiting Chinese scholars," while her heart is still with Prince Hari Shankar whom she awaits. The reference to visiting "Chinese" scholars implies clear distinctions between two sets of national civilisational identities, the Chinese and Kaushal Deshi.

Quite early on, one begins to have some idea of different races, different countries (nations?) ethnicities (nationalities?) cultures and cultural prejudices. And there, set amidst all that, are Taxila, Shravasti, Pataliputra – sovereign states of north Indian plains.

Interestingly, Hari Shankar's claims are no idle boasts: he has really travelled to Aryana, today's Afghanistan, and beyond, to Central Asia, the land of Turukshas, the horse people. Then the fellow Aryans, the Iranians, and their mighty empire come in for some discussion between the two. And then there is some mention of the inferior races as opposed to the Aryas (the superior race). This is easily like the 19th-century European idea of the white, superior, European ruling races and the inferior, dark, unevolved subject races.

The extreme version of this distinction included Nazism in the 20th century, a doctrine based on the superiority of the Nordic races. Hari Shankar also happens to be a student of Acharya Vishnu Sharma (the famous Chanakya) whose lectures on political theory he had attended. Theory of statecraft and its innate reliance on violence, war, deceit, and cunning have made Prince Hari Shankar renounce the world and, consequently, the kingdom waiting for him. And, Champak, his fiancée.

Kingdoms, the precursors of post-Westphalian nation states, were built on large-scale violence and needed continuous war and bloodshed to sustain them. Violence against other kingdoms and also against people within their own boundaries. It would be of help to recall the national wars of the 20th century and those of the present to gauge the scale of manslaughter involved for the cause of nation. The millions of Germans, Russian and Kampucheans, who perished at the hands of Hitler, Stalin and Pol Pot, killed by their own leaders within their own countries, provide another dimension of the violence of nationalism and statecraft.

Prince Hari Shankar, the second most important character in the novel, says it was the inevitable violence of running a state that made him renounce the kingdom. Prince Hari Shankar talks about his student life under Chanakya:

> I used to live in a tiny cave-like brick cell in the quadrangle of Taxila. We had our food in a dining hall where Acharya Vishnu Sharma often lectured on political theory. He propounded the Law of the Fish – big fish eat smaller ones. What we needed, he maintained, was an empire – the days of small kingdoms were over (10).

Building an empire would require state power, and even more bloodshed. To sustain such an enterprise there would be a well-crafted ideology and a "mystique" that would justify the exercise of so much power and the shedding of so much of human blood. Prince Hari Shankar continues:

> There were some Iranians in Taxila. They said their monarchs had developed a mystique of kingship which was truly awesome. I faced a dilemma. If I remained in this world of power-hungry kings and warlords and politicians I would have to kill human beings, whereas now I didn't even want to kill animals. (9-10)

Here we have quite a few features of modern nation states and the advent of large empires. References to the Greek, Chinese and Iranian states of 24 centuries ago, their distinctions and similarities vis-à-vis Taxila are also there in the recollections of Prince Hari Shankar of his sojourn through alien lands and interactions with different kinds of foreigners:

> I left the university and set out on my long journey. I sailed on the Indus river and rode out to the mountains of the blue-eyed Pakthas, and beyond. The Brahmins of the north-west boast that they can trace their lineage to the rishis who composed the Vedic hymns when they lived in the mountains of Aryana [modern Afghanistan] before the mailed warriors of Indra conquered the dark peoples of Hariyupia [Harappa]…. [A]nd those Rig Vedic chants, when they were sung out there, you could almost hear the tearing north wind and the thunder of red-faced Rudra. I sat around the bonfires of furclad nomads and heard the caravan-leaders recount the epics of Turanian heroes, Sohrab and Rustam. (11)

The racial memories and shared myths of racial groups like Aryans in north India, Ionians and Persians are some of the foundations on which nations are built. The period described is the 4th century BC when the republics of north India were rising out of tribal formations. And that was also the time when the idea of superior (Arya) and inferior (Anarya) races was crystallising. This is also the beginning of the story. Prince Hari Shankar again:

> I heard of the centuries-long Greco-Persian wars and the conquests of Iran's emperors. Darius I, King of Kings, had declared: 'I am Daryush, Emperor of Emperors, Lord of this Earth, Iranian son of Iranian, Arya, son of an Arya…. The Persian kings call their language Aryani. (11)

There are references to common ethnic and linguistic roots shared between "Aryan" tribes from northern Indian plains to Iran and Afghanistan and some light-hearted comment about the supremacist claims of people sharing this language group. The well-educated Gautam Nilambar is convinced that the Aryan supremacist claims are not hollow:

> Say, this Arya business is good business. We are Aryans, too, aren't we, very superior people, eh? Gautam sat up. Which goes to show. There are people of noble birth like us and the Iranians, and there are lesser breeds – it's all the Law of Karma. (11)

It is a time of wars of conquest and expansion. Gautam, "worried about the world situation," tells Prince Hari Shankar (who is now Hari Ananda, the Buddhist Bhikshu):

> I go to town every day on my begging rounds, and I hear rumours. A friend of mine, Vimleshwar, lives in Shravasti. He designs fancy ornaments. Sometimes I make the sketches for him. He had gone to Patliputra on business and he says the capital is full of unrest. The Dhan king has become very unpopular. More taxes: salt, sugar, even firewood is taxed. Moreover, your Guru Chanakya, Vishnu Sharma of Taxila, has turned up there. (19)

To the reference to his guru, Hari Anand says, "He was bound to" (be in Patliputra). "If one wants to capture power one ought to be in the capital" (19).

Matters of politics, statecraft and the inevitable violence involved with it come in for discussion. Gautam Nilambar, again: "So much is being spent on defence. Defence against whom? Both Saket and Madhya Desh are weak feudatories of Magadh, and Vimleshwar says our king is only a Rajan, not even a full-fledged Raja, with nobody to help him" (19).

The worldly Brahmin scholar Gautam Nilambar admonishes the prince-turned ascetic for running away from his responsibilities for his kingdom, his people, his father the king:

> Aren't you being an escapist? At a critical time like this you should have been at your poor old father's side. Look, Magadh has always been troublesome. They even fought against Lord Krishna in the Great War. They like violence … their king, Ajatshatru, killed his own pater. (19)

Hari Ananda remarks dispassionately, "These things happen in royal families" (19). Hari Shankar is not the only prince to have become disgusted with the innate violence of statecraft. He is talking to Gautam Nilambar 150 years after the Buddha attained *nirvana*. Ghastly crimes like patricide being no great news in the life of a king or prince ("These things happen in royal families") the noblest princes renouncing the world, too, should have surprised no one. Gautam reflects on the Buddha and Mahavira:

> I think that's why the Princes Mahavira and Siddhartha both appeared in that land to preach peace… But I have always wondered – both of them were contemporaries and lived and preached in the same region, but they never met. (19)

References to region (like above) desh, kings, statecraft, war and conquest abound, so do "foreigner," empire and other words to connote some kind of territorial association, its culture, dress and manners. The consciousness of belonging to such entities larger than families, clans, tribes, or, in spatial terms districts and parganah is a major component of today's nation and nation-state consciousness.

Gender: The Women of *River of Fire*

The world of *River of Fire* seems to be the creation of men, but over the entire 2400-year stretch of the story women had often been holding on their own as generally dignified, self-respecting, independent-minded persons.

Champa, the heroine, is a Hindu in the first two epochs while in the last two (as Champabai and Champa Ahmed) she is a Muslim. Here again, Hyder tries to delegitimise the Pakistani national doctrine by de-emphasising the religious identity of arguably her most significant character.

Quite a few people read the re-emergence of different characters in different guises as *ava-gaman* (transmigration of souls); others take it as merely recurring patterns of human life and relationships. Hyder had no definitive answer to this. Anyway, a great literary text can be read in so many ways. Liyange Amarakeerthi finds the recurring pattern significant. She writes:

> Mythical stories, in spite of their irrationality, have to be taken into account when exploring the cultural episteme of a community…. [M]ythical story is a supplement to history and it gives something that history itself cannot preserve. (37)

In whatever way we look at it Champak comes out as no inferior to her male counterpart in any of the epochs. The last one, Champa Ahmed, chooses to stay back in India, where she feels she belongs, in difficult circumstances rather than living in comfort in Europe or migrating to Pakistan where she would be better placed, materially. In many ways, Champa turns out to be made of stronger stuff than many men.

On the other hand, her friend Kamal is forced by the severity of post-Partition circumstances to go and settle down in Pakistan against his will. Kamal lives a prosperous life in Pakistan as Champa (who has similar education) struggles in a difficult situation in India. Yet, Kamal thinks Champa has done well for herself as she has stayed her ground and ignored the material comfort of Europe and Pakistan.

Kamal had earlier some misgivings about Champa's decision to stay back in India among the people she knew, the *jhoolas* of *Sawan*, the heavy monsoon rains, the song of *koel*, the faint smell of the earth after the first drops of rain and nature bursting into a riot of

colours. And the hot *pakodas* that people ate as a celebration of monsoon, besides a whole lot of other things. This was her land, these were her people, this was the life she wanted to live more than any other. This was eternal India.

Ananya Jahanara in *Partition's Post-Amnesias* observes that a lot of writers and artists who were young adults during Partition use clay as a symbolic return to the Earth. Terracotta object which is a product of "pummeling, kneading, throwing, pinching, scoring, scarring and burning of clay, … embodies overlapping experiences of trauma that striate and shape the modern post-Partition subject" (84). Champa's name is symbolic. She is beautiful and earthy. In the first section of the novel, she inspires Gautam to make a bas-relief of red clay. He calls it Sudarshan Yakshini. Champa's final return to Moradabad from London shows her awareness that she would blossom well in her native soil rather than in a foreign land (*Post-Amnesias* 116-117).

Kamal is in India for a short while to sort out matters related to the property left behind with the Custodian of Evacuee Property to find the family's immovable property in different towns, lost and irretrievable, and the only things that he could take away was moveable property. Disheartened and disgusted with the idea of having any possessions at all, he leaves everything behind, even the things he could take away.

In the final hours of his stay in India the realisation dawns on him that soon he would leave the land and the people he regarded as his own forever, irrevocably. He visits his friend Champa Ahmed briefly. Champa is sure her life is here in India, with all the struggles it entails. The town, Moradabad, is drenched in *Sawan* rains:

> Downstairs the girls were busy frying monsoon delicacies. They had put on traditional rainbow-coloured cotton *dupattas* and saris in honour of the rains. "Send up something for us, too," Champa called out to them through the window. "Okay, Bajia, wait a bit", one of them shouted back merrily and resumed singing, "Who, oh who, has hung the swing on the mango trees?" This popular song had been composed by Bahadur Shah Zafar, the last Mughal king of India…. (402)

Hyder goes on to describe the rainfall as it falls only in the Subcontinent:

> Rain fell tunefully in the pool downstairs. The trees appeared lush green, little streams rippled in the lanes, a tank of lustrous water sparkled in the courtyard. The supplings in the cracked China vases swayed in the breeze, and little water-falls spilled down from rain spouts. "*This*", Champa said, "*is mine own Water Place. Herein flows the stream of my tears*" (Italics are the author-translator's). (402- 403)

From the highly articulate and cerebral Champa Ahmed to the more ordinary Muslim women making *pakodas* downstairs, it is the women who are so deeply involved with nature's changing cycle and its exuberant celebration.

The women have no role to play in the partition, but it is they who are the agents of life that reasserts itself, creating the old rhythm again. Regeneration and celebration of the vitality of nature comes easier to them than to men.

By contrast, Kamal, who is no less Indian at heart than Champa, gives in. Hours before he is on his way to Delhi railway station to catch the train to Pakistan, he begins to find inconsistencies in the respective national historical discourses of India and Pakistan. Before leaving India, Kamal visits the museum where Kumari Aruna Bajpai tells him: "'A proper museum, under construction, will do justice to our glorious heritage'. Kamal winced at the cliché… Kamal did not think it necessary to tell her that he had belonged to this country, too" (414).

During the museum visit (a portion of the erstwhile Viceregal Lodge, rechristened Rashtrapati Bhawan), more facets of the new national narratives begin to intrude into his perspective:

> [O]nce again his thoughts were disturbed by Kumari Bajpai. "Come along, please", she said, shepherding her flock into another room. "Here is the Dancing Girl of Mohen-Jo-Daro, India's earliest civilization… five thousand years old". It is Pakistan's earliest civilization, he wanted to correct her officially, but the situation was too funny for words. (414)

Somehow the women seem to be more sure-footed in all this, whether it is Champa with her "my water place", or Kumari Aruna Bajpai holding forth on "India's earliest civilisation… five thousand years old". Kamal knows this rather well:

> Kamal used to think that while he was forging ahead Champa had stayed behind. He would march on to new worlds, new visions, new horizons. Today, he realised that he was perhaps receding and Champa, who was not lonely any more, was moving forward. She had the sorrowful little priest of her mosque for company. Zebun and Mariam, the veiled women and ragged urchins of her lane, the under-nourished coolies with their push-carts…. (403)

Gender, rather women, and what they mean and do to men, comes in for a lot of reflection and philosophising. Gender (unlike the biological category of sex) is ascriptive, a sociological construct. Here is Gautam Nilambar, mesmerised by the Taxila chief minister's daughter, whom he had surreptitiously seen taking a bath in the Saryu from behind shrubs. Champak is engaged to Prince Hari Shankar, who renounces the world and becomes a monk. Meanwhile, she had been waiting for him for the last eight years to return and marry her. The prince entrusts Gautam Nilambar with the engagement ring given to him by Champak and asks him to return it to her and thus free her from the commitment of marriage as he had become a monk and taken a vow of celibacy. Taking the ring, Gautam secures the "permission" from the prince to "fall in love with Champak". For a brief moment "a cloud passes over" Gautam's face before he "grants" the permission. The ascetic is yet to be fully free of the bondage of love for the young woman who wears magnolia (*champa*) in her hair.

In fact, it is difficult for men to get off their mind women they fancy or are in love with. Hari Ananda has somehow wrenched himself away from Champak, but the smitten Gautam is no renunciate, and for him, "The prospect of meeting Champak was much too exciting and unexpected" (21).

Men in love have always showed such symptoms and have often wondered what was it about women that so deeply affected them. They have liked that feeling and lionised and, even deified the object of their love in poetry, painting, drama and sculpture. They have also, paradoxically, demonised and vilified them, ultimately to admit that women are difficult to live with, and more difficult to live without. Here is Gautam Nilambar musing on the same old questions (men's questions) about women and the in-built paradoxes:

> Why did women have such power over men? he wondered. The Buddha had solved that problem too: shun them. He had told his chief disciple Ananda: "Don't look at them." "But suppose one's glance falls on them, Sir?"
> "Do not speak to them".
> "If they start talking to us?"
> "Keep wide awake". (21)

Gautam Nilambar thinks of sages' contradictory statements about women, like:

> Woman could never be pure, she was the root of all evil, she was shallow. Women of good families envied courtesans for their dresses and ornaments. Evil came into the world because of creation. Woman gave birth, so she was the origin of all sin (21).

This was woman, as seen by man – responsible for all the trouble. Yet, she deserved respect as she symbolised Shakti the feminine deity, the source of power. So, where do women really stand?

Questions like why are wives burnt alive with their dead husbands and why Sakyamuni (the Buddha) told his disciple Ananda that women were stupid, jealous and vicious. That led Ananda to desert his beloved Sundari and, following in his footsteps, now Hari Shankar had forsaken his Champak "What is so wrong with women that they should be shunned like lepers?" (21)

Being a woman has never been easy. Often valued only for their physical beauty, they seem to lose value with age. In a nightmare, Gautam sees a goddess turn quickly into the beautiful Champak before turning into an ugly old woman with a toothless grin. "I am Vaishali's…," she says, as he wakes before she could complete her sentence with "Amrapali," the gorgeous courtesan of a century and a half ago. That sets Gautam thinking: "If you could somehow foresee your beloved in her old age you would never want to fall in love. Perhaps that's what the Buddhist Teaching was all about" (14).

The same idea of women's worth being limited by age recurs when, after years of his first glimpse of Champak, his long separation and seemingly endless search for her, he happens to see her among the audience looking at him playing the hero in a renowned theatre. In the intervening years Gautam has become a great actor with a large fan following and the lover of the best actress of the time, Ambika, who is rich and finances his fanciful, expensive life of excess.

He is so stunned that he lets his shawl, artfully covering the disfigured left hand, slip in the middle of the stage. He had lost some fingers of his hand in a war defending Kaushal Desh against invaders during the days of his separation from Champak in a melee created by thugs. In the war that soon followed, the kingdom (whose crown prince Hari Shankar was, and the daughter of whose prime minister was Champak) fell to Magadhan invaders. Chanakya's big fish eating small fish. The men were slaughtered, the beautiful women, including Champak, enslaved or taken away.

Before becoming a highly successful actor and giving up on Champak, a desperate

> Gautam could not trade in anything except his learning, but he was not supposed to charge any fees from his students. And he avoided the company of thinkers and sophists. He continued living on alms and looked for Champak in Buddhist nunneries, Champak whom we could today call a Sanatani, is not certainly Buddhist, to be looked for in a Buddhist nunnery. But because of the attraction of the Buddha after a century and a half of his *nirvana*, young women of the upper classes were still becoming Buddhist nuns in sizeable numbers, market-squares and new garrison towns of the victorious Mauryan army. She seems to have vanished. (43)

After all those years of longing and desperate search, and after giving up on her, he finds her sitting in the audience, watching him. "And then it happened. In a flush of unexpected excitement he threw up his disfigured hands." In that charged moment:

> Women gasped. Romantic young girls were shocked. There was a hushed stir in the hall. The celebrated sad-faced hero had mutilated fingers. He always kept his hands, especially the left one, carefully concealed under his mantle. On this fateful evening his glance had fallen on somebody in the audience. It had upset him so much that he spun round with a flourish and his shawl slipped off. Ambika quickly picked it up and quickly threw it back over his shoulders. (47)

The earlier talk about women losing beauty and value over time comes to mind. The toothless, frightening haggard woman in Gautam's nightmare who was the once beautiful courtesan Amrapali of Vaishali and Gautam's remark that no man would fall in love if he could see the beloved in her old age.

The Champak he sees is not the fresh-faced young woman that he hankered for but a radically different persona:

> Champak sat in the first row, dressed in purple silk, loaded with gold ornaments. She was accompanied by a little boy and her maid. She had come to attend the famous actor's first performance in the metropolis. She had also wanted to see Ambika, who was reputed to be his possessive mistress…. Speechless for a moment, he gathered his wrap and stared at Lady Magnolia again.
>
> The woman he had been searching for all those years – there she sat on the floor, cross-legged, with a child beside her. A prosperous housewife and mother. No longer an ideal or a vision, just a matron with a double chin and a middle-age spread. Shiva-Shiva. (47)

Women's worth and the reason to love them is merely physical allure, which is in ruins in a short while. But men seem to be prized for not just their looks. Their value endures.

At the end of the First Act of the play Champak sends her maid to Gautam asking to see him for a while. By now Gautam has moved on. "Across the foot lights Champak cried quietly, pretending to be moved by the hero's oratory" (47). Gautam asks the mai, "Go and tell your lady on behalf of this body: One who is awake falls asleep one day, and one who has been asleep suddenly awakens" (48). This resonates with the earlier advice of the Buddha to Ananda to keep away from women, avoid looking at them and, if they insist on talking "keep awake." Gautam has probably awakened in that sense. Allusions to high philosophy follow. Gautam tells the maid… "I now am wide awake, and though the path be as sharp as the razor's edge, nothing can hinder me now." This has reference to the Katha Upanishad's, "The path of salvation is sharper than a razor's edge".

The maid comes back from Champak, finding him "still there, backstage." She is the same dusky maid he had seen years ago standing by Champak while she was taking her bath. She says bowing, "My lady says: you are so right, O Wise One! It is good that you have woken up. Further, the Lady Champak says: What, kind sir, you know of a woman's devotion? However, it is all right, she says, for none can blunt the razor's edge. Now you may go too, quoth she, and bids you farewell" (49).

The maid tries her last ploy: Come see her for a moment, "For old times' sake." Gautam, the university-educated philosopher, snubs her: "My dear Jamuna, there are no old times and new times. Only Eternity–which is also an instant" (49). Before that the maid Jamuna has told him that when the palace was sacked she was made a captive and Lady Champak was forced to join an "old mantri's harem, who was at the moment away on a tour" (49). She goes back to Champak to return soon with this long answer:

> Lady Magnolia says that in all your glory and self assertion you may propound great philosophies but right now, at this moment, after receiving this reply from you, it is she who has become the Enlightened One. For she has realised the Supreme Truth–It is a profound misfortune to be born a woman, since her beauty and youth have nothing to do with Eternity! (49)

The "profound misfortune of being born as a woman" is a recurrent theme throughout much of Qurratulain Hyder's body of work. Her novels *Agle Janam Mohe Bitiya Na Kijyo* (God, Don't Make Me a Woman in My Next Birth), translated by her as *A Woman's Life*, *Chandni Begum*, *Patjhar ki Awaz* (translated by her as *Sound of Falling Leaves)*, *Sita Haran* (translated by C.M. Naim as *Sita Betrayed*) are all woman-centred and reflect this ontological disadvantage of being a woman.

The battle of sexes is reflected again when Kamal tells Hari that Amir Reza felt uncomfortable with an intellectual woman. He had decided to marry a simpler woman as he "didn't want to feel threatened by his wife" (337). Both friends agree that they understand the emotion perfectly.

Women have been victimised in the name of religion across countries. After all, it is a patriarchal institution. Prafulla tells Cyril that his elder sister, a widow, has only two options now – either marry a peepul tree or a dying man. The stigma of widowhood is so strong that not even the poorest of men would marry her till she was purged of this curse by choosing one of the options.

Cyril is reminded of death-bed marriages for the sake of money. Prafulla informs that among Muslim aristocrats a woman is married to the Holy Book if the men are unable to find a suitable boy for her. This practice also seems familiar to Cyril who thinks of the "brides" of Christ in Europe. Not all women go for it out of volition but because they are forced to (116-117).

One often wonders whether Hyder's women, being what they are, have some agency and come to the conclusion that they do, within their own limitations. She likes to remember forgotten women from history who dared to change the rules.

Kamaluddin learns about Razia, the female monarch who preferred to be called Sultan (masculine) rather than Sultana (feminine) .She wanted to abolish the tax paid by Hindus in lieu of military service. She tried to present herself as "manly", but she was killed for her reformative policies. She was disliked by her ministers for her humane attitude. Kamal is presented a coin bearing her name on one side and the image of a goddess on the other. She was a courageous administrator who knew how to rule over a large empire with people from diverse faiths (61-62).

Hyder's novels portray the predicament of being a woman in a man's world, while still managing to have some agency of one's own and, occasionally taking pride in the extraordinary lives of some earlier women:

> [After Bibi Raji's father died, her] no good brother, Allauddin Alam Shah abdicated in favour of Bahlol Lodhi. When Mehmud Khan [Bibi Raji's husband] became king, Bibi Raji told him, "If you don't attack Delhi I will lead the army myself. That throne belongs to my family. My brother was a fool to quit." So Mehmud laid siege to the capital when Sultan Bahlol was away at Sirhind. (64)

On the other side, too, a woman was not merely the inspiration behind the confrontation, but an active leader of the defence:

> Bahlol's aunt, Bibi Masto, was officer-in-charge of the fort. Only a few members of the Lodhi family were present inside. Bibi Masto dressed the woman up in men's uniforms and sent them up to the ramparts. From a distance they looked like soldiers. Then she ordered a few men inside the castle to keep shooting arrows from time to time at the enemy so that they would think the fort was well defended. (64)

This tactic harassed and unnerved the invaders, who receded to their camps. Bibi ordered victory drums to be beaten, which further demoralised the invaders, who went back from where they had come, Jaunpur. The exceptional courage and presence of mind of such women fascinate Hyder perpetually. Following the above, accounts of Bibi Raji's deftness at court intrigues and intricate manoeuvres of power play are described approvingly.

Hyder is quick to appreciate tokens of women's emancipation, enlightenment and freedom at earlier stages of history. In *River of Fire*, the Jaunpur Sultan's kinswoman Ruqqaiya Bano Begum goes to college and is a budding scholar, with whom Kamaluddin (he is the first Kamal) falls in love. Hyder sees some signs of women's, or at least some women's, emancipation as well as other signs that are not pleasing in medieval Jaunpur:

> In her college the faculty consists of pious spinsters of royal blood who are unmarried because men of equal status or lineage could not be found. There are also old and learned war widows of whom there is no dearth. Young widows remarry in no time. (68)

Usually, it has been men who have been hankering after women, writing poetry to celebrate their beauty, singing songs to the accompaniment of musical instruments, but Kamal, the son of an Arab father and a Persian mother, is thrilled to see some gender role reversal in Jaunpur:

> These are faithful, shy, docile. They worship their husbands as demi-gods and touch their feet in obeisance every morning. They put the man on a pedestal and sing songs in his praise. That's how it ought to be. We developed this Cult of the Lady in Hispania and introduced the concept of romance and chivalry into the rest of Europe…. Here the roles are reversed – man is the beloved, the woman pines for him and is forever waiting for him. That's very flattering indeed. (76)

Interestingly, there is a fleeting mention of *purdah* among Rajput women, like the women of Muslim upper classes. Even *purdah* seems to be a shared practice among certain castes and classes of Muslims and Hindus.

Hyder's early women seem to be more fatalistic than men, or later women. The Champa of Jaunpur Sultanate talking to Kamaluddin:

> "The cult of Radha and Krishna is a Mystery," she picked up some flowers. "And, anyway, everything is in the hands of destiny."
> "No, you can make your choice here and now. If you agree to marry me you'll get such an interesting fellow in this life and as a Muslim, you will be safe in the Hereafter" (78).

Here she virtually echoes the first heroine of the novel, Champak, who lived almost two millennia earlier. Her fiance, Hari the Prince, for whom she had been waiting for eight years, had returned her engagement ring after becoming a Buddhist monk. The man who was assigned to give the ring back to her loses it somewhere and says "sorry" for it to Champak, who replies: "'I am not.'… 'This was all my karma. What's done cannot be undone'" (29).

Women are captured and expropriated like enemy territory, their bodies and persons marked as objects of contest. The first Champak is captured by the invading Magadhan army and put in concubinage to a *mantri*. Close to two millennia later, Ruqqaiya Bano

Begum is captured by Afghans and taken to Delhi. Women are treated as enemy territory during Partition riots and later. In that particular sense, women do not seem to have attained full freedom.

Women become warriors rarely, but men love to kill. The second Champa does not like the sight of a sword. She tells Kamal so, who reassures her that he is not a warrior, only a scholar. Kamal says what he is carrying is merely a dagger, "the ornament of a man" (77)

Later, Kamal meets a former Thakur general in the Lodhi army that trounced the Sharqi Sultanate of Jaunpur. This Thakur general, who lost his right hand fingers in the war, has become an ascetic and a follower of Sant Kabir Das.

The general tells him he met Champa wandering in the jungle, awaiting Kamal's return, but no swan and no dark clouds brought her Kamal's message. Her non-combatant brother was killed in the war. She told the general to throw away his sword and go to Kabir Das, which he did.

Hyder's women are mostly lovers of peace, but end up as victims of war. Losing their brother, son or husband, they are often captured as war booty. In *River of Fire* Hindu kindgoms fight Hindu kindoms, Muslim sultanates battle against rival Muslim kingdoms, the warriors on both sides being both Hindu and Muslim. Religion is not at the centre.

Among the women of Hyder there is always the sorrow of fading charm with the passage of time. The first heroine, Champak, notices it as does Gautam Nilambar, who had spent a long time looking for her after a war. After he sees her years later with her child, the matronly woman seems to have lost all her charms. She is no longer the person Gautam loved. In the 19th century, British official Cyril Ashley's "desi bibi" Sujata Debi is faced with the same predicament. She discovers that after 25 years of devoted service to Ashley he wants to cast her off "as an old shoe" (129). Over the last quarter century her charms have slowly worn off.

Women's predicament seems to remain unaffected 2,400 years after Champak, till 1940s, around the time of India's Independence. Qamrun, the "Driver's Wife", tells the last Champa, Champa Ahmed:

> What's a mere woman, after all…. she is a man's personal servant as a wife, and even as a mother. In her youth she is tormented by her in-laws, in her old age she is bullied by her daughter-in-law, as a widow, if she is a widow, she is ignored by everyone. All her life she has to serve, serve, serve. And even then men are not satisfied. What do they want? Complete submission, like God. (267)

Women's emotional difficulties never seem to ease. Even those of beautiful women, who "die twice, once when they get older and the charm wears off " (250). Physical death comes later.

Financial independence helps, but their emotional difficulties do not go away with that either:

> "Champa Baji is economically independent," Hari argued, "but look at the mess she is in…"
> "Amir Raza, Gautam, Cyril Ashley, Bill Craig, Gautam again, in the second round—why she's been playing musical chairs," Talat replied. (336)

The Champa here is the last Champa of *River of Fire*, around World War II. Despite her high education, economic independence and the mid-20th century milieu of Lucknow, Champa Ahmed is still essentially like the Champas of earlier ages.

An enduring impression that one gets about Muslim women across the ages is that they are like any other women. There are similarities here between women of different religions, but the same class: feudal Rajput women observing purdah like feudal Muslim women.

Throughout the novel, it is the class and caste of women that mark their identity. After the "Indianisation" of Muslims the same principle held, till the time of Partition when women were marked for their religion and turned into territory to be conquered, plundered and destroyed by opposing armies. Like Hindu and Sikh women of what was to become Pakistan, Muslim women of what remained of India had to bear the brunt.

Happily, as the storm began to weaken and blow over, older personal and social ties reasserted, even across the new national frontiers, as was evident from the lives of Hari, Gautam, Champa and Kamal. These were the recurring patterns of human relationships across the ages that Hyder had been interested in.

Identity

In River of Fire denominational identities are de-emphasised and commonly shared cultural and civilisational values are privileged. People's religious affiliations and sensitivities are accepted, accommodated and celebrated. The separateness of religion is enveloped in oneness of social life. In Jaunpur kingdom there is separate staff for Hindu and Muslim travellers in the free kitchens of serais established by King Ibrahim (65). As is evident from the previous pages, Hyder embraced gender identity, but was wary of religious identity.

Sultan Hussain Shah of Jaunpur (66) is a great synthesiser of Arab and Indian musical traditions. He has composed *ragas* and *raginis*, which he calls *khyal* (Arabic for thought). At this point in time Gwallior and Jaunpur are two great centres of music. The Sultan is also known as Nayak (a performing artiste). He is possibly the only medieval monarch on earth who is also a fine performing artiste.

A galaxy of his musicians live in Dharitola, Dhari being a caste that includes both Muslims and Hindus.

This is the age of the rise of a composite culture of Hindus and Muslims in India. It is the time of sufis and bhaktas who emphasise the oneness of humankind. Even the Arab-Iranian Kamaluddin writes *dohas* in Hindvi (71). There is an Awadhi who tells Kamal that the Prophet Noah's son, Prophet Sheth was buried in Ayodhya, the holy town of Hindus (75).

In the same view, a *bhakta* poet, Kabir Das, rises to become a folk spiritual guide. Born to Muslim parents, "Kabir Mian" epitomised synthesis of Hindu and Muslim cultures and beliefs.

It was a time of great spiritual flowering and synthesis. From a Chishti *khanqah*, Kamal goes to Varanasi to meet Sant Kabir on the orders of the Chishti *peer*. It was a time of synthesis:

> Stirring things were happening in Sikander Lodhi's regime. A child called Nanak was born in Punjab in a Khatri household, destined to found a new syncretic religion. The Muslims called him Nanak "Shah Faqir", "Shah" and "Sultan" in Sufi vocabulary signified spiritual elevation, faqirs or humble mystics were Kings of the Spiritual World. (98)

Official, organised religion was at loggerheads with the folk, popular religion in India of those times as it has been in other times and climes:

> Like the Catholic mystics of contemporary Europe, the mystics of India were not too popular with the clerics. The pundits and maulvis of Banaras resented Kabir Das and sent petitions to Sultan Sikandar to chastise this heretical weaver who was misleading the masses. Sultan Sikander requested Mian Kabir to leave Banaras. (98)

It was the time of the rise of a great syncretic culture in India. A hundred years before Kamaluddin left Jaunpur to wander over a large part of India, mixing and singing with

sufis and bhaktas, Bengal had a poet and a singer in every village and hamlet. "Storytellers chanted roopo-kathaa; ferrymen, snake-charmers and elephant-trappers sang their ballads" (99).

In the same song they hailed the Prophet, Shri Ram, Sitaji and Radha-Krishna. One such ballad was called Nizam the Robber as the man who had composed it was a robber called Nizam. He composed it after Suhrawardy sufis had reformed him. (99)

Since, *River of Fire* uses a large time frame, it is episodic in nature. Hyder picks up specific periods and characters suitable to depict a composite, syncretic civilisation. Among her favourites is King Vajid Ali Shah, who appears in her other novels also. She writes:

> Vajid Ali Shah, the tenth ruler of Oudh, became a legend in his lifetime.He endeared himself to the people as Akhtar Piya, or Jan-i-Alam—life and soul of the world…. He composed thumris and dadras, perfected the dance style of kathak and created the ballet called Ras Lila or Rahas in which he danced as Krishna. In the annual Jogia Mela or Spring Festival held at Qaiser Bagh everybody wore yellow, signifying the colour of mustard (151).

Incidentally, it was a question regarding spring Hyder's niece had asked her that drove her to write the lengthy *Aag ka Darya*.The girl had been brought up in a different milieu, and enjoyed reading about Elvis Presley, had asked: "Amma basant kya hota hai?" (Kumar, Sukrita P, *Narrating Partition* 8).

When in 1856, Vajid Ali Shah was being deported to Calcutta, he gave money to his host, Maharaja Ishani Prasad of Banaras, to set up a trust for the *shehnai* players of Kashi. These were mostly Muslims who were employed by the priests to refresh the Hindu deities in the morning by playing music (209).

Such kings were peripheral in a society where they were supposed to engage in manly pursuits like horse-riding, hunting and engaging in wars. Bano, one of the cousins of King Hussain Shah Nayak, laments that the king had to spend a considerable amount of time in waging wars rather than composing music (70). Other women who pursue spiritual and aesthetic pursuits over statecraft and violence are Champak, Nirmala, Champavati and Sujata.

In her personal life Qurratulain Hyder subscribed to a version of faith which was accommodative of all other faiths and was close to the eclectic, sufi version rather than a strict, clerically-approved one. Born to a Shia mother and a Sunni father, she had grown up seeing close relationships between her parents and their Hindu, Sikh and Christian friends. Her world view had to be eclectic.

With the advent of the British, things began to change, but caste identities remained dominant rather than religious identities. The time of exclusive and competing religious identities was still far away. The castes, across religions, co-existed benignly:

> Cyril's outhouses were full of low-caste folk: gardener, grass cutter, groom, water-carrier, washerman and chowkidar – all Hindus. His tailor, barber, butler and cook were Muslim, and his private barge was manned by Muslim oarsmen. He belonged to the superior caste of Big White Sahabs (113).

Well after the Battle of Plassey in 1757, old syncretic beliefs and shared cultural values held good in Bengal. Reference to the cult of Satyapir-Satyanarayan faqirs, followers of a "Bengali folk version of the Muslim mystical figure of Khwaja Khizr, who like St. Christopher, is believed to guide travellers who have lost their way" , come in during a talk between a Bengali boy and a bewildered John Company official, Cyril Ashley:

> The boy Prafulla gazed at the river bank. He said wistfully, "My father says that on still nights like this one can sometimes see the curly-haired Satyapir, sandalwood on his forehead, a flute in his hand, walking along the river. My

> father often says that if he ever meets this particular god he will ask why he has been afflicted with all these misfortunes" (116).

References to cultural values shared over generations and beliefs that are identical or coterminous with each other are often referred to. A grateful father, whose widowed daughter is saved from the funeral pyre by Cyril Ashley, tells him about the composite culture of pre-British days. This impoverished man was in the employ of the Nawab-Nazim, the ruler of Bengal before the British took over. The man brings Ashley two books as a gift of gratitude:

> "Saheb, this most precious heirloom I have brought as a token of my eternal gratitude." He opened the velvet bag slowly and took out two calligraphed books. I am told that you are deeply interested in Oriental literature, and that you have studied Sanskrit, Persian, and Urdu as well."
>
> "Ah, yes, indeed," Cyril replied modestly. "I am also trying to compile a Bengali-English lexicon when I get some respite from my official duties."
>
> "That is why, Sir, I know you will value these books and perhaps render them into English – Prince Dara Shikoh's Persian translation of the *Upanishads*. He translated it with the help of pundits of Banaras. It is a rare copy. My grandfather was a calligrapher in the scriptorium of Nawab-Nazim Aliwardy Khan at Murshidabad.
>
> "And this one, Saheb, is the Prince's famous *Majma-ul-Bahrain*, the Confluence of Oceans, in which Dara Shikoh compiled the precepts of Islamic mysticism and Vedanta" (119).

Speaking in different voices, Hyder brings out different perspectives in an argument. The Bengali, who was in the service of the Nawab-Nazims of Mushidabad, is still loyal to the old regime:

"How could you be so loyal to rulers who called you Kafirs?" asked Cyril Ashley.

"How are people like the Raja Saheb here so faithful to you, Sir, who call us heathens and treat us as inferior human beings? They didn't. We were their equals, they shared our culture. Aliwardy Khan and his court officially played Holi for seven days running. Two hundred tanks in Murshidabad were filled with coloured water. They did not send the country's wealth outside to some foreign land. We ran their administration and held the highest ranks."

"How could you remain subservient to the Mussalman for seven hundred years? The only explanation is that Indians kow-tow to authority, to the powers that be."

"Ali Jah Aliwardy Khan's government consisted of a large number of Hindu ministers and generals", Radhey Charan responded.

"Yes, but then why did so many Hindu zamindars turn against him and become our allies?" asked Peter Jackson.

"Every phase of passing time has its own logic, compulsions and expediencies", the old man spoke like a sage and to nobody in particular (120-121).

Cyril Ashley saves one woman from Sati while he takes her sister, Sujata as his native bibi. The latter would never be treated as an equal in the British society nor her children if she has any. This reveals the hypocrisy of the colonial administration over its supposedly inferior subjects. Ashley continues to visit courtesans and nautch girls. He has his flings too. His native bibi has to silently bear his atrocities. Sometimes, he wonders if

Maria Teresa, the girl he had seduced bears his child. He realizes that they too practice hierarchy, a sort of caste system. Eurasian children were considered outcastes by both English and Indian people. After the death of their white fathers they were sent to orphanages: "Boys became drummers, girls obtained jobs as nannies, or even turned into trollops" (125).

At every turn Hyder dwells on a shared past, common ancestry (in most cases) and common cultural practices, ideas that stand in sharp contrast to the abhorrent "Two-Nation" theory on which the case for Pakistan rested:

> The Nawab Vazirs of Oudh banned the killing of monkeys in deference to the Hindu monkey-god, Hanuman. Dussehra and Holi were celebrated by many Mughal kings in the Red Fort at Delhi, Holi and Basant were official festivals in Lucknow. Asif-ud-Daulah's mother, Nawab Bahu Begum, used to come to Lucknow to celebrate Holi. The fifth Nawab Vazir's mother, Raj Mata Chhattar Kunwar, built the famous Hanuman temple in Ali Gunj, Lucknow, with a crescent atop its spire.
>
> The Nawab Vazirs created a culture which combined the finest elements of the civilisations of Iran and India. It was a tension-free society of polite, fun-loving people. This chivalrous, feudal world was inhabited by scholars, poets, story-tellers, musicians, scribes, knights and barons, actors, jugglers, chefs, calligraphers, embroiders, champion swimmers, kite-flyers and cock-fighters. Extreme finesse and good taste in the minor arts became the hallmark of the craftsmen. The architecture of Lucknow reminded European visitors of Moscow, Dresden and Constantinople. (131)

This was the city that the nawabs had built as a living tribute to the composite culture of Hindus and Muslims that had the best of India, Iran and Europe in it, a city that prided itself on its culture and arts.

> Lucknow's cosmopolitan society included Italian and French architects, Scottish brewers, Armenian, Jewish, Kashmiri, Iranian and Gujarati merchants, some of whom attended Champa's concerts (135).

Lucknow's court popularised the Awadhi culture and its nobles tried to blend the best of Western and Indian culture. Many nobles visited London regularly.

> Vajid Ali Shah, the tenth ruler of Oudh, became a legend in his lifetime… Like Hussain Shah Nayak of Jaunpur and Sultan Baz Bahadur of Malwa, he was an accomplished musician. He composed *thumris* and *dadras*, perfected the dance style of kathak and created the ballet called *Ras Lila* or *Rahas* in which he danced as Krishna. In the annual *Jogi Mela* or Spring Fetival held at Qaiserbagh everybody wore yellow, signifying the colour of mustard. Vajid Ali wore the ochre robe of a yogi and his favourite dancer was dressed as a jogan. (151)

River of Fire's historical and cultural narrative runs against the grain of Pakistan's official historical narrative that emphasises the separateness of Hindus and Muslims. And yet, on people's level in Pakistan *River of Fire's* original Urdu *Aag ka Darya* remains the highest selling literary work after Iqbal's and Faiz's. Perhaps readers there believe that Indian civilisation is not "exclusive" and all kinds of people have contributed to it. The Two-Nation theory cannot begin to explain Indian life's rich tapestry.

Years, centuries, millennia pass and the end of colonial dominance comes along, as does Partition. Every phase of passing time has its own logic, compulsions and expediencies, as Radhey Charan tells Cyril Ashley. The "logic" of the moment forces Kamal to leave India against his wishes because his property in India is confiscated as "enemy property." He has no resort but to go over to Pakistan, leaving behind his friends, including Hari who calls himself Kamal's double, his alter-ego.

Ironically, Kamal, who is a staunch nationalist, is forced to go over to Pakistan, but Champa Ahmed, who has no strong opinion on anything, decides to live in India in difficult circumstances.

> "Are you a very staunch nationalist, Kamal?, she [Champa] asked him in awe.
>
> "Yes, every honest person should be a nationalist", he answered. "How is it that all the great Muslim intellectuals and scholars and theologians of India are nationalists? Have they sold their souls to the devil? Have a heart, Champa Baji."…
>
> "Kamal, if your father thinks the Muslims' salvation lies in the establishment of Pakistan, you should have no quarrel with him at all. Don't you believe in freedom of thought?" said Champa.
>
> "You cannot drop your motherland like an old coat," Kamal shot back. (254)

And yet, it is Kamal who has to leave for Pakistan, forced by the "logic, expediencies and compulsions" of Partition. The sheer force and size of the event of Partition leaves the major characters groping for elusive answers.

Kamal reminisces how as playful children he and Hari had changed nameplates in Dalanwall, Dehra Dun. Now, he would have to carve out a fresh identity in a new country (411). The exchange of names and places did not seem amusing anymore.

CM Naim, who has translated Hyder's novella *Sita Haran* into English as *Sita Betrayed*, calls Partition, "a season of betrayals." Frustrated at the turn of events, Kamal's friends talk about it in India in terms of betrayal:

> …After a while Hari said, "Yaar Gautam…"
> "*Bolo*"
> "Kamal has deserted us. Betrayed his friends, gone away for good and let us down. Together, we could have challenged the galaxies."
> "We have all betrayed one another," Gautam replied quietly. Can these western visitors to Shravasti understand the pain in our souls? In India's, in Kamal's, in mine." (425-426)

Translation

River of Fire may not adequately be described as a "translation" of *Aag ka Darya*: It is a "transcreation", even an adaptation in some ways. The Urdu version can be said to be the "original" only because it preceded *River of Fire*. Otherwise, the latter is largely a self-referential, legitimate, "original" work in itself.

The two novels are conceived, organised and written differently from each other. *AKD* has 642 pages against *ROF*'s 428. In the latter there are changes in nuance; even some characters' names are changed and some of their personal attributes have been changed.

The relative brevity of the English version cannot solely be attributed to the prolix nature of Urdu and precision of English language. The Urdu version is more nuanced, heavy with the colours, textures, details of landscape, changing mood of nature with changing seasons and the diurnal cycle, while the English one misses some of these. However, the tightness, precision and its fidelity to the classical art form of the English novel stand out to even a casual reader.

The beginning of the two novels is different. *AKD* begins with an epigraph, which is a translation from TS Eliot's Four Quartets (Dry Salvages) in which the poet contemplates on a river that is live and its flow replete with meaning. The English version does not have this mood-setting device. *AKD* has 101 chapters while *ROF* has only 73. The former's chapters have been marked merely by numerals, while the latter has chapter titles that try to indicate significant elements of their content.

In Hyder's fiction time is constantly present, almost like a central character. The Urdu original of *River of Fire*, *Aag ka Darya*, begins with an epigraph that is a translation of the parts of 'The Dry Salvages' in TS Eliot's 'Four Quartets'. This firmly sets the tone and reflective tenor of all that follows. She does not take all lines of a certain part of the poem, but a line from one and two or two or three from another. Hyder's selective translation is also adaptation of sorts as it takes elements from some other lines also besides the following:

I do not know much about gods; but I think that the river
Is a strong brown god—sullen, untamed and intractable,
… The river is within us, the sea is all about us;
… It hints of earlier and other creation:
… I sometimes wonder if that is what Krishna meant
Among other things—or one way of putting the same thing:
That the future is a faded song, a Royal Rose or a lavender spray—
Or wistful regret for those who are not here to regret,
… 'Fare forward, you who think that you are voyaging;
You are not those who saw the harbour
Receding , or those who will disembark.
Here between the hither and farther shore
While time is withdrawn, consider the future
And the past with an equal mind.
You can receive this; "on whatever sphere of being
The mind of a man may be intent
At the time of death"—that is the one action
(And the time of death is every moment)
Which shall fructify in the lives of others:

And do not think of the fruit of action.

Fare forward.

O voyagers, O seamen,

You who came to port, and you whose bodies

Will suffer the trial and judegement of the sea,

Or whatever event, this is your real destination,'

So Krishna, as when he admonished Arjuna

Not fare well,

But fare forward, voyagers.

Thus, the reader expectation firmly framed in a contemplative mode, begins the novel with a grand sweep.

Some character names and some of their attributes have also been changed in *ROF*. The name of the maid of the first Champa (of the Shravasti period) has been changed from Sarojni to Jamuna and Shahzadi Bano Begum of Jaunpur has become Ruqaiyya Bano Begum, Cyril Ashley's desi bibi Shunila Debi has become Sujata Debi and Prof. Sabzjeevan has become Prof. Bannerji.

In the Urdu version, the fourth century BC, the period of Buddha, takes up 16 chapters, while in English it is summed up in nine. Fifteenth-sixteenth centuries occupy nine chapters in each version. The British period takes up 9 chapters in Urdu while in English it extends to 13. In both versions the most substantial is the fourth part dealing with the freedom struggle, Independence and Partition. However, in Urdu, it is spread over 57 chapters, almost 400 pages, while in English it is covered in 43 chapters, 250 pages.

The Urdu version is far more nuanced, full of the rhythms of daily life in India over millennia. The English version has achieved its goal of reaching a wider audience, but many readers prefer the first over the second in terms of style, idiom and texture etc.

Khushwant Singh, in a review of *River of Fire* writes that Hyder is herself to blame for the flaws in her transcreated novel. He feels she should have let someone else translate it. This is a thorny issue in translation studies: whether the author is the best translator of her own work. M. Asaduddin writes, unlike Beckett who considered translating his own texts a dull work, Hyder seems to have loved it. She had several versions of translation for the same chapter. This is supposedly an uncommon practice in translation history. ("Lost/ Found" footnote 246)

CHAPTER THREE

Fireflies in the Mist

(Aakhir-e-Shab ke Hamsafar)

It is the story of a group of people in pre-Independence Bengal, young men and women who come together to free India from the British rule and usher in an era of freedom and equality. Fired by revolutionary zeal, they go to great lengths, risking their lives and limbs, spending whatever they have for the cause of the Revolution.

They come from different socio-economic and religio-cultural backgrounds, all united in a close-knit group with shared dreams. There is the charismatic, LSE-educated communist, Comrade Rehan Ahmad, a fugitive from law, chased by British police officers and their *desi* subordinates. A master of disguise and playacting, Ahmad always remains a step ahead of his pursuers. However, he is accessible to, and constantly in touch with, his comrades.

Then there is Deepali Sarkar, an undergraduate student at the beginning of the story. She is the lead female character of the novel, not just because she is the romantic interest to Rehan, but because she is seen by readers as a woman of substance. Urdu critic Prof. Abdul Mughni emphatically says that Deepali Sarkar is the tallest character, and is not only a heroine but a person of great depth. Even, Rehan, hero pales in comparison (117).

Deepali comes from a family of East Bengali zamindars. The family's fortunes take a turn for the worse when her grandfather, a lawyer in a small town of what is Bangladesh today, decides to move to Dacca and live in the lavish style of the local Nawab, Qamrul Zaman Chowdhry. The lavish living bankrupts him ultimately.

Deepali's father, Dr Binoy Chandra Sarkar, is a physician who could have earned a lot of money by treating the rich, but he prefers to treat the poor and live in poverty. Her uncle, Dr Sarkar's younger brother Dinesh Chandra Sarkar, is a revolutionary, and is hanged by the British.

Deepali's mother died early, and she lives with her father and his widowed sister Bhavtarni Debi, a simple-minded, religious woman who is given to strict discipline. With a gentle father, who is liberal and non-interfering, a watchful aunt and two brothers, Deepali grows up to be a "rebel", working for the communist underground.

Deepali's friend Jehan Ara, the daughter of the nawab, is a gentle, caring young woman. Another of her friends is Rosie Bannerjee, the daughter of the local priest, Reverend Paul Mathew Bannerjee.

These are some of the main characters, who go through life as Indians fighting for freedom from foreign rule and the establishment of a just order. All of them make sacrifices for the cause. Rehan, a nephew of the nawab, refuses to marry Jehan Ara and inherit the nawab's huge estate which, besides extensive land holdings, includes profit-making jute mills, simply because he wants to live like a commoner among the poor. He is prepared to marry her on the condition that as his wife she would live and work with him among the poor. The nawab angrily rejects the idea. Jehan Ara and Rehan, who are cousins, love each other, but she is ultimately married by her parents to an older nawab who is a widower and an idler, but filthy rich nonetheless. A docile woman, she accepts the marriage to protect the family's honour.

On the other hand, Rehan finds a soul mate in Deepali and intends to have a civil marriage with her. In many ways, they are like each other: enlightened, leftist, ready to sacrifice for the cause.

When the Party needs money, Deepali steals her late mother's costly Balucher sari kept for her wedding by her parents. When the Party needs intelligence gathering right in the residence of the white district collector, she goes in to serve as the replacement of a maid who had been tricked into visiting her village. At great risk to herself she puts on a Muslim identity and works as a maid for some time.

Rosie Bannerjee runs with violent revolutionaries and is jailed when she and her colleagues are caught after a bomb attack. For their political beliefs, Rehan, Rosie and Deepali always end up causing great unhappiness to their parents and their loved ones. Rehan is the beloved nephew of the nawab, who had always cherished the dream of marrying him to his daughter. Till the end he tries desperately to avoid marrying his daughter to the other nawab and get her married to Rehan instead. He frantically searches for Rehan who is untraceable, out on a mission for the sake of the Party, which, after Russia's entry in World War II on the Allied side, backs the British war effort.

As the British leave in course of time, the country is divided into two parts, India and a new nation state, Pakistan. This is the second division of Bengal, the first one in 1905, which was annulled by the British following protests by mainly Hindu Bengalis. This one, however, seems to be more enduring as it is part of larger divisions. Now East Bengal is East Pakistan, the western part being a thousand miles across India.

This is a disturbing development, accompanied as it is by wide-spread violence, dislocation and expulsion of religious minorities–Muslims from India, Hindus and Sikhs from Pakistan. Somehow, not really related to the Partition in any imagined or actual sense, the lives, dreams and aspirations of a free, secular, socialist India begin to disintegrate inside the major characters' hearts and minds.

Events turn out in ways that shatter lives and ideological commitments. Rosie, who was fiercely committed to the Revolution, abruptly opts out as she is rescued from jail by a prosperous lawyer, who wants her to marry his rich, lawyer nephew, Basant Sanyal. She does not just drop the Revolution, but her ageing parents as well, for the sake of worldly comforts. She moves to Delhi with her husband and gets so engrossed in her newly acquired status and the pricey clothes, jewellery, car and palatial home that she does not bother to enquire about her parents, who continue to live in poverty in Dacca. The father, blinded by age and the cataract that comes with it, lives his days in the hope of hearing from her and waiting for her visit with her children. The parents conclude, rightly, that Rosie does not want to associate with them any longer because they are poor.

People feel strongly about the Partition even before it comes. Nawab Qamrul Zaman Chowdhry of Arjumand Manzil Dacca thinks it is the right thing for Muslims to have a country of their own as they are treated disdainfully by Hindus, especially the Bengali Hindu-zamindar class that had risen as a result of the rout of Sirajud Daula and the new land settlements by the British. Deepali, a friend of the Nawab of Dacca's daughter, Jehan Ara, thinks Partition would not be morally correct. The nawab, who takes his daughter's friend as his own child, patiently replies to Deepali's arguments, saying that the Hindu upper classes had become so spiteful of Muslims that it was no longer possible for them to live as one nation.

The nawab tells Deepali to read *Anand Math*,[1] the bible for India's freedom-fighters, particularly Hindu Bengalis, to know how full of anti-Muslim venom and vendetta the book is. If such a book is the inspiration for freedom fighters across India, it is clear how disadvantageous it would be for Muslims to live as a minority in a country ruled by people fed on such poison for years.

In any case, the Muslim nawabs and zamindars are for Muslim League and Pakistan, and the Hindu zamindars and rich classes for Congress. But even some of the comrades (Hindu, Muslim, Christian) seem to have lost their way. There is an argument in the book that if the Muslim rajas, nawabs and zamindars were in favour of Partition, many Hindu zamindars and persons from other upper classes too were hobnobbing with the Hindu Mahasabha and British officials and were being driven by anti-Muslim prejudice. There is a secondary argument that the Hindu-Muslim mutual suspicions were not there before the advent of the British who, with the help of the upper classes, were spreading the mutual division and hatred. The creation of a novel like *Anand Math* by the first Hindu deputy collector was part of the divide and rule power agenda of the British rulers. This is seen as an act of betrayal and sowing division between Hindus and Muslims, at the cost

[1] The two translations I have read of Anandmath are vastly different. Basant Koomar Roy's is a sanitised version where all references to the Sanyasi Rebellion of 1770, mother India as goddess and Muslims as enemy have been done away with. Lipner's translation, which came out in 2005, uses a lot of notes and lengthy introduction that places the novel in context.

largely of Muslims. However, the fact remains that the nawab is not the first or only Muslim to complain about Hindu majoritarian high-handedness.

Deepali is more amused than angry at her "Uncle's" line of thinking, nor is the nawab's affection and goodwill for Deepali and her family reduced a bit by the difference of perspectives on the situation prevailing in Bengal around Independence and Partition. Ironies like the nawab's son humming a Tagore tune while preparing for a Muslim League meeting only underline the complexities of life.

Deepali and Rehan would have made the happiest married couple, but events move so quickly that they are thrown apart (fortunately, religion is not the reason). As time passes, Deepali is cut adrift, has lost touch with the Revolution (some of the comrades are hanged, others drifted away from the Party, which has still got faithful followers, many of them unknown to her).

Around the time of Partition, Rehan is in India working for the Party, that to some of his former comrades of a deeper red colour, has become revisionist and reactionary. The Party Establishment feels that the revolutionary movement cannot be sustained without the support of the powerful Soviet Union, which has joined the Allies in the war against Germany, Japan and Italy. This means the Indian communists, allies and protégés of the Soviet Union, would have to cease the drive against the British rulers, who have become allies of the Soviet Union. This line of argument is satisfactory for Rehan, a high functionary, but not to the lower cadre, the field operatives. They take it as betrayal of the cause. Some of the best of them die fighting the British, ignoring the new Party line. Rehan and Deepali can understand the frustration of their friends, but are too mature to ignore Party discipline.

The Roys (an upper class Bengali family of big lawyers and government officials) and the Barlows (who for three generations have been officers of the elite ICS and some of their women have been missionaries and teachers) are another set of important characters.

After the Partition, the Roys come to Calcutta where they settle down as comfortably as they were in Dacca. Uma Roy's fierce communism is somehow blunted as she settles down to a life of prosperous spinsterhood.

As years pass, Jehan Ara's son Akmal becomes an officer of the Pakistan Air Force and Rosie's son joins the Indian Air Force. When the two were toddlers (with similar sounding Hindu and Muslim names, but with opposing meaning in Sanskrit), Jehan Ara's father had jokingly predicted that they would be fighting each other on behalf of Pakistan and India respectively. This is some kind of a foreshadowing of twin nations born in conflict and condemned to live in conflict. Such an eventuality does come to pass and this only son of Jehan Ara is killed in India-Pakistan war. Within the next quarter century comes the civil war in Pakistan and Indo-Pak war leading to another partition of the Subcontinent and the division of Pakistan into Pakistan and Bangladesh. With this, history seems to have come full circle, at least for a while.

These events are accompanied by monumental violence, dislocation and misery of millions of people. Unlike most other novels and short stories on the Partition of India and the partition of Pakistan this work does not talk about mass murder and mass expulsion from settled life into an unsettled, uncertain future as refugees. This is about enduring human relationships within nations and across international borders, about politics, art and history, about the deep political faultlines that move the tectonic plates sundering apart settled communities and countries. Despite the divisions, an all-encompassing Indian civilisation still holds together the fragments.

Changing Contours of Nation States, National Identities

Throughout her entire body of work Qurratulain Hyder holds that nations and nation states can undergo changes, but civilisations remain undisturbed by periodic upheavals for centuries. Within the span of the novel's period the subcontinent is partitioned twice (not counting the earlier partition of Bengal).

In her major novels the idea of indivisibility of civilisation seems to be in constant struggle with division of nation states and creation of new ones. There is a palpable tension between nation and civilisation with the former's fragility and the latter's endurance being evident to the discerning.

Historically, new identity formations, aided and abetted by the British, had begun soon after 1857 and the idea of separateness had spread to the United Provinces (today's Uttar Pradesh) with shrill demands of replacing Urdu with Hindi as the language of courts and other official transactions. Like in Bengal, this movement, too, was led by literary figures, Bhartendu Harishchandra being the most prominent, in Varanasi. The movement involved caricaturing of "Urdu Begum" and what Muslims construed as belittling of the composite culture (*Ganga-Jamuni tehzib*) of India that Muslims had built with Hindus.

Rajmohan Gandhi writes about the state of Sir Syed's mind at this point in his life when he was posted at Varanasi. "He is hurt, even bitter, and his old friend Shakespeare (an ICS officer), also posted in Benares, finds that 'for the first time' Sayyid Ahmed is speaking about 'the welfare of Muslims alone'. … Shakespeare says, 'You were always keen about the welfare of your countrymen in general'." To that Sir Syed replies:

> Now I am convinced that both these communities (Hindus and Muslims) will not join wholeheartedly in anything…. On account of the so-called educated people, hostility between the two communities will increase immensely in the future. He who lives will see. (27)

Late 18th century-19th century India seems to be undergoing a steady identity formation in which the role of religious affiliation was emphasised. Sharpening of religious identities beyond a point in a multi-religious society is, quite obviously, inimical to national cohesion and the consciousness of a national identity. Regrettably, the role of "the so-called educated people," as Sir Syed calls them in the above quote, promoted separatism and religio-cultural supremacist views over commonly-held beliefs and common cultural values shared over the centuries. Qurratulain Hyder often stresses the point that

separatist, mutually exclusive and contending cultural values in Hindus and Muslims were non-existent before the British came to India. These conflicts were subtly created and sustained by the British. Rehan informs Deepali: "…you would not find a single Hindu-Muslim riot mentioned by any historian. There were battles between rulers. No riots, till we come to the last century" (118). On another occasion he tells Deepali:

> All our monuments, our superlative handicraft, our music and dance and literature…all this belongs to better times. Our communal tensions and our poverty are the direct result of British colonialism. The badly exploited agricultural land and a growing population are bound to cause group conflicts (132-133).

The curdling of relations built over centuries of shared experience of living together into competing and mutually hostile collective identities was a product of British historiography, British administrative strategies and the overall survival and wellbeing of Empire. The following, rather long quote is from Barbara Metcalf:

> The first, and more complete, has been to recognise, in India as everywhere, the extent to which the writing of history since the nineteenth century has been tied to the project of the nation state. Today's public narrative, we now realise, while new in its emphases and its uses, has roots that can be clearly identified as part of colonial practice that forged a powerful outline of the history of India, a history that simultaneously contributed to the construction of British's history itself.
>
> In that colonial history India was already a bounded entity inhabited by two religiously defined communities. And in that India, British historians imagined Hindus as the original inhabitants and Muslims rather as they, the British, imagined themselves: as foreign rulers, as imperial rulers, who arrived as successful conquerors. Muslims served as a foil against which the British defined themselves: by saying that Muslims were oppressive, incompetent, lascivious, and given to self-indulgence, the colonial British

> could define precisely what they imagined themselves to be, namely, enlightened, competent, disciplined and judicious. At the same time they imputed to Muslims certain qualities they admired like qualities of masculinity and vigour, in contrast to the allegedly effeminate Hindus. (*Islamic Contestations* 195)

Whether it is the movement against "Urdu Begum" run from Varanasi by the first, most well-known advocate of Hindi, Bhartendu Harishchandra, in the 19th century, or his contemporary Sir Syed's remark that Hindus and Muslims would never henceforward come together fully, or the earlier *Anand Math*—all of them feed directly into the British historiographical narrative referred to above: "…India was already a bounded entity inhabited by two religiously defined communities." (195) From "two communities" to two nations was not too far to travel.

By the 40s of the last century the magic of the "two religiously defined communities" had taken hold. In Dacca, a young Deepali asks the father of her friend Jehan Ara, Nawab Qamrul Zaman, an enthusiastic Muslim League supporter, some uncomfortable questions:

> She asked sweetly, "Uncle, why is it said that the All India Muslim League is a body of Nawabs? Nawab Liaqat Ali Khan, Raja Amir Ahmad Khan of Mahmoodabad … and Nawab Qamrul Zaman Chowdhry …" She broke into mischievous giggles (135).

To that the nawab replies: "Muslims are not the only loyalists in India as alleged by the Congress. What about the Hindu zamindars and Rajas and title-holders who kow-tow to the Sahabs?" (135) An environment of competitive communalism seems to have been created by the British historical narrative long before Partition. Deepali, opposed to the idea of Partition says, "Uncle…, I merely wished to say that we could work together for unity instead of partition." (135) The nawab, who is already convinced that there is a Muslim nationalism, as opposed to Hindu nationalism, says:

> Where the hell is unity? The anti-Muslim Arya Samaj of Punjab and the Hindu militancy of Maharashtra and Bengal … are they symbols of peace and goodwill? Don't forget that these movements were started before we thought of setting up a separate political platform (135).

By the time two mutually antagonistic "nationalisms" had taken shape—the first, Indian nationalism, which because of its involvement with "anti-Muslim Arya Samaj of Punjab and the Hindu militancy of Maharashtra and Bengal", made it look like Hindu, rather than Indian, nationalism; and the second, "Muslim nationalism." Religion and communal consciousness did not always seem to militate against Hindu-Muslim goodwill in society or Congress Party, even though the latter was constituted of among others, Arya Samajis, Hindu Mahasabhais, Bengali and Maratha "militants" and, between 1919 and 1921, supporters of the Turkish caliphate. Muslim League regularly shared the stage with Congress Party in the freedom struggle for years without the acrimony and conflict that grew as India's freedom drew closer.

Civilisational Memories and Composite Identities

Questions of national and religious identity are not always easy to handle. What do we say when the Nawab of Dacca's son plays a Tagore tune while preparing a hall for a coming meeting of Muslim League, which would pave the way for India's Partition, an act which would have made Tagore recoil in horror? That the young man is not just a Muslim, but a Bengali as well. That the creation of Pakistan addressed only part of the issues, which were finally addressed 24 years later with the creation of Bangladesh. Nationalism is not always easy to define or its contours easy to be delineated. Any number of Partitions would not possibly solve the problems, any number of new nation states would not wholly undo the subcontinent's civilisation, which is not Turkic, Arab or Persian, but subcontinental, a result of centuries of commingling of different peoples.

Hyder's belief in unity in diversity is reflected in Rehan's words:

> Always remember, there are two or more aspects of India … Hindu and Muslim. Just as you have two or more aspects of your deities. At several points these aspects merge into each other. But we must not ignore their identities and must analyse them specifically. They can co-exist peacefully (110).

Hyder underlines the unique position of India in assimilating parallel, sometimes contradictory beliefs. Talking of Qamrul Zaman's antecedents, she writes:

> They were also very different from the Khans and Aghas and Pashas of the West, because they were *Indian*. This inner duality had been no problem in earlier times. The modern concepts of Pan- Islamism and nationalism had turned it into a political dilemma (126).

Rehan, acting as Hyder's mouthpiece, again educates Deepali about the role of mendicants in fighting the British. Religion did not matter to them because they took the British to be outsiders and culprits: "In Bengal the Hindu sanyasis and the Madari fakirs had fought together against the company forces in 1770." Deepali learns that Tagore's poetry and music were inspired by Bengali Sufis like Sheikh Madan Baul, Shatolan Shah, Hasan Reza, Lalan Shah etc. (136-137)

An important character, Yasmin, an old friend of Deepali from undivided Bengal, visits her in the Caribbean. After Partition Deepali had come to Calcutta before coming here. Now Yasmin is an East Pakistani dancer moving all over the world. Deepali's gregarious maid, Mistress Sarswati, strikes a conversation with Yasmin:

> "Madam says," she began grinning, "that you are a dancer. You have come all the way from Pakistan."
> "Yes, Mistress Sarswati. I have known your Madam for quite a long time. We belong to the same country… I mean it was the same country three four years ago". (259)

The same theme of nation and country—old and new—keeps recurring as Hyder seeks to look deeper into the issue. Remember Rosie living with her husband in Delhi and her old parents living their last days still in Dacca, the capital of Bangladesh? They had first lived in united India (in Dacca), then Rosie moved on to India after Dacca became East Pakistan's provincial capital, later to be Bangladesh's capital. Formalities of passport, visa and a hundred other considerations of nationality and national politics divide families like Rosie's across newly-created borders. Nation states may divide, but civilisation unites. That is what Hyder believed.

When the India-Pakistan war comes in 1971, finalising the process of Pakistan's division, Rosie good-humoredly calls her old friend Jehan Ara in Dacca her "enemy." Their sons––Kamal and Akmal—are in the armed forces of India and Pakistan respectively, preparing to teach the "enemy" a lesson. Jehan Ara's son Akmal's plane is shot down over Jammu in the heat of the war and he dies in the crash.

Not long ago, Deepali had come to Dacca all the way from the Caribbean to be present at the marriage of Akmal. *Fireflies in the Mist* is also about the dispersal of people to far off lands in the wake of Partition of India and many of the bonds still remaining intact.

The "two religiously-defined communities" inhabiting India were part of a larger trope. From the Empire's perspective India was neither a country, nor a nation in the sense European countries and nations were. Ramchandra Guha in *India After Gandhi* copies from a series of lectures of Sir John Strachey at Cambridge in 1888 in which "India was merely a label of convenience." In Strachey's words, India (is) "a name which we give to a great region including a multitude of different countries" (xiii).

The differences between the countries of Europe were much smaller than the "countries" of India: "Scotland is more like Spain than Bengal is like the Punjab." From Strachey's point of view, "countries" of India were not nations as they did not have any political or social identity:

> [This] is the first and most essential thing to learn about India–that there is not and never was an India, or even any country of India possessing, according to any European ideas, any sort of unity, physical, political, social or religious. (Guha xiii)

Indians brought up on such narrow ideas of country and nation were acting naturally when they were thinking of their own national and ethnic group as *the* "nation" to the exclusion of all other groups:

> A few days before Christmas, Esther got busy with her annual chores. It hurt her to see her husband sitting by the window waiting patiently for the postman. This had become his sole occupation over the years…waiting for Rosie's letters which came once in a blue moon.
> The postman passed by. The old clergyman recognised his foot fall.
> There was silence again.
> "Esther, any letter from India?"
> Esther was boiling rice on her kerosene stove. It would certainly break his heart if she said No again. "It was not the postman, dear," she shouted from the kitchenette.
> "Rosie hasn't come for so many years. Esther, have you decorated the Christmas tree?"
> "Yes, dear."
> "Where are toys? "Show me…."
> "Toys?"
> "For Rosie's children. I have a feeling they may arrive this evening. There is an areoplane service now between Calcutta and Dacca."
> "Yes, Paul."
> "We wait for her every Christmas. She doesn't come."
> "Paul, it is not very easy for her to travel from India. Visa problems, you know.
> "She hardly ever visited us even before Partition. Let's face it. She is ashamed to own us as her parents" (275).

Hyder does not talk about the monumental violence, rapine and pillage of the Partition in her novels, but about the enduring human values and relationships salvaged out of the dying embers of the ferocious blood, thunder and fire of the catastrophe.

She also does not dwell upon the politics of Partition which, even without being mentioned as such, is a male project. She eschews a cause-and-effect narrative – what caused all that murder and mayhem. However, in this novel Nawab Qamrul Zaman provides a rationale for why the Muslim League was demanding Partition. At best this is only the Muslim side of the story, which seems to be short on moral clarity.

Creation of a new nation state always entails violence. In this novel, two more nations are created out of India at great cost to human life and limb, livelihood and dignity.

The impact of the Partition was so mighty that it scattered people over far off areas. It is not just the fictional Deepali or Yasmin Majid (later, Belmonte) who end up in different continents, but real life people like Hyder, her friend, novelist Attia Hosain, and several others who went to London or other European cities. Attia Hosain left for London in1948. Her sister-in-law, Begum Habibullah, was a close friend of Hyder's mother, Nazar Sajjad. She remained in Lucknow like another leader Begum Azra Rasool. The decision to go to Pakistan was based on people's personal conditions. Lots of families left after the abolition of zamindari. Some waited for retirement from government services but sent their sons to Pakistan nevertheless. Hyder writes that Attia was so beautiful that the English used to say "in India if you don't see Taj Mahal and Attia, you haven't seen anything" (*Shah Rahe Harir* 153).

Mushirul Hasan in *India Partitioned* (vol.ii) includes the reminiscences of some well-known men who were suddenly forced to choose between the two countries. Professor Ishtiaq Husain Qureshi recounts how he had to hurriedly leave the Delhi University campus amidst mayhem and murder. His rare manuscripts and a typescript amongst other valuables were looted (181-192). Masud Hasan Shahaab Dehlvi, an Urdu litterateur fled

to Pakistan after witnessing a murder in his locality. His area was fast becoming unsafe. He left thinking he would return once the situation became normal. He had to trick his father into leaving India. Otherwise, he would have preferred to stay back (193-205). Josh Malihabadi was enticed by the Pakistan government to settle over there. But, he came back. After discussing the matter over with Jawaharlal Nehru, it was decided that Josh's family would settle in Pakistan while he himself would be a citizen of India. He could visit his family for four months in Pakistan, Nehru suggested (206-217). Asif Farrukhi's father had gone to see off a friend to Karachi. He got caught in the rush and sailed off with him. Asif's grandfather wrote him angry letters that he could go anywhere but he should have informed. Their ancestral home in Fatehgarh was taken over by the custodian. The old man had no choice but to go to Pakistan. He was so ashamed to migrate to the new country that he told his neighbours he was going to Lucknow. ("Living in the City" 303)

Hyder went to Pakistan, then moved on to London before returning to India to finally settle here. Such people, disappointed by diverse kinds of nationalism–Indian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi, British, Hindu, Muslim, had to find solace in the enduring values of human civilisation.

Gender: Women as they are seen and see themselves

Men created Pakistan (and Bangladesh), caused all the death and destruction, destroyed homes and families and left the task of rebuilding life and families all over again, often from scratch, to women. Partition was particularly unkind to women, who were raped, cut into pieces, and thrown into fire.

Women lost their sons, brothers and husbands. They were kidnapped and forced to live their lives as concubines or wives of men of other religions, often changing their religious identities under duress. The trauma lasted a lifetime.

Hyder, as said earlier, spares readers these gruesome details. After the double partition, much of the camaraderie of pre-Partition days between the women remains intact even though they are not in one place. Deepali comes all the way from Port of Spain to Dacca to attend the marriage of Jehan Ara's son. Rosie, who is not given to much letter-writing, writes from Delhi to Jehan Ara in Dacca. Yasmin, their Bangladeshi friend, goes to Port of Spain on her international dance tours to stay with Deepali. When Yasmin (now Yasmin Belmont) dies in Europe her half-white daughter gives her diary (in which she has recorded her innermost thoughts, her joys and sorrows) to Deepali.

The novel does have full-bodied, well fleshed out male characters like Rehan Ahmad and Nawab Qamrul Zaman Chowdhry but it is the women who are the most important. Deepali Sarkar is by far the most substantial character, followed by Yasmin and Nasira Najmus Sehar. The last one is the second generation character who calls Deepali, Aunt. She represents both the revolutionary fervour of a younger Deepali and the recklessness of Yasmin. On the other hand, Jehan Ara presents a different, traditional model. She is sedate. Deepali is the most important female character as she is the connecting link between her generation and the next. The younger generation has heard about her courage and chooses to confide in her. Yasmin meets her in Trinidad. Through their discussion we get to know about their respective lives and those of the rest. Deepali would have married Rehan had she known that Jehan Ara had married a nawab. A one-day delay in Yasmin's letter changes her life forever. Rosie is in touch with her. Deepali attends Jehan Ara's son's wedding. She is also able to meet Rehan and inform his uncle about him. Yasmin's daughter, Scheherzade ,chooses to inform Deepali about her mother's demise. She passes her diary to her. Deepali also happens to meet Swami Atmanad, Charles Barlow's grandson, in a plane. He informs her about his entire family. Later she meets Charles' son Richard Barlow. The only conversation Zohra, Rehan's wife, has in the novel is with Deepali. Nasira, Rehan's niece, hates Jehan Ara and her feudal relatives but she admires Deepali. She comes to meet her daily when Akmal gets married. Nasira had fought in the War of Liberation and was now teaching political science in the same college where Deepali and Jehan Ara studied.

However, the younger generation is dissatisfied with its elders. Scheherzade, who is a nude model, writes to Deepali from Hamburg that Yasmin would "cite you as a shining example" (303). But Scheherzade found her generation hypocrites, having a lot of "pretensions". She feels her mother's Bengali-Pakistani-Muslim identity clashed with Western attitudes. She couldn't adapt and went mad. She saw Rehan in London's Playboy Club mixing with his opponents from India and Pakistan. During conferences they had heated, acrimonious debates. Later, they would "visit the same night clubs and chase the same white women" (303).These leaders, according to her, would bring misery to their people while enjoying luxurious life themselves.

Nasira is angry with Jehan Ara for not letting her son Akmal marry her. She says if her aunt had so much social "awareness" why did she choose an industrialist's daughter over Nasira Najmus Sehar whom Akmal loved. She finds Rehan to be an opportunist: "Wherever there are greater chances of becoming a Minister, and behold! he is there. A friend of Moscow as well as of Washington. The perfect Non- Aligned Man" (286). Furqan, Rehan's brilliant son, gently corrects Nasira that "perpetual revolution" is not possible. Deepali is amazed at her cynicism. Richard Barlow, a gay, tells Deepali he is comfortable with his sexuality: "We of the New Generation gloat in our frankness. Hypocrisy was the hallmark of your times" (336).

The story comes full circle when Rehan complains to Deepali that he tried his best to help his niece Najmus Sehar. He got her a Soviet scholarship to keep her away from the extremists. She returned from there as a Maoist. She had turned against him. He is unable to comprehend the young people's desires: "This is an ungrateful, thankless generation" (313), he remarks much in the same way as his uncle Qamrul Zaman had.

Rehan shows satisfaction at having regained the nawab's property. He thinks his mother has been avenged for she had been cheated out of her property by her uncle, Sir Nurruz Zaman. He added it was tough leading a Communist's life in united Bengal. Things did not change in West Bengal soon after Independence. He had grown tired. When he got a chance to have some comfort he grabbed the opportunity.

Deepali realised she too had become accustomed to her luxuries. Returning to Santiniketan after twenty eight years, she feels things had changed. She now felt a stranger. She found the West affluent but impersonal. Now she did not feel at home in her own Bengal. She wondered if all first-generation expatriates felt the same. Once she had stolen her family's precious Balucher saris for the Party. Now she was in a position to buy several. She was dismayed to find despite their efforts as revolutionaries poverty, child marriage and the stigma attached to widowhood remained the same in India and Bangladesh. Beggars and cycle-rickshaws depressed her. Deepali accepts that Rehan had been right. She was thankful to be alive, while many of her acquaintances had died. She accepts her reality finally like Champa in *River of Fire*:

> Joyfully she recalled her beautiful house, surrounded by her own parkland… Her loyal servants and her faithful dependable uninteresting husband Lalit Mohan Sen. Her comfortable world. Good food. Music. Holidays in the States (346).

Rehan had realised much earlier that previous rebels could easily be with the present establishment. He tells Deepali that she had no right to accuse him of being a capitalist for she was in the same boat. Deepali believed as they say: "In the Vaishnava faith of Bengal every man is an image of Krishna, every woman a Radha, although they are not aware of this"(333). Therefore, it is not possible to get one's beloved in this world. The yearning always remained. She comes to terms with her life. She informs Uma that Rehan had returned to his roots and seemed satisfied. If he had married either of the two, he may have faced some discomfiture in his old age. This is the time when a man looks for his "cradle", "his mother's culture" (342).

The cantankerous Uma Roy is left desolate in her old age. She could neither marry Dr. Benoy nor Rehan. The latter thought her to be a good friend, a matronly figure. When he saw her intent, he severed all ties with her. Uma's mother wanted her to get married because of her obsession for Rehan, while Nirmalendu her brother, a capitalist, was uneasy because of his "sister's politics". Uma herself consented to marry the doctor because she thought the stamp of a married woman would give her the license to be "friends" with Rehan.

Fathers

Dr Benoy Sarkar, according to Deepali, did not really find Uma fascinating, but perhaps needed some emotional support in his old age. However, when it came to Deepali's happiness, he readily gave up the idea. He is the most progressive father in the novel. When he hears about Deepali's romance with Rehan, he tells Uma he had no objection to their marriage despite their different religions if they genuinely loved each other. He informs Uma Roy that his wife and brother died young. They would have wanted to live. Therefore, he would not strangle his daughter's happiness by foisting his own choice on her. He is confident of his daughter. He admits she had been foolish to rush out to meet Rehan in the Sunderbans. But Uma is to be blamed for that as she taught her to tell lies. It could have been because of her naïve idealism or romanticism, he says.

Rosie's father, Rev Banerjee, is heart-broken when she marries outside her faith community. Still he awaits her return and hopes to hold his grandchild in his arms .He tells Nawab Qamar not to grieve when Jehan Ara was leaving with her husband, that he should rejoice for he had been able to marry his daughter amongst his own people.

Nawab Qamarul is an aristocrat who doesn't believe in giving unbridled freedom to women. He was furious when his nephew Rehan refused to accept his riches and settle down in his estate with Jehan Ara, his daughter. Later he realises that his daughter would be happier staying with Rehan on his meager Party salary than with the rich, moronic Nawabzada his wife had chosen for her. He makes frantic efforts to trace Rehan, but fails. He again hopes his daughter would refuse the match when the fastidious maulvi conducting the *nikah* asks for her consent. Jehan Ara has the values of an aristocratic woman ingrained in her. She did not have the courage to run away with Rehan. She did not want to embarrass her family. She is a tragic figure, a product of her class who has been taught to "bear their anguish in silence, cry on the quiet, and face the world with a smile. Besides, a lady never created a scene" (218).

Be it India or the West, women have been taught to conform to certain ideals. Men like status-quo, for it suits their purpose of always remaining in control of their property and women. Jehan Ara is aware of her pessimism. She wonders if it is is "pre-destination" or her "sheltered upbringing" because of which she could not accept Rehan's proposal to elope. Once she is married she attends on her husband like a subordinate despite having countless servants. She sheds copious tears at his death. Rosie calls her a "singularly luckless girl" (290). Earlier she had pitied her: "She is imprisoned within the fortress of her religious- feudal- cultural pressures. She has nobody to help her" (101).

In *Fireflies in the Mist*, the female characters form a broad range of gender stereotypes. Uma Roy is an aggressive LSE-educated, communist college teacher from a family of rich lawyers in Dacca. The family moves to Calcutta around the Partition of India to live in as much comfort as it was used to in Dacca. Uma gradually changes from a fierce communist revolutionary to a disinterested, temple-going spinster. The other major female characters, too, gradually move away from revolution to settled lives—Deepali in Port of Spain and Rosie in Delhi. These are more animated characters.

By contrast, Jehan Ara, the nawab's daughter, is docile, brought up in a milieu where conformity with entrenched gender stereotypes rules: obedience to father and husband, appropriate etiquette and manners, personal sacrifice for family honour. When Rosie tells her that she found "solidarity" helpful, she replied that perhaps she understood it better than she and Deepali put together. Jehan Ara is personally affected by its principles. She is shown to be an amicable woman helping the destitute in need. She arranges for Yasmin to be tutored by Rosie so that the latter could get some pin-money and the former some education. She is generous with Rosie when she celebrates Christmas and later when she arrives with her son. She gifts expensive saris to Deepali also, but the latter's father discourages it for he finds himself unable to return the gesture. She never confesses about her love for Rehan to anyone. The rumours of his alleged liaisons with Deepali and Uma must have reached her (Jehan Ara's mother and Yasmin have heard them), but she never broaches the topic with anyone, let alone Deepali.

Jehan Ara is a woman ensconced (and comfortable) in feudal patriarchy. A college friend of the more free-spirited Deepali and Rosie, she remains docile without the other two women raising a finger at her tameness. They seem to respect each other's ways even though her figure looks somewhat aloof and tragic to them. She is in college with the other young women, but her father does not seem to be enthusiastic about higher education for women, whether it is for Jehan Ara, Deepali or Rosie.

He is disturbed to know about Deepali and Rosie running with terrorists, a catastrophe he attributes to "too much education." His daughter is timid enough no to do any such thing and even go to such extreme length as marrying somebody just for the sake of family honour. Jehan Ara's character rhymes well with the gender stereotype of early 20th century Indian Muslim woman of feudal and business classes–women who had no agency of their own and lived in men's shadows.

Yasmin Majid is on the other end of the spectrum. A junior member of this group of women, this younger woman comes from a traditional, working class family of East Bengal. She learns to be a dancer, and over the years grows to excel in it. This is as rebellious as rebellious could be, for dance is frowned upon in traditional Muslim families. She is a free-spirited woman who sticks to the pursuit of the art form she has chosen.

Soon she moves all over the world, mixing with the high and mighty. She ends up marrying in London an Englishman called Gerald Belmont. The news appears in the *Daily Mail's* "voluminous overseas edition." The news carries a picture of the newly-weds. Her friend Jehan Ara reads the news in Dacca. The family is sufficiently scandalised. In the photo caption she is called "Black Beauty". Jehan Ara's brother says, "…Sad. A girl from the family of the venerable maulanas of Jalpai Guri… she has come to be called a Barefoot Dancer." This is reversal of the dominant stereotype of the Muslim woman. What follows is a reflection of contemporary feudal Muslim attitudes and gender expectations:

"What does the English fellow do?" asked Begum Qamrul Zaman.

"Must be some Cockney shoeshine," Nayyar replied lightly.

"Fashion designer…" Jehan Ara read out.

"In other words…a tailor," Nayyar remarked….

The Nawab's footsteps were heard. He was coming out of the gallery for his evening walk. The setting sun had lengthened the shadows of the verandah's pillars.

"Shhhh … keep quiet. Hide the newspaper," Begum Qamrul Zama said urgently. "Do not let your father see it. He will be very unhappy. This is precisely the reason why he has always been against women's unbridled freedom. Rosie liberated herself totally and hurt her parents till they died. Now Yasmin…." (278)

Jehan Ara and Yasmin Majid Belmont represent two poles of the Muslim woman's identity in *Fireflies in the Mist*. There are several others who fall in-between. There is Begum Qamrul Zaman, mother of Jehan Ara, neurotic and manipulative like many other feudal ladies of her times. There is Shamsa, her trusted maid, conspiratorial enough to eavesdrop on people and report it to the Begum with elaborate adornment.

There are other Muslim women who are like the salt of the earth, far removed from centres of power and plentitude, eking out a meagre living in the Sunderbans, between the jungle and the powerful Padma river. Deepali and Rehan stay with an old Muslim couple in the Sunderbans. The man catches fish and the woman looks after the house. When Deepali reached the place, she saw "a bamboo hut standing by the stream, its thatched verandah covered with flowering creepers." It is the "home" of the old couple who would be her hosts:

"What a lovely house!" she exclaimed.

"Part of it was destroyed by the last cyclone. But with Allah's help we have repaired it. You know, daughter, He sends us a lot of cyclones, but also gives us the strength to survive them."

> A lamp burned in a doorside niche. The old man hastened to the verandah and shouted, "Zainab" (108).

Which of the Muslim women – Jehan Ara, the nawab's daughter, Yasmin Majid Belmont, the poor maulvi's daughter who becomes a dancer of international fame and marries an Englishman; Zainab, the old fisherwoman of the Sundarbans – has some agency of her own?

Naturally, Jehan Ara, the humble daughter, sister and wife living in a golden cage, must be having the least of it. Zainab, living in the lap of nature, is possibly less restrained by the strict patriarchal code of Bengali Muslim nobility. The least fettered is Yasmin Belmont who, after a failed marriage to the homosexual Belmont, passes through relationships with dubious men. For an East Pakistani Muslim woman living on one's own terms turns out to be pretty hard. From a glamorous dancer she is reduced to a hungry, sick vagarant. She ultimately dies in penury and helpless misery. Given another chance, she would not have thought twice before choosing a similar life of a free bird, singing and dancing in joy, impervious to social opprobrium.

In the second generation, a young woman rises who is like Deepali, Rosie and Yasmin in many ways. She is Rehan's niece, Nasira Najmus Sehar, a great admirer of Deepali. She often seeks Deepali's company during her visit to Dacca. She is a reflection of the independent-minded woman of the earlier generation. In short, Muslim women are like other women of the subcontinent.

The evils of child marriage and the treatment of widows is shown through Bhavtarni Debi and Giribala (Esther) Bannerjee. Deepali's aunt Bhavtarni was married into a wealthy family when she was just twelve. She became a widow at eighteen. Her father did not believe in widow remarriage that reformers were advocating at the time. Being childless, her father called her back and entrusted the management of his house to her. His wife was already dead. Bhavtarni was more fortunate than others. Her father was alive to take care of her. Her brothers were considerate. Her only sister-in-law died young.

Giribala, Rosie's mother, had to suffer hardships initially. She was married at four and lost her husband at six, while she was still staying with her parents. When she was nine, a terrible flood wiped away her entire family. She was saved clinging to a mighty tree. Her parents-in-law took her in, but tortured her no end. She endured till she was fourteen. Then she ran away. She decided to seek help from her feudal lord at Dacca. Luckily, she was recognised by a servant of the nawab. He knew her story and took her to Lady Chowdhry. She worked there as her housemaid.

But her employer's son began to trouble her. Lady Chowdhry thought of marrying her to their bachelor cook but as a widow she could not even marry a fellow Brahmin. Since she had run away and "disgraced" her people, she could not be sent back to her village. She could not be married to their Muslim servant either because Bengal had just been partitioned and there was tension between the two communities.

They found it safe to hand her over to the missionaries. Conversion by the ruling class would not be taken as an offence. She passed her eighth class and was married to the native clergyman, Rev. Paul Bannerjee. Though he was fifteen years older she was extremely happy with him. After a long time she had respect and a home of her own.

Rev. Bannerjee supported a lot of his female widowed relatives on his humble salary. Thus, it is clear that these women were at the mercy of men. Hyder writes:

> Hindu widows of Bengal were considered inauspicious. Their heads were shaved and they were not allowed to re-marry. Many went off to the sacred towns of Hardwar, Mathura and Benares in North India, where they became mendicant nuns.Some changed their religion.Some ended up in brothels. A few were rescued by social reformers (51).

The Question of Identity

The idea of who we are as individuals or groups is crucial. The latter identity being more problematic: a nawab's daughter, aristocrat; a dancer; a fisherwoman. An aristocrat, a dancer or a fisherwoman do not have to be Muslim and share their group identity across religious denominations, but group denominational identities too matter.

Jehan Ara takes her gender role assigned by feudal patriarchy seriously, even though she does not always seem to be convinced. She thinks she is the second woman in the family of the Nawab Zaman Chowdhrys to be sacrificed at the altar of respectability, the first being Rehan's mother Maliha (the nawab's first cousin who was married off to a poor maulvi even though the young nawab and she were in love). Another young woman, a Brahmin widow, Giribala, running away from a cruel fate and heartless in-laws, had become Esther and married a young priest, Paul Mathew Bannerjee, to live a contented life, jettisoning her old religious identity. To Jehan Ara her marriage, too, looks like a sacrifice to live a respectable life as a woman: "Do I qualify as an Ideal Indian Woman like Aunt Maliha and Esther Bannerjee? Jehan Ara thought bitterly as she got up for her evening prayer" (278).

Jehan Ara and Zainab are conscious of their religious identities, but Yasmin Majid Belmont is less so. When her homosexual husband runs away with her dance partner, she is left to fend for herself. Finding it difficult to bring her daughter up on her own, unsure as she is of where their next meal would come from, she takes the baby to her mother-in-law, who is estranged from her son because of his waywardness. Describing a meeting with her mother-in-law in one of her letters to "Deepali Didi," Yasmin writes:

> Laura Belmont is a retired stage actress, wealthy and mean. We had a long discussion. She has never got along with her only son and does not approve of his lifestyle. She took to the grandchild and offered to bring her up on the condition that she would be first baptised in the Roman Catholic Church. I was so desperate I said, Roamn Catholic? You can bring her up

> as a Seventh Day Adventist, Budhist, Shinto, Hottentot, whatever, as long as she does not have to starve and knock around like me. (281)

The Muslim characters are often seen afflicted with an identity anxiety, particularly in the period before the Partition. It is related to misgivings about their contribution to India's culture being denied or misappropriated by the Hindu majority. They assert their cultural identity at every turn. Even the Muslim comrades are particular about it. In the Sunderbans Rehan mentions Alaul to Deepali:

> "Alaul…?
> "Yes. Syed Alaul .The Muslim poet of the 17th century Bengal."
> He was always subtly conscious of the Muslim aspect of Bengal. This surprised her…
> "Really? You take it for granted that all Indian and all Bengali culture is Hindu culture…" (110-111)

Another conversation between Nawab Qamrul Zaman and Deepali shows the deep rift growing between Hindus and Muslims:

> "…in Bengal Hindus and Muslims share a common culture."
> "Did your community ever admit the fact that the folk music and folk literature of Bengal are largely the contribution of the Muslims? By 'Bengali culture' you only mean Hindu culture."
> He alleges that the press had only made matters worse by dissociating the Bengali language and literature completely from Muslims (136).

Rosie, brought up on a steady diet of prevalent anti-Muslim prejudice (that they are womanisers, fanatics and toadies), finds quite a number of serious Muslim communists at the secret study circle she joins. She says to one of them called Mushir, "I am so glad that you all have also joined us." Then, a rather acerbic conversation ensues:

> "And pray who are *you* and who are *us*?" he asked.
> "I mean the Mohammedans are such loyalists."
> "Miss Bannerjee," Mushir replied in a huff, "our ancestors started fighting the aliens nearly two hundred years ago."
> "Kings and queens trying to save their thrones…"
> "No. Peasants and artisans who also waged a class war. But you perhaps do not know about the modern revolutionaries."
> "Of course, I do. Madanlal Dhingra. He killed Sir William Curzon-Wylie in London in 1909. Bhagat Singh who shot police officer Saunders in Lahore. Hanged in 1931…."
> "Talking of the earliest London-based Indian radicals we tend to forget Khudadad Khan, Hyder Reza and Zafar Ali…"
> "Comrade, don't turn it into a communal question," Mahmood admonished Mushir.
> "We are here to discuss, analyse and correct our inherited prejudices, aren't we? And we acquired these prejudices only during the last century," Mushir countered. (57-58)

Mushir continues in the same vein, "Give me one good reason why our Rosie has not heard of Mirza Abbas. Because our contribution to the freedom struggle is ignored." He says forty years ago in Paris the Russian Nihilists had taught an Indian student Mirza Abbas how to make bombs. "Nobody even remembers Umar Sobhani, the cotton king of Bombay. The British reduced the price of cotton and made him bankrupt overnight because he had financed the Indian National Congress" (58).

This anxiety to assert the Muslim identity by communist and reactionary Muslims alike marks the chapters before Partition. The harangue continues unabated: "You are talking like Nawab Qamrul Zaman Chowdhry. You ought to join his Muslim League," an exasperated Comrade Mahmood tells Mushir, who would not listen to anyone without completing his argument:

> Mushir rattled off some more names. Ali Ahmad Siddiqui and Mujtaba Hussain of UP. Syed Rahmat Ali Shah of Punjab. Cassim Mansour of Bombay. All hanged in 1915. Ashfaqullah Khan of UP. Executed in 1927. And lots more hanged, shot down, died in prison. Does anybody talk about them? (58)

Then Rosie asks Mushir a question that common Muslims are asked even today. "Tell me, are you a Bengali first or a Muslim?" she asks.

> "Both,"
> "If you believe in dialectical materialism, you can't call yourself a Mohammedan," she retorted.
> "Historically and culturally, I am. Look, the trouble is when a Hindu glories in his traditions, it is Indian culture and Indian philosophy. When a Muslim mentions his own heritage, he is a communalist" (58-59).

The Muslims assert their identity citing Nazrul Islam's poetry, saying Tagore was influenced by sufi Alaul's poetry, talking about great Muslim Bengali musicians, artistes and craftsmen, baul singers and fakirs singing the glory of Bengal and its eternal beauty. It is a big roll call.

Both Hindus and Muslims have contributed to the arts and culture of the subcontinent. Deepali's hundred-year old Balucher saris have figures woven on it by the Muslim craftsmen of old Bengal. Her teacher Abbasuddin Ahmed is an accomplished singer. Her fathers's old friend, Prof Murtaza Hussain from Santiniketan, knows the Lord's Prayer in thirty-six languages. Human figures and songs are not generally assosciated with Islam, by the way.

After the Partition, East Pakistani and Bangladeshi Muslims talk less of their religious identity and more of the Bengali civilisational heritage. The East Pakistani (later Bangladeshi) Yasmin Majid Belmont writes in a letter to "Deepali Didi" (she is junior to

her): "We could not call ourselves Indian dancers although the Manipuri, Kathak and folk dances of both India and Pakistan are the same" (281). She also faced tough competition from classical dancers from South India who were apparently more "authentic." The post-Partition narrative is replete with such references to a common subcontinental civilisational heritage.

Her case reminds one of the famous singer Firoza Begum of Bengal. After Partition, her motherland was renamed East Pakistan. Though a Muslim, her art suffered because she was Bengali singer who was forced to adopt Urdu in Dhaka (Kabir, *Partition's Post-Amnesia*, 12-13). Ananya Jahanara Kabir begins her book *Partition's Post-Amnesia* by recounting Firoza Begum's trauma:

> The partition of these two countries dealt an irreparable blow to my singing. I became completely detached from everybody. The Gramophone Company [of India in Calcutta] kept asking me to record with them as a guest artiste, but how could that happen? Where would I live? Who would stay with me? These thoughts preoccupied me so much that I became mentally ill. I came to Dhaka, but I didn't like it one bit. (Introduction 1)

In Dhaka, she had to give up Bengali music for Urdu: "there was only *Kalam-e-Iqbal* here then; only *Kalam-e-Iqbal*" she rues (13). This turn in attitudes is worthy of further examination.

Literary merit, translation, technique

This novel has been rated as one of her best. Originally written in Urdu, its title was *Aakhir-e-Shab Ke Hamsafar* (Fellow Travellers of Night's End). The Urdu title was taken from a quartet of Faiz:

> *Aakhir-e-shab ke hamsafar*
> *Faiz na Jaane kya huway*

Rah gayee kis jagah saba
Subha kidher nikal gayee

(Fellow travelers of night's end
Faiz, what became of them?
Where did we leave the morning breeze?
Where did the morning go?)

The fellow travellers of the novel begin their journey towards the end of the long night of British colonial rule, to get lost like the breeze that heralded the morning of Independence. Even the morning goes away somewhere.

The English version's title, *Fireflies in the Mist* seems to be a take on descriptions of such scenes in the novel. Here is a reference to "night's end":

> After every few minutes a wall of foaming white spray rose, melted and spread itself, wave after wave, on the deck. The night was coming to an end. "Why are you in Dacca? Secret mission?" …. The ship began to toss and tumble. (170)

And here is a reference to mist: "The steamship blew its foghorn and passed the bend in the Padma. The path of light became wider as the mist slowly lifted" (172).

Hyder is endlessly fascinated by the idea of time in its multiple dimensions: Time measured in seconds and centuries, and time as a constant flow like a river, a cyclic movement without a beginning or end, or time at sunrise, noon, sunset or dawn. Also, time as seen in the flow of generations through life into eternity. That fascination with time is manifest here also.

Nawab Qamarul Zaman in a conversation with Rev. Bannerjee says:

> …the West's national memories are woefully short and selective. Today the Nazis have forgotten that the Jews are co-architects of what is known as the Western Christian Civilisation. It is also overlooked by the West that a thousand years ago the Arab scholars and scientists were the leading lights of Europe. (50)

Charles Barlow, imagining his obituary finds it's difficult to talk of the future: "The past is safe and full of peace" (178).Thinking of his present prestigious service and his wife's infidelities he turns to *The Lays of Ind*. It recurs to him: "The past was safe and uncomplicated" (181). An old and tired Uma in her last meeting with Deepali admits: "Time crushes the arrogant and mighty" (345). On accepting a receptionist's job in Hamburg offered by Maqbool, the proud Yasmin in her diary writes: "Time turns proud people into beggars" (297).

The last lines of the novel emphasise the impermanence of human life versus the permanence of the sun: "For millions of years the sun has been rising and going down and rising again and going down again and rising" (347). It also ends on an optismitic note, for the dawn brings new promises and hopes.

This story begins with Deepali's grandfather and ends a generation after her, with the adult sons of Rehan, Rosie, Jehan Ara and an adult niece of Rehan. Deepali is childless. It is a story spanning four generations, a passage of generations into eternity. Contemplation of time comes at important points. Here is a description of a Scottish planter's house built in Dacca in the 18th century:

> Caledonia was also a planter's house, built in Dacca by a Scotsman called McDonnel Saheb. It was not as large, nor as imposing as Joost House, next door, which belonged to a Dutchman and also faced the Old Ganga. In bright sunshine the waves of the river reflected on the outer walls of Caledonia, like the undulating scale of Vangla Raga, or it was time playing upon time. (4)

Contemplation of time as seen in the changes of diurnal course – dawn, sunrise, morning, noon, sunset, dusk and midnight and the play of elements is often at the heart of passages like the following description of Deepali's departure, probably for the last time, from Bangladesh to her adopted homeland, Trinidad:

> The Boeing jet shot through the night like a giant's arrow. Soon its bright lights were swallowed up by the midnight sky. … Tokyo Honolulu Los Angeles Port of Spain. It's a long journey. The inner and outer journey of time. And beyond that the voyage of ashes and bones floating down the Ganga. And the underground trail of the graves' worms. … I am thankful that so many in the world have died, but I am still living. Weary and tired like the Old Ganga at Narayan Gunj, but not dead. Living.
>
> … She grew frightened again. Wind my father. Earth my mother. Fire my friend. Water my cousin. Sky my brother. One is born through you. In the last moments of my life I send you my greetings, Bengal's Sanskrit poet Yogeshwar had written a thousand years ago. (346-347)

Deepali's reverie in the plane goes on in this vein. She presses her nose against the window pane and looks out into "the pitch dark night":

> After a few minutes the darkness lessened. The jet black sea became visible, and the dark sky above. The first night of creation.… The notes of the awesome Raga Bhairav. Slowly the first light appeared on the horizon.
>
> …The waves of China Sea glimmered like liquid silver. Morning spread itself far and wide. With his golden Noh mask on, the sun-god was slowly appearing over the misty islands of Japan. For millions of years the sun has been rising and going down and rising again and going down again and rising. (347)

MP Sinha in *Indian Fiction in English Translation* says that the revolutionaries "…Rehan and his comrades are feeble fireflies in the mist created by the opium of religion" (49).

The novel's narrative uses several voices and techniques.

Sometimes the author narrates the background, the scenery, part of the story. Sometimes it moves with internal monologues of important characters, dialogues or multilateral discussions and playful chats.

At other points letters provide information on significant events or provide the missing links in the story. Then there is Yasmin's Good Luck Diary in which she records her happy moments which provide vital clues to the state of her inner self as well as accounts of her relationship with people close to her. The same diary turns into Bad Luck Diary when things become difficult, life seems to come apart under the pressure of joblessness, loneliness, breaking of relationships.

Different characters have different perspectives on the same issue and debate them zestfully, with equal force of argument. As a result, issues are more clearly grasped from different dimensions. MP Sinha quotes Mikhail Bakhtin's remark on Dostoevsky's novels to make the point that *Fireflies in the Mist* is like Dostoevsky's novels, which are:

> a new type of polyphonic fiction in which a variety of discourses expressing different ideological positions are set in play without being ultimately placed and judged by a totalising authorial discourse. (36)

Sinha goes on to elaborate the point by quoting from Aamer Hussein's review of the novel: "…never bound to a single ideology or perspective, Hyder articulates one viewpoint only to contradict it in another voice (36)." She recognises that truth could be multifaceted.

Hyder uses foreshadowing effectively. Deepali says she isn't psychic. However, she has a nightmare in which she sees Jehan Ara murdered ruthlessly. A bright ship named "Passing Show" vanishes in darkness. Jehan Ara standing before it also disappears. The palanquin is found empty. This is a hint at Jehan Ara's grand wedding but her not so happy marriage.

An enraged and depressed Deepali throws away the terracotta elephant gifted by Rehan. He had called it Ganapati who would bring her luck. Shortly after a conversation with Rehan at Santiniketan, she notices broken red bangles at her feet. She remembers it is worn by new brides and broken bangles is a bad omen. Sure enough, her romance with Rehan does not culminate in marriage despite her deep desire.

Uma in her last meeting with Deepali says she had always been a winner. She also imagines that Deepali had appeared before her as Kali. Uma is fearing her end now and accepts that humans are mortals. Scheming and plotting do not help in the long run. Deepali, on the other hand, is admired and trusted by almost everyone in the novel.

Though Jehan Ara does not have a pivotal role in the novel, Deepali feels she had sinned against her:

> Jehan Ara has crossed the ocean of life but continues to make me feel ashamed of myself. Rehan rejected her because of the very riches he now owns. She had to marry the wrong man, lost her son, and herself died a violent death…so that Mr and Mrs Rehan Ahmed could stay in this house happily thereafter (315).

Time and again she has a feeling that Jehan Ara is watching her from her window. In fact, it is Zohra Rehan on her prayer rug in what used to be Jehan Ara's room. Once, even Rehan looks up at the window. Jehan Ara continues to hover in her friend's mind and perhaps Rehan, who had proposed marriage to her once.

Technically, *Fireflies in the Mist* is a translation of the original *Aakhir-e-Shab ke Hamsafar* in Urdu. But in reality it is not. It is not a work of translation or transliteration, but one of transcreation. The English version has been written afresh, its organisation and structure being distinct from the original work.

Despite so many changes, the basics of the storyline remain unaltered. Keeping that in view, the reorganisation of the book looks even more amazing. In the Urdu version, an adult, college-going Deepali steals the Balucher saris from her mother's trunk in the first chapter itself, while in the English version she is only three years old till the end of the third chapter. She steals the saris in the fourth as a young, college-going woman.

The thickness of both volumes being the same, it is a drastic restructuring of the book. In the Urdu version Deepali enters the District Collector's house in Chapter 9, but in the English one she does so in Chapter 11. Thus the entire English novel is restructured.

The beginning of the two books is dramatically different. The Urdu novel begins with a close description of Chandrakunj, the abode of Deepali Sarkar, while the English version has this beautiful description of the Old Ganga at Narayan Gunj near Dacca:

> The Ganges is young and sparkling when it comes out of the snow-covered Himalayas. It grows muddy and middle-aged as it traverses the hot and dusty plains of Uttar Pradesh and Bihar. By the time it crosses half of Bengal and reaches Narayan Gunj near Dacca it becomes world-weary and is called Boorhi or Old Ganga. There it is also known as Padma or Lotus River, celebrated in folk music and boatman's songs. (1)

Wherever the English text looks like a translation of the Urdu original, it turns out, on a closer inspection, to be not just translation but a rewritten text in English.

The English version has these lines on the last page:

> …The waves of China Sea glimmered like liquid silver. Morning spread itself far and wide. With his golden Noh mask on, the sun-god was slowly appearing over the misty islands of Japan. (347)

The Urdu version has this description: "Down below, waves of the China Sea glimmered like molten silver. Surya Thakur, sporting his golden Noh mask was appearing over Japan". (348 Translation mine)

The Urdu version talks about only Japan, but the English one, probably more appropriately, talks about islands of Japan. More importantly, the subcontinent's people are as familiar with Surya Thakur as with the sun. On the other hand, someone from outside the subcontinent, especially the United States and Britain, may not instantaneously recognise Surya Thakur.

In a way, it is not just translation, but adaptation, reorganisation and rewriting.

Finally, where did the morning go? Who waylaid the revolution?

Towards the end of the novel Deepali, married and settled in Trinidad, visits Bangladesh, probably for the last time. During her absence, Bangladesh had been created after a devastating civil war that destroyed hundreds of thousands of lives. The entire family of the Nawab of Dacca was killed and Rehan, being the closest of their kin, inherited all the wealth. Deepali's friend Jehan Ara too was killed.

She is deeply upset to see Arjumand Manzil, the Nawab's palace. Soon Rehan comes into Arjumand Manzil, which is now his home. Deepali launches a bitter attack on him, accusing him of betrayal of the Revolution. Otherwise, how could he have adapted to the lavish life of a nawab?

Then Rehan sneers at her opulent living in Trinidad, where she has a grand villa, servants and every imaginable luxury. She vacations in the United States and her husband could

be the next prime minister of his country.[2] Rehan asks her: "After you migrated to the West Indies, should not you have organised a trade union movement and worked for the red revolution among plantation labourers?" (323)

When tempers cool, Rehan presents a philosophical explanation of what went wrong:

> You see Deepali, to keep the lamp burning requires a great quantity of oil. And the trouble is sometimes the oil runs out pretty soon. Now you have become a ringside spectator. You have your own sympathy for the downtrodden. You hate injustices and wars. But you are no longer in the actual arena. To remain consistently in the sphere of misery and struggle requires a hell of a lot of courage (323).

Deepali realises that she too has not been faithful to the Revolution. She says in a calm voice: "But quite a few have not turned out to be cowardly like us…. There are many who have kept the lamp burning" (324).

Rehan agrees:

> Yes, indeed. There are many who have kept the lamp burning. There are Hindu-Muslim riots in many states of India, except Bengal. Why? Because of Bengal's strong Leftist tradition which was created by people like you and me. Some of us did fall by the roadside, but many more are still there…. All luck to them. (324)

[2] Deepali's conversation with Rehan reminds us of Kamal's visit to Cyril Ashley's tea estate at Srimangal, Sylhet. Formerly both men had been students at Cambridge with leftist leanings. When Kamal protests that the workers are getting a meager salary and that Ashley is trying to prevent them from forming a union, he reminds him that the latter isn't actively involved in the uplift of the downtrodden either:

> You know I once carried the world's cross on my puny shoulders. It was futile, so I threw it off. You have rid yourself of this cross too, remember. Early tomorrow morning we're leaving for Raj Shahi to have a dekko at a Paharpur Gupta sculpture (391).

Among the list of narrative techniques can be added a lecture that Deepali delivers at a meeting organised to honour the memory of "the celebrated daughter of Bangladesh", Yasmin. Sinha calls it "the message of the novel" (50):

> The concept of Mother India had been given to the rest of the country by the terrorists of Bengal. They worshipped divine Power in the image of Kali the destroyer. They believed in the prehistoric Dravidian concept of the mother goddess. The British branded them as terrorists. Indians called them revolutionaries. Many among them were anti-Muslim as well. Bankim Chandra's novel *Anand Math* was their Bible. The crosscurrents of the politics of Bengal's *Bhadralok* and Muslim gentry gave birth to East Pakistan, and the internal politics of West and East Pakistan created Bangladesh. Individual personality clashes and temperaments and actions of political leaders build or destroy nations (332).

CHAPTER FOUR

Street Singers of Lucknow
(*Agle Janam Mohe Bitiya Na Kijio*)

As the title suggests, it is about the tough life a woman is destined to live because of her gender. Nonetheless, the female characters fight it out. Like several of her other narratives this, too, unfolds in the backdrop of the Partition. In addition, we have another Partition here, that of Pakistan.

The Story

Rashke Qamar, a beautiful, teenaged girl, and her younger sister Jamila, who is lame, sing, and their *khala* (mother's sister) plays the *dholak* at the *urs* festival of Peer Handey Shah. They have high hopes of earning some money on this occasion, but they end up with a meagre Rs. 9, six annas and eight pies only.

They live in one of the outhouses of a Deputy Officer. His wife is a miser and has let the underground space and rooms around her palatial bungalow Furqan Mahal on rent. The Deputy Officer's wife is vexed by the reports from her other tenants that Rashke and her family live on singing and begging.

Farhad, the officer's college-going son, hears his mother's complaints. He calls Rashke Qamar and inquires why she had left school. She replies that some girls objected to her presence amidst them. Farhad asks her to sing. He is so impressed that he decides to make her career as a *shaira* (poetess). He takes her to Sayyad Sahib for audition. She is appreciated and soon she starts singing on the radio. She starts making decent money from radio programmes. Consequently, her rented house starts looking better. Her *khalu* (*khala's* husband), who is a barber, now wants to work in a salon. But *khala* and others feels it would be demeaning for Rashke. Finally, Farhad makes him a *jildsaz* (book binder). He also buys crutches for Jamila.

Farhad has better plans for Rashke. He introduces her to Narendra Kumar Verma, journalist, writer and art advisor. His house has an intellectual atmosphere. There are paintings of Chughtai, Ghalib and Tagore on the wall. On the bookshelf, English and Urdu books are neatly stacked. On the table there are some Pakistani journals and Urdu books by Progressive Writers.

There is an eighteen-year old, fair, rustic girl in a purple sari seated there. She gets up to greet Rashke and Jamila. Verma is a couple of years older than Farhad. Dressed in khadi silk kurta, Nehru jacket and churidar pajama, he is wearing spectacles with a thick black frame. He looks kind-hearted and jovial. He is rich, lives in a bachelor apartment, and is totally devoted to art and culture.

It turns out that he is in love with the fair-skinned Moti. He renames Moti Sadaf Ara Begum and Jamila is renamed Kumari Jalbala Lahiri. He schedules a radio programme for one and half months later so that Moti's pronunciation could be worked upon till then. By now, Rashke has already become popular.

Jamila recounts her story to Verma. Her mother died at her birth. Jamila was born lame. She and Rashke were brought up by their *khala*. The latter contracted tuberculosis. Their mother's savings were spent on her medication. Somebody suggested that they should go to Bhavali.

A *Hajjam* (barber) was called for Jamila's *aqiqa* (tonsure ceremony). Since there was no man in the family, he volunteered to help them. The girls were still very small. He offered to accompany them to Bhavali. *Khala* gave all her money to him and shifted to the women's compartment. It turned out that he was a drug addict. He declared that the money was stolen. They got down at the station and started singing to earn some money. People threw them some coins. However, this did not last long. The police arrested them. *Khala* got better in the hills and continued to make money singing in the streets of Haldwani and Afzalgarh.

She would often curse Jamila who would also wish some wild animal devoured her. Some Christian missionaries at Afzalgarh asked them to convert to Christianity and they would educate the girls and treat *khala*. The latter was angered at this suggestion. Nevertheless, the missionaries taught the girls some English and the art of knitting.

The *Hajjam* had tagged along, and *khala* married him. His ancestors being Bhands (Muslim caste of folk singers), he performed some street plays and helped the family. *Khala* did not want to go to any other city because she feared for her health. But, then Pakistan was created. At Afzalgarh, near Nainital, Sikh refugees started pouring in. They couldn't comprehend the girls' art. They were forced to return to Avadh.

They stayed in a tavern for the night. Some dacoits jumped into the courtyard and attempted to carry Rashke away. Her shrieks gathered the travellers there and she was saved.

Rashke continued their story. Their mother was widowed at seventeen. In fact, their *khala* had been married. But, soon afterwards her husband was caught up in a legal case. Her in-laws called her ill-fated and threw her out. She sought shelter with her widowed sister. Jamila's father was apparently an "honourable" man. He never inquired about her. (It's here that we learn that the sisters had different fathers).

Verma opens a Song Birds School of Light Music. He makes Sadaf (Moti) the principal and Jalbala the vice principal. He begins an Urdu quarterly called *Gohar-i-Shab-Charagh* and makes Rashke Qamar the assistant editor. All this is done to help the three girls.

Farhad takes Rashke to Bombay where she gains immense popularity. But, when she comes back she is banned from *mushairas* (poetry symposia) because people start questioning her morals.

Farhad marries the girl of his parents' choice. Rashke has two boys in a few years, one of them is Farhad's son, the other a Punjabi artiste's. Farhad's son dies in infancy. However, he continues to pay her Rs 200 a month secretly. Rashke is again sunk into poverty.

A fair, handsome man, Agha Shab Aawez Hamdani tells Verma that he wants to marry Rashke. He is an Iranian who has settled in Calcutta. He has his business in Karachi, Tehran and London. He writes a few letters to her initially but soon forgets all about her. Rashke continues to write to him though. Jamila doubts if he would even recognise the former with her woebegone face now. Rashke fears a similar fate for her daughter, Mahpara. So, she takes great risk in crossing over the Rajasthan desert. She wants to hand over her daughter to her rich father so that she could live and marry well.

Hamdani disappears from the scene leaving Rashke with their daughter, Mahpara. Verma dotes on this girl. Whenever he goes abroad, he brings her a gift and asks her to tell her classmates that it was sent by her father. Rashke tries various *tantriks* and *sadhus* to find out the whereabouts of Hamdani, but to no avail. She spends her entire savings on this pursuit.

Then she leaves for Karachi. She loses touch with everyone in India. *Khalu* dies. Her son Aftab steals Jamila's jewellery and runs away to Bombay. There he joins the underworld.

Farhad's elder daughter is settled in London, the middle one in Lucknow, and the youngest in Karachi. They have all been married to wealthy men.

A rich lady doctor comes from abroad, takes a fancy to Verma and marries him. They leave for Ahmadabad. After his father's death, Verma has to shut his school and journal. His business suffers and he is nearly broke. He has to discard Sadaf after 21 years of living with her. However, he has settled some money in her account. With this, she buys a two-room flat.

In an international conference on folk music, Sadaf is appreciated by an American who can speak Hindi and Urdu fluently. Within two weeks, they perform civil marriage. They leave for Paris.

Verma secretly continues to give Jamila Rs 150 every month. She supplements this income by selling sweaters, baskets and embroidery.

She writes to Rashke, but in 1971 all forms of communication between India and Pakistan have been disrupted. The two sisters have the same complaint. They don't realise that communication is nearly impossible in such a situation.

Rashke meet a poor maulvi and his wife in a train. They take pity on her and take her to their home. Their daughter has been divorced. Their son is a driver with an American. His wife gets jealous of Rashke and her daughter. Once on a religious occasion, Rashke sings *milad* (religious hymn). This attracts some tourists. They are mesmerised by Mahpara's beauty. They call her to a hotel to take her pictures. The maulvi's son objects, but Mahpara runs away, never to return again. He finds Rashke a job with a Japanese couple.

Mahapara calls Rashke up after a long time. She had been to Arabia, Hong Kong, etc. She asks her mother to live with her, but she refuses. Then, Mahpara joins a smuggler's group.

Rashke writes to Jamila again. Her Japanese mistress gives this letter to her mother and asks her to post it from Tokyo. The old lady forgets.

Mahpara is found murdered at a beach one day. Rashke is driven insane. Her employers get her treated and send her to India.

She tries to meet her old acquaintances. Nobody wants to help this destitute woman now.

A kind businessman recognises the artiste in her, treats her to a decent meal and gives her money to return to her people.

She learns that Jamila is dead and *khala* is bed-ridden. Jamila had kept a tenant, a consumptive rickshawpuller. Once, she gave her money (given by Farhad) to her tenant for medication and clothes for their children.

This man's family looked after the two women. Farhad had tried to help Jamila several times, but she always returned his money. However, it was he who paid for *khalu's* and Jamila's funeral.

Farhad had contracted some dreadful disease and left for Karachi to be treated by his doctor son-in-law. Before leaving, he had left a packet for Rashke. It turned out he had waited for Rashke and composed several *ghazals* for her. Rashke looks for work, but finds it nowhere. She is too old to sing. So, she takes up embroidery, the same work Jamila had done in her last days.

Nation

Ideas like nation, nation state or national chauvinism are farthest from the minds of the three heroines – Qamrun, Jamila and Moti – or the other central character, Hurmuzi Khala. They are too keenly focused on where their next meal would come from, or what tomorrow will bring to their uncertain, impoverished lives.

Used to living raw, insecure lives, they have little to look forward to, or feeling attached to, a certain place. Nation-consciousness, or the sense of belonging to a nation requires a minimum degree of social and economic security and some sense of wellbeing. For the three heroines, Hurmuzi Khala and her husband Kaane Khalu, these could be distant abstractions, the luxury of people who have food to eat, clothes to wear and a home to call their own.

G. Aloysius in *Nationalism without a Nation* quotes Gellner who defines nationalism as a "congruence of power and culture" (14). The down and out characters have some affinity with high culture: they can recite, sing and understand some of the finest Urdu poetry to musical instrument accompaniment, which a couple of them play. The other element, power, is missing from their lives. Power is something which they cannot even aspire to as they are at the bottom of the social heap.

As every human relationship is said to be a power relationship, one side gives the orders, the other carries them. A certain feeling of empowerment among a lot of people with some cultural commonalities is essential for the growth of national sentiment; these people are simply out of the loop.

As Aloysius points out in the preface referred to above, nationalist ideology has been "often enough an excuse for plain pursuit of power" (vii) Hence, these people are outside the pale of nationalism.

Still nation comes into play in their lives in a strange, cruel way. Rashke Qamar's Iranian lover Agha Shab-awez goes back to Iran promising to come back and take her to Iran. She gives birth to his daughter, Mahpara, and waits for his return. She gives the daughter a convent education and desperately prays for Agha's return. She starts squandering her hard-earned money on all kinds of dubious godmen to do special prayers and occult rituals to bring back her man.

She becomes almost a pauper when she learns that the man was living in Karachi. She takes her daughter, now 18, to Karachi, to give her to her father for getting her married and settled down. But she finds that she cannot go there as she had no passport or visa for Karachi, which is now in a foreign country which does not have good relations with India. She, along with her daughter, takes the great risk of entering Pakistan as illegal immigrants. She joins a convoy of such illegal immigrants and enters Pakistan through the desert of Sind.

The status of illegal immigrants is thrust upon the mother and daughter because a new nation state has arisen. Had it been an undivided India the mother and daughter would not have to face so much risk and humiliation associated with the life of unwanted immigrants.

In Pakistan, Rashke Qamar lives, not with a proper Pakistani family, but with a kind-hearted, religious couple from India who had crossed into Pakistan illegally in the convoy with her. The Indian couple has a son working as a car driver in Karachi for an American family. They live in a small flat with the old couple, their son and daughter-in-law. Soon the old couple's daughter-in-law develops a strong jealousy against Mahpara. Rashke Qamar asks the kind-hearted old couple's equally kind-hearted son to find her an ayah's or a maid's job in some well-to-do family. He obliges by putting her into a Japanese family in Karachi which has friendly relations with his American employers. They are the most well-behaved and considerate people. They give her food, accommodation and Rs. 200 a month, which was not a small amount in the newly-created Pakistan.

Like most of Qurratulain Hyder's work *Agle Janam* is also replete with the troubles that the creation of Pakistan brings in its wake. Postal service between India and Pakistan is suspended at the time Rashke Qamar and her daughter enter Pakistan. Her aunt Hurmuzi gives a letter to somebody working in Kuwait, who sends it to Karachi. However, for one reason or the other all letters do not meet with such success.

Once her Japanese employer offers to send her letters to India by sending them to Tokyo where her parents and children live. The Japanese lady's old, forgetful mother forgets to redirect it to India.

When Rashke Qamar's daughter is murdered, she loses her mind temporarily. Instead of sympathy, she gets suspicion and hostility from the Pakistani establishment. The police suspect she must be an Indian spy as the demented woman has no passport or visa to show on demand.

After her daughter's murder she sees no point in staying in Pakistan any longer. The Japanese couple arrange for her return to India, but she cannot get a visa because she does not carry a passport. After a year's effort by the Japanese couple through Europeans her travel documents are finally prepared. The Japanese couple buy her an air ticket to Bombay and come to the airport to see her off.

But when she gets to check in at Noor-i-Islam Musafir Khana, Bombay:

> The bearded young clerk of Noor-i-Islam … said mechanically: "Your passport, please, Pakistani or Indian?"
> "No idea."
> The clerk looked at her, amazed.
> "Why did you think I was a Pakistani? Is it written on my forehead?"
> "Well, Madam, you were looking around with obvious distrust, the way some people from the other country do when they first come here." (46)

For Rashke Qamar the word "distrust" seems to be the key to all human affairs, including the relations between India and Pakistan, the relationship between her daughter's father and her who disappears without a trace, leaving her with his child, a general distrust in a world which murdered her daughter and threw the body on the Clifton beach in Karachi, and the fakirs who cheated her of her life's savings to keep her in false hope. All this is reflected in her reply to the reception clerk who says "people from the other country" look around with distrust:

> I look at the whole world with distrust. For all I know you may decide that I am a spy and haul me off to the police lock up. Or declare me insane and send me to a mental home. Or stab me to death in the dead of night and throw my corpse on the seashore. Or cheat me of all of my life's savings and keep me in false hopes, or blacken my face and spit on it. Or I send you a thousand appeals and you don't write back once. Or… (46, 47)

Not that Rashke Qamar does not trust anyone at all. She does trust some people: her younger sister Jamila, weak and paralysed from birth in one leg; her aunt Hurmuzi Khala gradually wasting away with TB; Hurmuzi's husband Kaane Khalu, the one-eyed jester, her daughter Mahpara, son Shiraz; the old couple which accompanied her daughter and her to Pakistan, their son who kept them in his flat and found her a good job; the Japanese couple which employed her and gave her respect, food and shelter, paid the entire bill for the treatment of her mental illness, lobbied with Europeans for a year to get her travel papers prepared, bought her an air ticket to Bombay and came to the airport to see her off – she trusts and loves all of them. Then there was the impresario, Khan Sahib, who kept her entertained in Bombay and helped her with some money. Even Verma's and Farhad's small acts of kindness are duly appreciated. It is the general overarching atmosphere of distrust between India and Pakistan following the Bangladesh war that seems to have generated the dialogue between Rashke Qamar and the clerk with all its dark connotations regarding human capability for evil.

Soon the moment passes and Rashke Qamar is back to an even keel. But before that she makes it a point to tell the clerk not to think of her as some crank. She whips out a certificate of health from the psychiatrist who had treated her in Pakistan. The certificate says she is healthy and of sound mind.

That she carries no passport or a visa, two of the most precious emblems of national belonging, suggests in a way that the marginalised people like Rashke Qamar are denizens of a surreal no-man's land. They have no place to call their own.

Gender

As the title of the original Urdu novel, *Agle Janam Mohe Bitiya Na Kijio* (Don't Make Me a Girl in My Next Birth), a woman's prayer to God to spare her the difficult life of a woman in her next birth, suggests, this novella is about a certain understanding of gender in India. This is a line from an old Avadhi folk song:

Ore Bidhata binti karun tori paiyyan padun baram bar
Agle janam mohe bitiya na kijo chahe narak dijo daar (95)

The English translation reads:

O gracious Lord, I beseech Thee,
Don't make me a woman in my next birth…
Don't let me be re-born as a girl, O God…
Agle janam mohe bitiya na keejo (34)

The Urdu version is more powerful as it suggests it is better to be consigned to eternal Hell rather than be born a woman. Her life on earth is far more difficult and painful. One wonders if Hyder left out the second line because an English audience would not really see womanhood as a handicap.

In a way, it is also not about just the disadvantage of being a woman. The major characters, all women, are also burdened with grinding poverty, crippling disease and a severely unjust social order that provides little protection to the weak.

That "*A Woman's Life*" (the title of one of the two English versions of the novella, the other being *Street Singers of Lucknow*) is difficult is evident from this conversation recounted later by Jamila in a letter to Rashke Qamar:

> I remember the depressing evening so well. Verma Sahib had said: "Most women in our society usually get a raw deal. And in order to make damn fools of them they have been called Goddesses of virtue and Devotion and embodiments of self sacrifice."
> We were always vastly impressed by Verma Sahib's compassion and sympathy for womankind. But he never married Sadaf. For twenty-five long years she served him hand and foot and the other day he discarded her like an old shoe.

> Narendra Kumar Verma has now married a fat Gujarati lady doctor. She had just come back from London and was visiting some friends in Lucknow. Her father is a mill-owner in Ahmadabad. (38)

Women, particularly those who are not quite young, are often said to be "discarded like an old shoe" (*River* 29) in Qurratulain Hyder's novels. Quite often, Hyder's female characters seem to mull over the value of women declining as they age and their beauty diminishes. Why is it that a woman's worth depends so much on her short-lived feminine charm while men's does not on their physical beauty?

In her *River of Fire* we find the interesting observation that a man would never fall in love if he could see how his beloved would look like in her old age – haggard, toothless, with shriveled hair, sunken cheeks and hollow eyes, scary (14, 178).

This theme recurs frequently in *River of Fire*. A 19th century British official, Cyril Ashley, jettisons his "desi bibi," Sujata Debi, to marry a white woman. She discovers that she is "cast off like on old shoe" (129) after 25 years of devoted service and companionship.

In *Street Singers of Lucknow*, Moti is also discarded similarly after 25 years of devotion and companionship by Verma Sahib. He had brought her from a village fair when she was only 17. He trained her as a singer (which she already was, to begin with) and made her his mistress.

The "old shoe" metaphor for ageing, immensely disposable objects connotes terrible cruelty and disdain for women, a language indicative of society's ingrained misogyny. However "shoes" don't always have to be old to be cast off. There could be other flimsy reason for that.

Rashke Qamar's mother was thrown out of her home by her in-laws after her husband's death. The in-laws said she was ill-starred and had brought calamity to the family. She is

left to fend for herself and her little child. For her daughter's and her own survival, she becomes the *khangi* (mistress) of a well-heeled person. In feudal society, keeping a *khangi* or two was a matter of social status, not shame. When Rashke Qamar's mother gives birth to the crippled Jamila, her father silently walks out of their lives.

Hurmuzi Khala, too, is discarded as a mistress by another "respectable" man even though she is still young and beautiful. Her reason for being thrown out is that she contracts TB. For the man it is easier to throw her out than to take the trouble of getting her treated.

Farhad's recital of a folk song of Delhi proves ironic. It originated before the first war of independence when the British Resident of Delhi, William Frazer falls in love with a Haryanavi woman, Sarwan:

> Leave your rustic kitchen, my Sarwan,
> Take up the forks and knives.
> Shed your peasant skirt, my Sarwan, put on English gowns… (17)

Farhad adds that while the British was murdered no one knows what befell Sarwan. At this Verma quips that if some firangi fell for his Moti, he would kill the fellow. However, when his family business begins to decline, he has no qualms in marrying the daughter of a prosperous mill owner of Ahmadabad. Later, a young American scholar marries Sadaf. He calls her Sadie because she reminds him of the heroine of a popular English novel. When Verma had changed her name from Moti to Sadaf, she had protested that mere change of names does not change fortunes. However, this time, getting a new name changes her fortunes as well.

Verma's Songbird's Club is a success. Despite his good intentions, he seems to be too patronising, sometimes demeaning to women. He calls Moti his "blue Angora", "skylark" and "magpie". Rashke doesn't find these names endearing. She finds Verma and Fahad immature who were always up to something for their amusement: "They are schoolboys treating us as their newest toy trains" (21). She chides Verma for taking Moti too lightly.

Jamila, who is perhaps the most vulnerable because of her handicap, breaks down. She finds it difficult to believe that they are finally getting some love and respect. However, she is still skeptical. She warns Rashke to be wary of her well wishers. The two men grow embarrassed at her remark: "In an instant she had become their Conscience, crippled and unused" (22).

A Woman's Life came out in 1979 while the *Street Singers* was published in 2008.Some of the very glaring, irritating typos were revised in the latter edition like "gauva" for "guava" (22 and 59), "spit image" for "split image"(47), and "tree" for "tea"(63).

Hyder has sympathy for the poor artists called *bhands* who performed in weddings. But, Farhad's naïve romanticism is seen from his exaggeration that had these people been born in the West, they would have been rich and famous (29).Communists are questioned in Hyder's other works also like *Fireflies* and *River*.

In *Street Singers* about two paragraphs from *A Woman's Life* has been deleted. Perhaps, Hyder found it being too harsh on her "progressive" characters. Farhad's observation about *bhands* leads Verma to say: "'Yeh. And worthless capitalists continue to suck the blood of the down-trodden masses,' Verma said with feeling" (*A Woman's Life*, 32).The audience understands that it isn't a genuine response for these upper-class men have their flaws. Jamila continues to make these men uncomfortable about their pretensions:

> You also write short stories and poems about the poor, don't you? Without really knowing anything about them. The lowest of the lowly. Do you have any idea of the kind of lives led by—say—grave-diggers, washers of corpses, lepers, jailbirds, beggars, pimps, common whores, the disabled, the despised, the scavengers? I could go on. The list is endless (32).

This was a charge levelled against Hyder also. She silenced her critics by producing a novella like this. The story was more popular in Urdu than its first reception in English.

To a Western reader, much of its dialogue was clichéd and its episodic nature added to the problem. Frances Pritchett writes that there is an abundance of unexplained Urdu words: "Her Indianisms would have been alright if she hadn't contrarily practised giving strange English slangs to her impoverished characters : '…Myself don't like to mix with snooty females' (p.18); 'we the riff-raf' (p.18); 'My sister, here, is a bit of an oddball' (p.27); 'My mother conked off' (p.27)…." (137). However, she praises Hyder for her sense of parody :

> In my favourite such passage, one rich young man is planning to promote Rashke Qamar's ghazals (which are really written by another rich young man) by writing the following critical articles about them : "Rahke Qamar's Poetry—Its Lyrical Existentialism;" "The Influence of Mallarme on Rashke Qamar;" "Image and Idea in Rashke Qamar's Longer Poems;" "A new Voice in Modern Urdu Ghazal;" "Rashke Qamar's Views on Art, or Her Philosophy of Life;" "The Profound Significance of the Succession of Days and Nights in Rashke Qamar's Time Scheme"(p.26) (Pritchett 139).

Pritchett sums up her review saying Hyder should be more painstaking with language. She should also request her publishers to work harder. He believes that she is a talented writer who could have done better justice to her work by being more professional.

Women are supposed to behave in a certain way and try to keep a certain veneer of respectability and feminine behaviour, even if they are despised *khangis*, or worse. The independent-minded Rashke Qamar shocks her lover Farhad and his friend Verma by acting like a man, or a streetwalker.

> Farhad lighted a cigarette.
> "Give us a cigarette," Rashke Qamar said. The young man was taken aback. Reluctantly, he passed the tin of Goldflake to his mistress. She took out a cigarette, lit it and began inhaling it like a habitual smoker or a tramp.
> It saddened Verma. "I had thought the world of this girt," he mused.

> Rashke Qamar watched the men's reactions and gave a harsh laugh. "You are romantics, both of you. Well, grow up" (28).

Despite their physical intimacy with the men for whom Rashke Qamar, Moti, Rashke's mother and aunt have been working as *khangis*, they know that the men will never marry them and give them the social respectability of a wife. Despite their closeness to their masters they are no better than despised and disposable slaves. The women recognise these terms of the relationship and abide by them.

When Rashke Qamar gives birth to Farhad's son, he abruptly and without explaining any reason, quits the relationship. In this relationship there is no binding on men. Almost as whimsically, when she gives birth to someone else's child Farhad resumes the monthly stipend of Rs 200 to her.

There is a certain code of honour in *khangis* also: they are not conducting any sexual relationship outside this arrangement. They are not streetwalking while being somebody's *khangi*. This is why Rashke and Jamila feel hurt when the latter overhears Verma telling Farhad that Rashke could be carrying someone else's child and only to blackmail Farhad she could be attributing paternity to him. Farhad's son dies soon and he has only daughters with his wife when he later marries someone else.

At the beginning of the novel Rashke is shown singing a beautiful Urdu poem to the accompaniment of her uncle's *dholak*, her aunt's harmonium and her little sister's vocal. She is a talented, beautiful teenager at this point. The song is poignant, with reference to the transient nature of life, wealth and beauty. People come into the world only to go away before they know. It is a world permanently on the move:

> The journey is tough, how long would ye sleep?
> The destination is hard to reach.
> Nasim, arise and tie your sash, roll up your mat.
> Get ready to leave, the night is short. (6)

* * *

Youth and charm, pomp and wealth,
Are matters all of numbered breaths…
Extinction awaits with folded hands.
Moment by moment the warning comes
To pack up and leave, saddle and go.
Like the empty palms of a beggar am I,
Bereft of all desire.
Attached to detachment, my heart reflects
My True Love's Rediant Face.(7)

* * *

Life follows not a stready course,
Grief comes after transitory joy…(7)

The lyrics of the ghazal are meaningful. It talks of the love between the soul and God—a sufi theme. There cannot be True Love on earth. One finds it only in the hereafter. That Bhooray Qawwal is a talented singer and his audience a devout lot is evident from the fact that soon they are drowned in spiritual ecstasy. The dancing dervishes add to the atmosphere.

The long poem sung at the beginning foreshadows events to come in the characters' lives. In fact, it is true about anyone's life: "Life follows not a steady course,/Grief comes after transitory joy."

At the end, Rashke Qamar comes back to India, having failed to find her daughter's father. In addition, she loses her daughter, killed by gangsters. By the time she gets back, Jamila is already dead. Khalu, too, is dead. Hurmuzi Khala is on the verge of death. She fails to get back to the *mushaira* circuit as she is too old to sing. Jobless, she decides to work as a chikan worker which does not pay enough for two square meals a day. The novel ends there, a sad end.

A Woman's Life: Identity

For the three heroines – Rashke Qamar, Moti and Jamila – their homeland is India. They are unwanted even here and pushed to the bare margins of existence. They are born in Avadh and live most of their lives there. Rashke goes to Pakistan for some time. After her daughter is murdered by gangsters, she finds no point in staying in Pakistan and returns to Lucknow to a lonely life of poverty and drudgery.

For the characters their home is Avadh in present-day Uttar Pradesh, the kingdom of Shri Ramchandraji, the place of Tulsi, Kabir and Jayasi. Rashke is steeped in Urdu poetry and Avadh's Indo-Islamic culture, which was liberal and emphasised common humanity rather than religious denominational differences. Her religious belief does not make her different from her fellow humans. Farhad and Verma, too, are cosmopolitans who do not aggressively assert their religious identity.

Jamila often wonders why God, who is Merciful, makes some people so poor, so ugly, so helpless and crippled. She thinks little of any religion, including her own. Yet, Verma gives her the trade name Jalbala Lahiri, the first name (which means water girl, mermaid) does not seem apt to her, nor does the Lahiri surname that belongs to Bengalis. She feels comfortable with her original name Jamila (beautiful). She finds putting on another persona difficult, but Verma thinks this new name will suit her as a rising singer.

Nor is the Hindu Moti (pearl) comfortable with her new name, Sadaf Ara Begum, a Muslim name. Sadaf is the Persian for *moti*. Her new Persian name could be translated as Pearl-decorated Lady. Sadaf, angry at Verma's gimmicks, complains:

> Adopting a different name does not change one's destiny. You changed Jamila's name. Has it made any difference? She is still hobbling about, moping. I am a Hindu and you made me Sadaf Ara Begum. You changed Jamilun-Nissa into Jalbala Lahiri. How does it matter? Whatever is predestined shall come to pass. (31)

Despite their different religions Sadaf, Rashke and Jamila live like sisters. Moti is highly protective of the two sisters, who treat her as their own. Here religion does not divide.

Here class identity is quite sharp. Farhad and Verma, despite their humane nature, distrust "this class of women" (28), that is, Rashke, Jamila and Moti. Jamila never forgets to curse the rich for their vileness. Their aunt Hurmuzi is equally disdainful and hostile towards the rich, Hindu and Muslim. Farhad's mother, Diptiayin, is contemptuous of these unfortunate women and treats them like dirt. The we versus they equation here is between the rich and poor. Class identity is more marked than any other. Rashke Qamar, however, does not bear animosity towards anybody.

Of all the important characters, the down and out Hurmuzi is a great believer in God and the prophet. During their travel to the UP hills somebody picks the pocket of Kaane Bhand (Jumman Khan). Thus the entire life's savings of Hurmuzi and her family are gone. Hurmuzi is livid with rage. She showers him with the choicest abuses accusing him of losing the money in gambling as he goes on crying and pleading innocence. At last Kaane swears by God, His prophet and the prophet's family.

This touches a chord in the pious Hurmuzi, who suddenly quietens and resigns herself to the loss, taking refuge in God's Will. To her credit, even Hurmuzi does not discriminate between people on the basis of faith. Though, she vehemently opposes conversion for the sake of obtaining worldly riches.

There is another female character, Sharifan, at the beginning of the novel who is at the *mazaar* of Hande Shah, a poor man's *pir*, whose *dargah* is frequented by "oil-pressers, weavers, potters, butchers, peasants and their womenfolk, who spent their lives in flat-roofed hovels and were buried in mud graves" (4). The woman's only daughter was murdered by her in-laws, who paid the police and went scot free. The woman works in neighbouring households and earns a few annas a day. After her back-breaking labour, she prays regularly to God, reciting half-remembered, jumbled verses from the Quran:

> I begin with the Name of God. I recite the credo of Muhammad. There is no god, but God. And Muhammad is his Prophet. Lead us on the Straight Path. Thine is the Glory. I begin with the Name of God. From Thee we come and to Thee we return. When the sky is rent asunder, when the stars scatter and the oceans roll together, when the graves are hurled about, each soul shall know what it has done and what it has failed to do…I seek refuge in the Lord of Daybreak from the mischief of His Creation, from the mischief of the night when she spreads her darkness. By the light of the day Your Lord has not forsaken you… (4)

Hyder comments, "Technically, she should be among the first to enter the gates of Paradise" (5). The author is clearly on the side of the weak, the poor, the God-fearing:

> And the humble, unknown qawwal, his aged, half-blind table player, and his fellow singers, and the lonely people who listened to them rapturously, and the poor traders who were selling their modest wares in the Urs fair – they were all duly informed from time to time that they were to inherit the Kingdom of God. (6)

"From time to time" here means possibly the scriptures announcing over the ages that the humble and the weak were God's own people. The Prophet Muhammad used to pray, "O Allah keep me among the poor (in this world) and raise me on the Day of Judgment among them." He tried to live like the poor: living in a similar home, wearing the same clothes, eating the same food. Earlier, the Bible had announced six centuries before the prayer, "The meek shall inherit the earth." Hindus believe that there is a *Daridra Narayan* (Indigent Lord).

There is no anthropomorphic God in Islam, but sometimes in the Hadith literature (Prophet's traditions) Islam's formless God does talk like humans. One Hadith says, On the Day of Judgment (Qayamat) Allah will tell a man:

> O son of Adam, I asked food from you but you did not feed Me. He would say: My Lord, how could I feed Thee whereas Thou art the Lord of the worlds? He said: Didn't you know that such and such servant of Mine asked food from you but you did not feed him, and were you not aware that if you had fed him you would have found him by My side? (The Lord would again say:) O son of Adam, I asked drink from you but you did not provide Me. He would say: My Lord, how could I provide Thee whereas Thou art the Lord of the worlds? Thereupon He would say: Such and such of servant of Mine asked you for a drink but you did not provide him, and had you provided him drink you would have found him near Me. (Sahih Muslim, Book# 032, Hadith# 6232. Sahih Muslim 2569, Grade: Sahih)

Similar lines occur in the Bible too (Matthew 25; 42-45).

Hyder, a sufi-influenced person, was deeply conscious of such traditions. The foul-mouthed, cranky, bitter, desperately poor and TB-stricken Hurmuzi has an incredible fidelity to the One God she has known, Allah, and His prophet Muhammad and his family. She is not prepared to forsake Allah and His prophet for anything on earth. Any amount of wordly riches and wellbeing is not enough for her to severe this relationship.

There is some understanding that God rightly belongs to all people and all religions, but Muhammad belongs only to Muslims and they should not forsake him. By the way, the broad Hanafi Sunni Muslim (a preponderant majority of the subcontinent's Muslims) faith is that the prophet belongs to all humans, but an enduring love for him is found mostly among Muslims.

The lame, sickly Jamila, who has lost faith in God, recounts:

> "In one of the remote villages on the mountain side we came across a Catholic mission run by some Europeans. They hinted to us that if we

> adopted their religion and sang Urdu hymns during their missionary activities, they would send me and my aunt to their hospital, and Bajia (Rashke) to their famous convent school in Nainital.
>
> "When we came back to our shed downhill, I said to my aunt, 'Let us all become Christians. God is neither here nor there. So how does it matter? Our lives would be transformed.' Aunt Hurmuzi beat the living daylight out of me. 'Fat lousy sow wallowing in the mud!' She fumed. 'Look at her. She has lost a leg and is willing to lose the True Faith as well" (6).

Between them, Hurmuzi, Rashke Qamar and Jamila represent different degrees of belief and unbelief. Hurmuzi sees no life beyond Allah and His prophet, Rashke Qamar is relaxed about religious identity and Jamila is hostile to all forms of religion. Moti (Sadaf) sees herself as a Hindu, who makes no distinction between people on religious grounds. This stance is true of everyone, including Hurmuzi.

Interestingly, the religion of these people and the crowd that gathers at Pir Hande Shah's dargah is some form of a Small Tradition, which does not always conform to strict Shariah standards. It is not like any of the several, standardised, scripture-based, maulvi-interpreted and qazi-judged and enforced Islam. It is some folk version, indigenised Islam of the subcontinent, to which a majority subscribes even today.

It is no less pious and righteous, if not more so, than the more strict versions of the faith, which compete vehemently with each other on being the True Faith. This folk version is not marked for scriptural authenticity and borrows parts of its language and beliefs freely from other faith traditions. Its historical authenticity also is not always established.

Nobody knows for sure who Pir Hande Shah was, at whose dargah the novel opens with Bhoore Khan's qawwali followed by Rashke Qamar and party's performance. Nobody knows where Pir Hande Shah was born, when or where he lived or when and where he died. He was not certainly Delhi's Pir Nizamuddin Chishti or Ajmer's Khawaja Moinuddin Chishti whose births and deaths are recorded and each day of their lives'

activities are meticulously chronicled after they became pirs. Even before they became great Sufis, events of their lives were recorded as their families were well-educated and cultured. Not so with the poor folks' pir, Hande Shah. The author says it was possible that there was no historical Hande Shah at all. This name had come from the "handa" (gas light) that illuminated the pir's dargah on his *urs* (death anniversary, the day of the soul's "union" with God).

Urs (Arabic for the bride's union with the bridegroom) is celebrated, not mourned, as it is in sufi lore the happy moment of the bride's (human soul's) union with the bridegroom (God). This idea itself is not part of the scripture or Islam's Greater Tradition, nor are festivities like *urs* there. The prophet's or his family's deaths are not celebrated. The prophet's death is not mourned either. The only deaths mourned are those of the prophet's grandson Hussain's and some of his family and followers who were martyred by a tyrant ruler. But only the Shia sect, which is about 20 percent of the Muslim population according to Pew Research Institute (http://shianumbers.com/shia-muslims-population.html) mourns it. Even they do not mourn the death of Hussain's elder brother, Hasan, his mother Fatima or his father Ali, or grandfather, the prophet.

Urs is a subcontinental feature, rejected by more puritanical versions of Islam as idolatry and distortion. Infused with a Hindu way of looking at things, this sits well with most subcontinental Muslims as their ancestors came to Islam from Hinduism, many of whose ways they never forgot. Most Hindus and Sikhs are also comfortable with it. People steeped in it have a different way of looking at life and death and the world than those subscribing to the more purist versions.

The poor people gathered at Hande Shah's dargah are lost in the piety and religious fervour of Bhoore Khan's devotional qawwali describing the prophet's ascent to the heavens to meet God while still alive. According to Muslim belief, the prophet lived for many years after returning home from God's presence:

> "*Laga ke kajal chale Gosain…*" The flame of the lamp quivered with the high pitch of Bhoore qawwal's voice. "*Are laga ke kajal chale Gosaiyan*…" Bhoore Khan's ten-year old son accompanied his father in his thin voice. "*Are laga ke kajal chale Gosaiyan*…" Bhoore qawwal's four famished companions began to sing repeatedly in a chorus clapping (65).

The Gosain and Gosaiyan here is not Krishnaji, but the prophet Muhammad. There is a certain similarity between the two. Like Krishnaji and many Semitic prophets, Prophet Muhammad, too, used to take cattle out to graze in his younger years. From shepherding to the shepherding of humans marked the progress of Semitic prophets, Christ being particularly famous as shepherd.

Still people outside the subcontinent, or people not familiar with the sufi lore can barely recognise the prophet in Gosain or Gosaiyan. The language and the lore of sufism, so familiar to commoners, was founded on local spiritual traditions, which in many ways was a continuation from the Hindu past. This version of Islam has been part of the Indian landscape and people steeped in it are distinct, like the crowd at Hande Shah's dargah. Interestingly, there are 99 names of the prophet, but Gosain is not among them.

Translation, other issues

Like other translations of her original Urdu works done by her, this too is largely a reworking of *Agle Janam Mohe Bitiya Na Kijio* than a literal translation. The previous quote from *Agle Janam…* is the Urdu novel's beginning, but the opening paragraph of *Street Singers of Lucknow* is entirely new:

> Bhooray Qawwal and party clapped their hands in vigorous rhythm as they sang of the Lord Prophet's Mystical Night Journey to the celestial spheres. The Lord Prophet rides a resplendent winged stallion. In an instant he reaches the holy city of Jerusalem he ascends from the grey rock and traverses the Seven Heavens, meeting the earlier prophets on the Way of

> Light. In an instant he reaches the presence of God.When he returns to earth the chain of his door is still moving. The mystical experience of the human soul. The Profound Mystery (3).

There are a lot of major and minor departures from the original Urdu. Jamilan is changed to Jamila in English. In the second chapter, in the Urdu version, Rashke Qamar is sitting near a hand pump with a bottle of scented hair oil and a Lux soap in her soap case (73). In English the Lux soap bar becomes a Pears soap (12). In Urdu the hair oil has a name – Gesu Daraaz (73) meaning Long Tresses. In English, it is just scented hair oil, not in a bottle: "Her long hair reeked of perfumed oil" (12). In the English version (*Street Singers)* she is sitting close, not to a hand pump, but a tap. In English, she is already "washing her face with Pears soap," while in Urdu she is washing her face, but the Lux bar is inside the soap case. In the same chapter, Diptiayin shouts (in English) "I will beat you with my own shoes" (11) while in Urdu, she says "I will have you beaten up with shoes" (72).

One wonders as to why the Lux bar in Urdu has been changed to Pears. Maybe because Pears is a costlier soap than Lux. Farhad is curious to know how can Rashke afford costly things like a Lux soap (in Urdu version) and Gesu Daraaz scented hair oil with her meager income. Hyder might have thought that Pears being costlier, it should be appropriately unaffordable to her. And why is Gesu Daraz deleted. Possibly because many Urdu readers could decipher its meaning, while English readers would not know that it indirectly promises long hair.

There are changes in the structure, detail and tenor across the translated version of the novel. Hyder thought that only she knew her text and only she could translate it. As a rule, she did not allow others to translate her work. Suzanne Gilbert Schwartz and Prof. CM Naim were the only people allowed to translate a small part of Hyder's work. Others could not take the kind of liberty with her text which she did.

Sita Betrayed

(*Sita Haran*)

This is one of the most complex and multi-layered of Hyder's works. This 173-page novella also happens to be her most staunchly and unambiguously feminist. The story is resonant with the ancient saga of Sitaji's kidnapping by Ravana.

Sita Haran, the story of a Sindhi young woman, translated into English by CM Naim, got the fresh title *Sita Betrayed*. Issues of nation, gender and identity are central to the story of Sita Mirchandani, who finds herself bereft of a home and home country with the Partition of India. Born in 1927 (like Hyder) she has to leave her beloved "Sindhu Desh", her spacious home and the family's considerable material assets to come to Delhi as a refugee to be settled in a cramped dark dwelling left behind by a poor Muslim family that had gone to Pakistan.

The instability of history and the fragility of a nation state's borders had produced hundreds of thousands of Sitas like her on both sides of the newly-created borders. The *Lakshman Rekha* of undivided India proved ineffective in protecting Sita Mirchandani and other Sitas. "They drew a line on the ground to protect me, but it didn't work…" (135), she says, a remark that describes the unreliability of national borders. This also evokes the futility of such a "line on the ground" that failed to protect the first Sitaji.

Sita Mirchandani's tragedy is that of a woman who fails to find a safe space of belonging in Karachi, Delhi, New York, Colombo or Paris. She remains a wandering spirit, perpetually unhinged from her beloved Sindhu Desh and several places after that. It is also a tragedy of a woman who fails to find a relationship to "belong in" as she is too emancipated to "belong to" a man.

Despite her marriage (that ultimately fails) to an Indian in New York, Jamil, and a series of lovers, she remains a lonely person. Surayya Jamal (quoted by Akhtar Sultana) says:

> Sita represents that eternal loneliness of human soul to which noisy thoroughfares, brightly-lit bazaars and glittering clubs look meaningless. To it the only reality is Time and Time alone, which is there from the beginning and will remain from eternity to eternity. (571, Translation mine)

The Story

Sita Mirchandani, uprooted by the Partition of India, comes from Sindh (in the newly created Pakistan) to India in 1948. After passing through several refugee camps she ultimately lands in Delhi where her once prosperous family is allotted a dark little house. Sita is so much embarrassed by her new poverty and her little home in a narrow lane that she avoids inviting anybody to it. Soon she becomes friends with some kindly and warm people. There are some Muslims also among them who have somehow stayed back in India. All these people are well-off and protective of Sita, who is shown studying at Ramjas College.

In a dramatic turn of events, her prosperous uncle, who is childless and settled in Canada, arranges for her to study in the United States. She goes there and earns a PhD degree from Columbia University. In New York's Greenwich Village she becomes part of a group of socialist-minded, free-thinking bohemians, several of whom are blacks and Jews, with an occasional Indian. She also comes across Jamil, a UN official from India in New York. They fall in love, get married and have a son who they name Rahul after Gautam Buddha's son. This gesture shows their secular values, high level of intellectual and cultural attainment and their commitment to India's history and heritage.

Jamil is a great admirer of Tulsidas and his *Ramacharitmanas* and Malik Mohammad Jayasi's *Padmavat*, both the texts being in Avadhi. He relishes quoting from them in his conversations. Jamil, Sita and their son Rahul have been living a happy, contented life in New York when a Bengali poet, Qamarul Islam Chowdhry, enters their life. Sita gradually drifts into a relationship with him as Jamil has started putting in extraordinarily long hours at the office and regularly going to a pub for several hours after that.

One day Qamar, a perfect bohemian, goes to the pub and announces to Jamil that he is in love with Sita. For that Jamil beats "the stuffing out of Qamar" (84), comes home and thrashes Sita, who had never imagined that the ever-polite Jamil was capable of such ferocity. Then he forces Sita out of their apartment at midnight and closes the door in her face as she soaks in rain standing on the curb. Sita could see through the window panes the moving shadow of Jamil trying to put Rahul to bed. She hears Rahul's cries for some time till he falls asleep and Jamil puts off the light.

Sita, who has nowhere to go except to Qamar's place, goes to him. He tells her frankly that he (Qamar) is an unreliable man and advises her to go to Jamil who is a noble person and would take her back. Sita says she knows in the heart of her hearts that Jamil is a faithful husband and it is she who has strayed out of the mutual trust. But because Jamil makes no effort to get her back she does not go to him and comes to India instead.

There is some hint of Jamil's "responsibility" for the drift as he had started putting in long hours at work and at the pub, leaving little for time together with Sita. To keep Jamil's company Sita too starts drinking heavily at the pub. Jamil frowns at her and tells her not to follow him all the time. "Can't you leave me alone even for a minute?" (80) Jamil would shout at Sita in desperation. Qamar easily walks into the breach.

Sita has been in Delhi for a year when she gets a call from Jamil's cousin Bilqis telling her that Jamil has remarried in New York. The woman is a European working with Jamil in the UN. When Sita asks Bilqis who is the woman Jamil has married, her voice seems to be coming out of a deep well. This is an indicator of the profound sadness gnawing at her heart. Soon she regains her composure and quiet dignity. She says, "He could have married Elizabeth Taylor, for all I care" (23). That is another side of Sita.

Jamil, who dotes on their son Rahul, refuses to give him to Sita. He also does not divorce Sita formally before entering into a second marriage. Her numerous affairs, one after another – some of them simultaneous – notwithstanding, Sita is right when she says no

woman would change herself so much for her husband as she did for Jamil. She did everything that he liked. She even learnt and practised Urdu almost to perfection as Jamil loved this language.

After Qamar she moves on to an affair with Projesh Chowdhry, another arty-farty type. In the meanwhile, there is marriage of Jamil's sister Qaiser in Karachi, where most of this family from Avadh had settled after Partition. Sita also gets a letter from Jamil's *khala* (maternal aunt) along with the invitation. The fact of Jamil's remarriage is already known to the family. Sita is invited to the marriage in Karachi where she goes with Jamil's cousin Bilqis. There she meets Irfan who, in some ways, looks and acts like Jamil. On top of it, he too is a great lover of Urdu and Avadhi, like Jamil. Soon she falls in love with him. She beseeches him to convince Jamil to divorce her and give Rahul back to her. In Pakistan her smoking, drinking and free mixing with men upsets the relatives.

She plans to make a tryst with Irfan in Colombo where she learns Jamil would be going on a UN mission during the same period. She asks Irfan to convince Jamil to divorce her and give Rahul back to her. Irfan advises her to stay away from him for a few days so that Jamil does not come to know she is there along with him (Irfan). Jamil and Irfan strike a great friendship. They do not only look alike in some ways but share the same cultural and literary background of Avadh's Muslim aristocracy.

Even at this point when momentous decisions have to be taken about her son and her growing closeness to Irfan, Sita drifts into a brief relationship with an American professor touring Sri Lanka at that point of time. She and the professor, Leslie Marsh, check into a hotel as Mr and Mrs Leslie Marsh. They stay there for four days. The news of such flings of Sita keeps reaching both her former and prospective husbands. Jamil and Irfan are disturbed, but not Sita. She is the opposite of the original Sitaji – she is what Sitaji was not. She can thus be defined as the other of the revered prototype.

She gets back to Delhi where she receives a letter from Jamil granting her the divorce she had been seeking. Now she goes to Paris to Irfan where they are to get married. When she

goes to his apartment in Paris the concierge there tells her that Irfan had married a European woman and gone on a honeymoon with her to St. Croce, Italy. Once again she is left alone in a foreign city, friendless and unwanted. The situation here, at the end of the novel, is identical to the moment when she was thrown out of her home to soak in rain and travel to Qamar's place where she was unwelcome.

Hyder constantly refers to or quotes from three texts :Vishakhadatta's *Mudra Rakshas*, Malik Muhammad Jaisi's *Padmavat* and Tulsidas' *Ramcharitamanas*. Naim observes :

> The question of personal loyalty within the context of political shifts, the experience of exile, the folly of undisciplined trust—these are some of the themes that the play [Mudrarakshas] shares with the novella. Perhaps it is not insignificant that fragments from the play are heard in a scene in Delhi, that eternal Indian site of contestations over political power and loyalty. (Introduction *Season* xiv)

Issues of nation, gender, identity

Sita Haran, written in 1960 in Urdu and translated into English in 1990 as *Sita Betrayed*, is a rich tapestry of issues related to nation, gender and identity, all neatly woven into a complex web of narrative. Here Sita is both a modern, Columbia-educated, woman as well as a reflection of the prototypal ancient Aryan woman who had had her own free will to exercise in the choice of a mate. Sita is a "modern" woman in the sense that modernity is characterised by a lack of absolutes and certitudes and a psychological state of not really belonging to a single place, religion, ideology or stance. At one point of the novel when an airport official asks her about her religion she is not really sure about it. Irfan good-humouredly interjects, "Perhaps you should write free thinker" (88). Ania Spyra writes in her "Is Cosmopolitanism Not for Women?" that belonging has two meanings. The first is "being owned," the other "having an affiliation to" (4). Sita certainly does not belong to anyone or any space in the first sense, neither is she firmly affiliated to anybody or country.

In a way it is a tragedy of not belonging. This Sita's search for a Rama across geographical and cultural borders turns out to be futile as she finds no Rama in marriage and a series of liaisons. Of course, she is no Sitaji of popular Hindu belief in so many ways, including the important aspect of not being subservient to any male. Sita Mirchandani is like Qurratulain Hyder. Hyder was twenty and had produced a warmly-received novel *Mere Bhi Sanamkhane* (later translated by the author as *My Temples, Too*) when the Partition blew in like an all-powerful tornado, blowing everything and everybody away. As the Partition forced Uttar Pradesh's Hyder away to Pakistan, it blew Sita from Sindh, into India. Like Hyder herself Sita blames nobody for the immense hardship India's division brought to its victims.

Sita is not a Pakistani, but she carries Sindh inside her wherever she goes. She is comfortable in India as she is elsewhere, including Pakistan, which she visits to be in the company of her estranged husband's family. Her husband, Jamil, is a Muslim from the aristocracy of Uttar Pradesh who works with the United Nations in New York. Jamil, too, carries Uttar Pradesh and its *Ganga-Jamuni tehzib* (composite culture) built together over centuries by Hindus and Muslims in his heart. Deep down in their hearts neither Sita nor Jamil have come to terms with the new dispensation. Jamil does not seem to be cognizant of the schism between Hindus and Muslims that had grown with the Partition. Nor is Sita saddled with the burden of victimhood, or too keenly focused on a Hindu identity.

An edge of marginality marks Sita's life. According to Naim she lives "in exile that is more internal than obvious" (Introduction xi). He writes on this state of non-belonging in the Introduction of *Sita Betrayed*:

> Sita Mirchandani, a Hindu, feels lost in a predominantly Hindu India… Sita may have internalised the history of Sindh – in fact, she remembers many histories – but the wound of separation from Sindh itself is so deep that no tie to any other place heals it. So she wanders, from Delhi to New York, back to Delhi, then to Colombo, on to Paris, and again to Delhi. Her story

> ends with her back in Paris, but again facing the prospect of having to return to Delhi or go somewhere else (Introduction xi-xii).

Persons from religions, ethnic or cultural minorities are more conscious of their identity as difference is pronounced because of the "regularity" or perceived "sameness" of the majority, their being on the margins being a natural corollary of the huge mainstream.

Sita's marginality comes not just from being from the Hindu minority in Pakistan (which, though has to be reason for hardships as a refugee in India in the early months), but also from her independence of mind and refusal to conform and kowtow. Her story makes a fine feminist text.

Sita's marginalisation also comes from her lack of complete affinity with established larger group identities or socially-sanctioned ascriptive behaviour patterns. In Delhi, her friend Hima's mother is a devout Hindu and tolerant human being. When Sita greets her with *Adab Arz*, instead of *Jai Ramji*, she gently points at it. Sita tells Hima, "… Your mother has strange ideas. Why should I say Jai Ramji. I am not a silly Hindu" (31). Too much of an individualist to "belong" to any religious denominational crowd, she has no locus to stand, but the margins, away from the "mainstream".

Intizar Husain's "search for a Ram" interpretation of her guiltless, guileless affairs with several men (even while being married to one) does not carry us too far. However, his other remark, that she is the reincarnation of an early Aryan woman from an age when matrimony and patriarchal control were not strongly established in India makes more sense ("Sita Haran" 410-411).

Early Aryan women, freshly settled in India after having wandered through Europe and Central Asia, were free-spirited persons, choosing mates as they wished or fancied. Husain says Sita Mirchandani fits in more snugly the early Indian Aryan woman model than that of Sitaji of the epic Ramayana of Tulsidas, who is the "ideal woman" of popular faith and culture.

Sita's attempts at cosmopolitanism, a state of being comfortable in any country, is doomed, because it implies transformation, freedom of movement and change. A cosmopolite "actively" belongs to every place, not "passively" as in the case of being owned by someone, argues Ania Spyra (4). It also implies the ability to escape "containment" (6). Spyra talks about the typological series of scales devised by the social geographer Neil Smith, which begins with "the scale of body and extends through home, community, urban, region and nation to the global" (5). In this concentric arrangement, it is possible for people in one scale to jump to another in what is called "scalar shifts":

> To counter the concentric cosmopolitanism, Homi K. Bhabha suggests a translational model based on the continua of transformation of the subject who is always in-between, always fragmented. Translation, however, once more implies transformation of identification, so an active redefinition lies at the core of cosmopolitanism. Consequently, Sita's… migrations can be interpreted as "jumping of scales," or an attempt to translate oneself to avoid containment within the symbolic meaning of the body by the mastering gaze of the masculine, their family, or community (Spyra 6).

Spyra argues that Sita's "failure to find a space of belonging within the global scale seems to lie in "… [her] inability to escape the constraints imposed by someone else's narration (6)."

The instability of national borders and the "unpredictability" of history is a central theme here. Like a line drawn on water, borders have a way of disappearing quickly, or getting irrelevant. Borders and boundaries have two functions: of confining and protecting. That they are more successful in confining than protecting is evident from Sita Mirchandani's words about her in-laws in particular, but allegorically about all such *lakshman-rekha*s: "They drew a line on the ground to protect me, but it did not work" (135).

The line-drawing by her loving in-laws was more in the nature of containing rather than protecting her, but the line drawn to mark the Indo-Pak border was for making aliens out of natives. This line turned out to be no better than the original one drawn to protect Sitaji of the Ramayana. She was abducted in any case, as were thousands of Hindu, Muslim and Sikh women during the Partition violence. Lines don't protect women; they only separate loved ones from each other.

When Sita visits Karachi to attend the marriage of her sister in-law she is received with great affection and love by the family of a Muslim pir sahib who is a friend of her father. Yet, in her own land (Sindhu Desh) she is treated as alien by the state and is required to inform the police about her presence.

The following conversation between Irfan and Sita in Karachi is illustrative:

> "I am truly amazed," Irfan said to Sita, shifting gears as they drove past the court buildings. "Isn't it strange that I am a resident of this country but you are an alien?"
> "Over the years I've grown accustomed to it," Sita replied. "The last time I came to India with Jamil, Manjhli Khala came from Karachi to Faizabad to see her favourite nephew. It was she who showed me all the sights of Lucknow and explained to me all the old rituals and customs. But when we arrived in Lucknow from Faizabad, it was I who took her to the police station to have her arrival entered in the records". (69)

Briefly, the predicament of Sita Mirchandani is that she travels across cultures and countries, but reaches nowhere. Irfan rebukes her for her casual relationship with Leslie. Sita is stunned and pained at his possessiveness. After throwing Irfan out, for interfering in her personal matter, she breaks down. She hadn't cried incessantly like this when she had to leave her home with her family for Kathiadwad after Partition in 1947, nor when Jamil had ousted her in New York (141). Perhaps, she loves Irfan in her own way and doesn't expect any accusation from him.

By the time, Sita realises the strength of her feelings for Irfan it is too late. After obtaining divorce from Jamil she dreams of marrying Irfan :

> who was no 'intellectual' or 'bohemian' or 'angry young man' – who was just a sensible, straightforward, solid person.... Jamil-Qamar- both had wounded her soul instead of enriching it. As for, Projesh, he was so engrossed in himself that he hadn't even bothered to find out if she had soul. But Irfan ...Yes, Irfan ... (167)

Sita, who is unable to find a home after she is dislocated from Sindh, hopes to reclaim it by marrying Irfan. It is as if he gives her a sense of security, with his reassuring ways. As she prepares to meet him in Paris, she reminiscences: "Home , now, was where Irfan lived" (171).

She introspects that she had fallen in love with Jamil when she was still pretty young. It didn't last long. She had been attracted to Qamar's "casual", "careless" style, Projesh had "drawn sympathy from her" (171). Sita felt she could pity the last for he seemed too lonely despite having fame, wealth and a horde of admirers. Sita feels she has finally found an emotional anchor and she would not be pitied any more.

She has declared to her mother that she is going to Paris to marry Irfan and bid farewell to her friends and family thinking she would settle abroad with her husband. Therefore, the revelation that Irfan has got married shatters her.

It makes the story poignant. Irfan, the ever circumspect, decorous man demands loyalty from her while Sita remains oblivious that news of her affairs may disturb him. Sita's expectation of unconditional love is difficult to be fulfilled.

What's there in a name?

Hyder likes to play with names. When Sita marries Jamil, her uncle is grief stricken. Her aunty, on the other hand , is impressed with him. She tells partial truth to Sita's mother that she has got married outside their caste to a boy called Jaimal. Sita recounts that later she would jokingly say: "Jamil...Jaimal...there's only a difference of a few vowels" (77).

People have a sentimental attachment to the places they inhabit, houses they live in. Sita's brother-in-law has been able to buy a house in the prestigious "Housing Society" area and calls his home "Chandpur House". Bilqis questions her relatives as to why they should hold on to old names in a new country. Why should they show themselves as former taluqdars of Avadh? She adds it doesn't make any difference that they had a small estate called Chandpur. Her aunt replies nonchalantly that they did have a house by that name in Lucknow. They may have left India, but they would like to carry the fond memories of their roots. Sita is reminded of her mother's constant reminiscence of her palatial house in Karachi (49).

When Sita tells Irfan that her father had his clinic in Ram Bagh, Irfan looks puzzled. He clarifies, it is renamed as "Aram Bagh" now. In a bid to forge a new identity, the new country renames places.

Sita informs that even when Sindhis converted to Islam, they continued with their old practices and beliefs. Their saints have a Hindu name and a Muslim name: "Yes. Raja Bharatari came to be known as Lal Shahbaz. Pir Pattu, as Pir Sultan, Zinda Pir as Khwaja Khizar. Udero Lal became Shaikh Tahir, and Lalu Jasraj is Manghu Pir" (61).

Hyder mentions the subtle similarities between Hindu and Muslim practices. When Sita tells Irfan that pipal tree is considered sacred because Lord Mahadeva lives in it, Irfan chuckles and adds that pipal is significant in his community too. His mother said witches live in it. Even "martyred saints were buried under them... Every Thursday she had a lamp lit under that tree" (61).

Sindoor is generally associated with Hindu women. But, Hyder is talking of a syncretic culture. Even Muslims in Bengal, Bihar, Eastern Uttar Pradesh use it. Sita's in-laws, who have migrated to Pakistan, insist that she wear it. Otherwise, it is a bad omen (54). Similarly, Urdu is not confined to Muslims alone. The man who teaches Sita Urdu in New York is a Sikh who is inspired by Krishan Chandar and Bedi (74). Qamrul asks Satish Gopal, a Punjabi, who writes poetry in Urdu, to translate his novel in Urdu (93).

Inverted resonance

Intizar Husain delves into Tulsi Das's *Ramacharitmanas* to know what Sita Mirchandani represents. He says Sitaji's fascination with a beautiful golden deer led her to ask Shri Ramji to kill it and get her its beautiful skin. She was so enchanted by the deer (*mrig*) that she forgot the protection of *Lakshman Rekha* and ran after the deer, crossing the line. It was then that she was kidnapped by Ravana and taken to Sri Lanka. Qurratulain Hyder's Sita is fascinated by metaphorical deer – men – whom she runs after in innocent fascination reminiscent of early, free-spirited tribal Aryan women. Husain in "Sita Haran" writes of Sita Mirchandani:

> She follows these deer to Sri Lanka, Ravana's land, where several deer of her liking have congregated. Ultimately, each deer turns out to be a demon (*rakshasa*). Sita Mirchandani is in exile where *rakshasas* are congregating and there is no Rama around to protect her. One take on it could be that Sita Mirchandani is not looking for deer but for Rama (408 Translation mine).

At one point Sita Mirchandani happens to glance at a picture of Shri Ramji's devotee Hanuman flying, lifting an entire mountain range with one hand. She reflects on her own existential angst: "I also tried to fly in the sky lifting the mountain of life" (47). The image recurs when Sita gets letters from Irfan and Jamil. The former wants to know if scandals about her are true and the latter finally divorces her. She is overwhelmed and her gaze unconsciously turns towards the same picture of Hanuman at her Delhi house (167).

In another moment of loneliness and sorrow after a long night of crying alone, she goes to meet Ratnasinha Jaisurya, editor of a renowned newspaper in Sri Lanka. She fears getting stranded in Colombo for there are chances of a curfew being imposed over there. The man gives her such dirty looks that she wishes: "The earth should split open ... and I should disappear into it " (77). However, she is not Sitaji to have this option and exercise it. "But this was not the world of Sita and Savitri of yore ; this was *kaliyug*. Instead, she opened her purse, took out a cigarette and lit it" (77).

Issues of modernity (Leslie Marsh is described as a "modern man"), identity, gender and nation emerge at every turn here. Spyra relates Sita Mirchandani's "abduction" (*haran*) to her American education (10). She, a woman of a newly free India, has been abducted by a neo-imperial American education system which takes her away from her own native cultural values and imparts to her the soulless post-war Western values of open-ended relationships and morally unfettered liaisons. Spyra adds, however, the two apparently different worlds are similar in their "patriarchal exploitation" of women. According to Spyra, Hyder shows how Partition rendered more women rootless than the official count (10). Interestingly, when she meets Leslie Marsh she immediately feels a commonality of attitudes about life. She even tells herself that Marsh represents the West where the best days of her life were spent.

Abdul Mughni (quoted by Akhtar Sultana) calls *Sita Haran* "a tragedy of the new woman…, a product of a faithless culture" (597).

Novel's craft

The novel's title is "a comprehensive symbol that evokes reader expectation that forms a background against which the narrative runs like a parallel" to the original Sitaji's story, writes Dr. Samina Shaukat (quoted by Akhtar Sultana, 563).

It is not one story, but at least three, placed layer upon layer, like onion peel. Just under the surface of Sita Mirchandani's story runs the parallel story of Tulsi Das's *Ramayana* like a subterranean stream of pure, unadulterated water, fresh and sparkling white. Images, allusions and, sometimes, direct references to *Ramayana* emerge regularly.

Beneath the second layer runs Malik Mohammad Jaisi's *Padmawat*, a classic in the Avadhi language like the *Ramayana*. Unlike Sitaji, who was kidnapped and brought to Sri Lanka, Sita Mirchandani had gone of her own will for a tryst with Irfan. *Padmawat*'s hero, King Ratan Sen, too, had gone there in his time to see his beloved princess Padmini, as his devoted wife pined for him back home. Hyder weaves this complex web of a narrative with a deft hand, without letting any strand tangle with another, or without any of them looking alien to the story or a contrived intrusion in it.

"Eye" is a recurring image in the novel. Sita's eyes are described as "dark" by Jamil. If she were dressed in traditional clothes, she would look like any Syed's daughter from Tulsipur (24). Hima's mother has garlanded a sanyasi and sanyasin's picture. The latter's eyes are bewitching, the former's "more magnetising than hers" 31).If we take eyes to be the window to one's soul, Irfan strikes an instant rapport with Sita: "As their eyes met he gave her a sad smile, as if he understood – or was at least trying to understand – the intense grief reflected in her own eyes. His hair reminded Sita slightly of Jamil's , and she felt a momentary stab of pain" (43). Irfan raises his "eyes" to look at Sita when Nadir informs that she is higly educated. Jamil's *khala* asks Sita whether she saw Irfan and if he would be a suitable match for Bilqis. When Irfan is left alone with Sita in a car, he ensures that he remains ahead of others so that the two are "visible" to everyone for propriety's sake (59). Hima's mother reading the Ramayana, comes across the incident when Sitaji enters the garden to perform puja. Ram hearing her anklets: "raised his eyes. His eyes became transfixed on Sita's face ... She bade Rama to enter her heart through her eyes, then closed her eyes" (100). Sita is disgusted when Jaisurya's "eyes seemed to bore through her clothes" (143). Rama, in Sri Lanka "looked at her [Sita] with calm and serious eyes (148)". Sita glanced at "his even, white , teeth" (48).

Eyes have been called the windows on soul and windows are akin to the eyes of a house. Glass window insulates and allows us to see while its transparency draws out the voyeur or the spy, stealing information and intimacy.

Sita looks out of the window of the hotel room where she was staying with Leslie. "There were patches of clouds floating by the peaks, and she could see several waterfalls in the distance" (129). It could signify longing, desire to travel or escape. Perhaps, Sita feels she must move on quickly for she has important work at hand. Also because she isn't really enamoured of Leslie. After he leaves for Calcutta, Sita stares at the "darkening current of the river" from her window. When the waiter informs her about the places where films are shot, she is inattententive. She looks out of the window again. The "dark current" may signify her sombre mood.

Dreams, memories, fantasies are reflections of the psyche's timeless reality and offers complexes and potentialities of the dreamer. Her dream is one long stream of consciousness. It's a mishmash of the various plays she has seen, her different lovers, her college life, in-laws, etc. The reader is able to pick up clues and get a glimpse of her complex psyche.

The idea of watching is related to gaze. Lacanian gaze signifies the anxious state that arises with the knowledge that one can be viewed. It is linked with the theory of mirror stage when a child looking into a mirror finds that he/she has an external appearance. Thus a person watching an object can become aware of being an object himself/herself. Foucault used gaze in relation to surveillance, discipline and self-regulation as an apparatus of power. He also used it to explain the power relation between doctor and patient and the supremacy of medical science in society. The *Encyclopedia of Feminist Literary Theory* edited by Wallace discusses Laura Mulvey's idea of gaze that the camera functions as male gaze because heterosexual men control it (176-177). Women are thus objectified for a primarily male audience. The latter become all powerful and women passive, and it shows an unequal power equation, an asymmetry. Women get accustomed to looking at themselves through the perspective of men.

Translation

Sita Betrayed is among the few translations of Qurratulain Hyder's novels not done by herself. Unlike the earlier discussed novels – *River of Fire*, *Fireflies in the Mist* and *My Temples, Too* – it is not a transcreation of the original Urdu novella, but a close translation of *Sita Haran*.

Hyder did not trust anyone with the translation of her novels, novellas and short stories. However, she made an exception in case of CM Naim, the translator of this work. As it is an "authorised" translation, it has to avoid any attempt at transcreation, a privilege Hyder reserved for herself.

Naim has rendered into English both the prose and poetry (there is some poetry also in this work) of *Sita Haran* with competence. However, there is a limit to translation. At one point, when an angry Sita shuts herself in a room, Jamil says: "*Humri Sita atwati khatwati leke kope bhawan mein jaletin*" (*Sita Haran* 64). This Avadhi sentence can be translated as, "My Sita has gone into her sulk palace with her bed and mattress". But, will this make any sense to an English reader unfamiliar with Avadhi, Hindi or Urdu? That's why Naim leaves such expressions out.

Similarly, a comic verse has been left out in English. In Urdu, Nadir and Bilqis recite: "*Kaha Majnu se Laila ki maan ne-ke beta gar tu kar le M.A. pass. Aji kaha Majnu ne yeh achhi sunai. Yahi thahri jo shart wasle-Laila to isteefa to isteefa*." (72)

Although the Urdu novel has similar number of pages (168) to the English version (173), the English one has been differently structured. The Urdu version used for this study was published by Sang-e-Meel Publications, Lahore, 2001. It seems there are also other editions available as indicated by Akhtar Sultana in *Tehriron ke Aaine Mein*. She says: "Maktaba Urdu, Lahore has published this 275-page novella, or short story" (563).

Parts of an Urdu couplet appear throughout the novel like the signature tune in a film: "*All my life long I have been preyed upon*" (172). The first version reads: "*All my life long I remained a prey/ to her coquetry*" (22). Sita had heard an Urdu poet reciting it. When she breaks up from Projesh to go back to Irfan in Paris, the line that occurs to her is "*All my life I was preyed upon*" (169). Finally, *was* changes to *have been* (172). The line struck her in a way that it occurs to her every time she feels forlorn and dejected. It occurs to her when a relationship breaks. It occurs to her when her last hope for marriage crashes in Paris at the end of the novel. The slight variation reflects Sita's changing moods with the change in her fortune. The original line is: "*Tamam umr raha ghamza wa ada ka shikar*" (*Sita Haran*, 4,165,168). The poet complains all his life he has been smitten by female allure. The original Urdu does not carry any connotation of being victimised. Yet, "all my lifelong I have been preyed upon" does carry some of the meaning of the original. The male poet has been a "victim" of female allure, and Sita has similarly been the victim of male attraction. "*Shikar*" in the original does mean prey, although it has not been used here in a literal sense. Between the way the poet took it and the way Sita Mirchandani does, the only difference is that of subject position – Sita (a female) taking the position of the poet, a male.

Strangely, Ni'mat "chacha" (22) of Urdu becomes "mama" (29) in English. Perhaps it is an oversight. Similarly, Irfan is said to have gone to "Karashi" in Urdu (168) while in the translation it is St. Croce (172).

Reading *Sita Betrayed* one gets the impression that Sita thinks men in her life have always betrayed and oppressed her. However, with all their faults, none of her men can be called exploitative, rude, ill-behaved, or evil. The original in Urdu has a different, more subtle meaning, with the allusion to the Ramayanic *Sita Haran*, and has nothing to suggest Sita being a victim of male deceit or oppression, as in the English translation the word "betrayed" does.

CHAPTER FIVE

Housing Society

It is one of the more deeply textured and nuanced works of Qurratulain Hyder. Titled *Housing Society* in Urdu and English by the author and *The Housing Society* by CM Naim in English, this novella straddles several cultures, climes and locales. Another distinction it has is there are two versions of its translations: both done by Suzanne Schwartz Gilbert, but one edited by Prof. CM Naim and the other supervised by Prof. Munibur Rahman. All my references in this chapter are from the latter.

The story is spread over a village in Uttar Pradesh, its cities Kanpur and Allahabad, and Karachi in the newly created state of Pakistan. From any reckoning, it is a woman-centric story, with three heroines, whose life and struggles in different milieus and differing degrees of prosperity and adversity form the warp and woof of the novel's fine tapestry.

Manzur-un-Nisa, a girl born and brought up in a family of marginal farmers in a village in Uttar Pradesh, is the daughter of a man who is the second among three brothers, who also happen to be caretakers of the village's sufi shrine on the bank of Gomti. Manzur-un-Nisa is betrothed to Jamshed, the son of her father's younger brother.

There is another girl Suraiya Sultan, also known as Basanti Begum, in a nearby village, and of similar circumstances. She is an orphan, who learns to struggle for her place under the sun at an early age.

There is yet another girl, known simply as Chhoti Bitiya (her real name is Salma Mirza), the daughter of a collector. The collector of British Raj had the sweeping authority and glamour of a raja. In many ways he had precedence over smaller rajas as his authority was not merely ceremonial. Chhoti Bitiya has the charmed life of a princess.

Within a few years comes World War II, followed by India's independence and Partition, all in quick succession. The Muslim collector, too, retires and his home in Mussorie is

burnt down by rioters. The collector, his wife and daughter go away to Pakistan to live a life of new challenges and struggles as well as opportunities. So do Basanti and Jamshed. Manzur-un-Nisa stays back with her parents in India. Chhoti Bitiya's elder brother, Salman, instead of trying to join the Civil Service to honour his parents' wishes, becomes a communist.

The Story

Both *Agle Janam* and *The Housing Society* have a religious song in the opening scene. Both mention sufi shrines. Mazhar Ali's wife plans to put a chadar on the grave of Shah Madar for her younger brother-in-law Akhtar's success. Within five pages a number of female characters crop up: Mem Saheb, her daughter(Chhoti Bitiya), Basanti Begum (Suraiya), Buta Begum, Nawab Shams Ara Begum (ta'aluqedar of Parbatipur). Later Manzur-un-Nisa (Mazhar Ali's daughter). Hyder indicates that the story would be women-centric.

The major characters are introduced right in the beginning, just before the World War II. It was still British India and the time of ICS (Indian Civil Service) officers, who were the epitome of British power and authority in the eyes of the natives.

Till that time the district collector, with an army of subordinate officers, clerks, peons, servants, personal barber, washerman, cook, butler, in-charge of lamps and gas lights, and storekeeper, among other personal staff, used to visit remote villages once in a while and camp in a field or grove in tents equipped with every amenity and comfort they were used to in the district headquarters. The place used to look like a camp town with all the material comforts provided for the collector and his family. The large staff was also better taken care of than villagers.

The novel opens on a foggy January morning. A small farmer carrying a basket of fresh and dried fruits with a hired hand in tow comes to the collector's camp in a mango grove in Muhammadganj village of Sitapur district. The fruits in the farmer's basket and the chickens in a larger basket in the hands of his hired worker are meant as a gift to the

collector. The collector's wife summarily refuses to accept the gift. The farmer, Syed Mazhar Ali, and the hired hand, Jhinga Pasi, have to return home with the gift.

The farmer had to incur a debt of Rs. 10 to purchase the gift. Although the gift is not accepted, the collector gives a sympathetic hearing to Mazhar Ali, whose younger brother, Syed Akhtar Ali, is a briefless lawyer in Kanpur. He is not able to provide for his two children, his wife and himself. Mazhar Ali has come to know that there is a vacancy in Lucknow secretariat for a position for which Akhtar Ali is eligible. Mazhar Ali wants the collector to help put Akhtar Ali in that position, but the collector says he has no authority to do that. The collector tells Syed Mazhar Ali to send an application to Lucknow and he would put in a word with Johnson Sahab, his English colleague in the Indian Civil Service, when he visits the camp.

As the day progresses at the camp, a widow, Buta Begum, petitions the collector's court seeking protection for her daughter and herself. The daughter, Suraiya Sultan, alias Basanti Begum, was kidnapped and imprisoned in the Durgakund castle of Nawab Bhure, the landlord of Sahroli and Durgakund. Nawab Bhure, a 65-year old with a number of wives, "lawful and unlawful", had asked for Suraiya's hand in marriage. The thirteen and a half year old Suraiya's mother had rejected the proposal, which led to her abduction. Nawab Shams Ara Begum of the nearby Parbatipur estate got her released from the castle with the help of the sub-divisional magistrate.

Within days, masked goondas jumped into her house and killed Suraiya-Basanti Begum's only brother with hatchets. To compound the difficulties Nawab Shams Ara Begum's son, Miyan Nauroz, stated in the sub-divisional magistrate's court that Basanti Begum was his lawfully wedded wife. Buta Begum pleads with the collector to reject Nauroz's false claim and close the case.

Around that time, Nawab Shams Ara's caparisoned and elaborately adorned elephant comes to the camp to take the collector's small daughter, Salma, nicknamed Chhoti Bitiya, to visit the Parbatipur estate. The attendant peon goes inside the collector's

personal quarters to inform the collector's wife, "Mem Saheb," about the elephant. Almost reflexively she orders that the elephant be sent back. Chhoti Bitiya insists on going to Parbatipur "to feed guava to the jumbo" (124). To enforce her decision she starts rolling on the ground.

Exasperated, the collector's wife allows her to go. The small, brown-haired girl, clad in fine clothes and shoes sits in the lap of a peon. The peon also carries her colourful umbrella. Suraiya, older than Chhoti Bitiya by almost a decade, is sitting on the ground by the side of her mother's palanquin in the mango grove where the collector is camping. The elephant taking Chhoti Bitiya to Parbatipur comes into her view. She is impressed by the brown-haired little girl on the elephant, whose mother's grandfather was an English man.

Suraiya begins to draw lines with her finger on the wet ground. She draws an elephant with a little princess sitting in the howdah. After completing the sketch she tells herself confidently, "I am the princess" (125). For a 14-year old orphan girl who has suffered abduction and confinement in a fort and has seen her brother hacked to death besides being forced into false litigation, this is chutzpah. Beneath this confidence lies her insecurity arising out of her traumatic experiences.

As the day progresses in the collector's court and Buta Begum's case comes up for hearing, the elephant is well on its way to Parbatipur. From the courtyard of her mud house, Manzur-un-Nisa, a little older than Chhoti Bitiya and younger than Suraiya, looks up at the elephant with the brown-haired "princess" passing by her home. She is engrossed in the grand spectacle. From her miserable world it looks like the epitome of happiness and fulfillment.

On Salma's way back from Parbatipur, towards the end of the day, Jamshed sees the elephant passing by, with Salma resplendent in her fine clothes and shoes sitting in the howdah. In the meanwhile, her umbrella drops from the elephant. Jamshed picks up the umbrella and calls after the mahaut, but the elephant moves away at a fast pace.

Jamshed takes the umbrella to the collector's camp, but is abused and beaten up by the servants as an intruder and a thief. Feeling humiliated, Jamshed protests that he is not a thief and he had only come to return the umbrella. Hearing the commotion, the collector's wife comes out. The servants get silent. Jamshed tells her that he is not a thief, but the nephew of Syed Munawwar Ali, the sufi shrine's caretaker. The collector's wife knows the Syed family, talks about them with respect and asks about what Jamshed is doing. He says he studies in BA First Year at Kanpur. She orders that dinner be served for Jamshed, but he refuses politely and comes back to his home. The collector's wife is impressed by his confident manners and his self respect.

Next morning, Jamshed goes back to Kanpur to continue his studies. He beings to earn to sustain his family – his father, his TB-stricken mother, his brother and sister. Over time he joins government service in the army's supply department. When the World War II begins, he applies for a commissioned army officer's job, but he is rejected because of weak eyesight. However, he continues to flourish in his present job. Meanwhile, he is married to Manzur-un-Nisa and has a daughter with her.

With Independence and Partition Jamshed goes to Pakistan. Amid the uncertainties and first spurt of Pakistan's economic growth, he ends up a rich businessman, whose wealth keeps on growing at a fast clip. The collector, his wife and daughter, too, end up in Pakistan. They have lost substantial property in India and find themselves living in Pakistan in severely reduced circumstances.

Chhoti Bitiya, after finishing college in Pakistan, has to work as a low-paid school teacher. She feels humiliated by the situation in which the family finds itself in Pakistan. The former collector is soon afflicted with stroke that paralyses him. His son, Salman, has been sent by the Communist Party of India to work for the party in the new country. He lives alone, away from his family.

Back in India a few years ago, the collector had given Suraiya (Basanti Begum) and her mother Buta Begum refuge in his home to protect them from Nawab Bhure and Mian Nauroz. In his own home in Allahabad, Salman had not noticed Suraiya, but over the years she grew up to be an artist with a solid education. She had begun to earn her living by teaching art and also selling some of her paintings. She moved to a rented house and took her mother along to live in that.

Before moving to Pakistan to start a new life Jamshed divorced his wife Manzur-un-Nisa. Later he came to take his daughter, Farhat un-Nisa, his mother, brother and sister to Pakistan. His father, an ascetic, hid himself somewhere to avoid being taken to Pakistan.

In their last days in Allahabad, Salman and Suraiya meet each other and fall in love. Salman makes her promise that she would work with him to usher in a more just, equitable communist order. Soon, Suraiya, too, moves to Pakistan with her mother. Salman goes to Pakistan to work for his party. He never happens to see Suraiya again as his life becomes a routine of imprisonment and police harassment.

Meanwhile, Suraiya's art and her fame grow spectacularly in Pakistan. At that point, she gets several rich American buyers of her paintings through Jamshed and his sister. They are either Jamshed's business partners or American tourists who visit Suraiya's studio with Jamshed's sister. Suraiya and Jamshed become friends over a period of time as she has no trace of Salman. Soon a time comes when Jamshed makes a costly mansion for his family and himself at the most prestigious address–Pakistan Cooperative Housing Society. Suraiya is commissioned to make a grand mural in the reception area of the mansion in the eponymous housing society.

Chhoti Bitiya (Salma) knows her brother is languishing in jail. She wants to take good books, a new shaving set, packets of cigarettes and chocolate to her brother in her jail visits. She is sure her brother would appreciate the gift. She also wants to keep her mother in greater comfort. The salary she gets as a school teacher is grossly insufficient for all this. Nor can she afford a pair of good saris for her outings.

She gets a job which pays several times more money than the school teacher's job. She becomes the social secretary of the millionaire Jamshed. She does not feel happy in this job either because she has to entertain his guests, many of whom are raunchy, uncouth men with roving eyes. Many, naturally, would surmise that she is the mistress of the boss, she shudders to think. This is a great come down for a respectable collector's daughter fallen on hard days because of the Partition. Despite the unpleasantness and implied humiliation of the situation, she carries on with the job. She cannot think of leaving the job because she has to take care of her old mother and her communist brother who has always some trouble with the law.

The climax comes late at the housewarming party of Jamshed where Salma and Suraiya recognise each other. Salma thinks, "But you, Suraiya Baji, accepted defeat so easily-" (188) forgetting her vows of love and loyalty to her brother, Salman. She, too, has changed, under the pressures of surviving in a strange land. Where have all those loyalties, all those notions of personal dignity gone? In a fit of great shame and sense of cheapening dishonour, Salma ignores Suraiya when she comes close to her and accosts her, calling her Chhoti Bitiya. By now Suraiya and Jamshed seem to be intimately linked.

Following a great bout of drunken revelry, Salma and Suraiya cling to each other like lost sisters reuniting. They realise the inbuilt degradation and indignity of the situation of two young women from India trying to find their feet in a ruthless environment. When a drunk Jamshed tries to be too paly with Salma, Suraiya slaps him like a protective elder sister. There Suraiya tells an inebriated Jamshed that he is not the Pakistani tycoon that he has lately become, but the son of a briefless lawyer of Kanpur from a marginal farmer's family, and she is not the great artist Suraiya, but Basanti Begum, daughter of another marginal farmer from a village near that of Jamshed's father's in Sultanpur district, India. To top it all, Chhoti Bitiya is the same girl, the collector's daughter, brought up like a princess, whose umbrella Jamshed had taken to the collector's camp, she tells him. The mere fact that the Partition had enriched Jamshed (who had nothing to lose in India) and impoverished Salma (who lost all her wealth in India) should not embolden Jamshed to

take liberties with her, Suraiya tells Jamshed. He takes the point and apologises for his conduct.

At dawn, Jamshed drags himself to his office in the building, followed by his secretary. Soon, he calls in Salma and tells her in a sober voice that he is leaving for Europe in the afternoon on his usual business trip. He tells her that foreign buyers are coming at 10 am and she has to go and receive them at the airport, get them checked in at a big hotel and hold a proper luncheon for them. After that she is dropped at her home in his car. Then Suraiya is called in. Jamshed tells her about the Europe tour programme, which includes a visit to an exhibition of her art in a Paris gallery. He gives her the air tickets and tells her he will be meeting her in Geneva. This suggests a certain intimacy between Jamshed and Suraiya.

At the height of the drunken revelry (and a nasty brawl) Jamshed gets a letter (brought in by his secretary) from India which says that his father's eldest brother had passed away. His former wife, Manzur-un-Nisa had also died. Before her death she had forgiven Jamshed, for whom the night seems to have brought both pleasure and pain, recognition and ignominy. He sings and wails, laughs and weeps in quick succession. This could be a metaphor for life in the new state. Salma is shocked to discover that "Suraiya Baji" is no longer faithful in her love for her brother Salman. In the party, two reporters get the news that Salman had died in jail. It is plausible that the state has got him killed. Like all reporters, they want to be the first to get the scoop in their respective newspapers. As drunk as others, they are also deeply saddened by the event. According to Naim the two reporters shedding tears over Salman's death "are in fact lamenting the passing of their own innocent and idealistic days of not too long ago" (Introduction, xiv). No one at the party except them knows about the death of Salman. Alok Bhalla in *Partition Dialogues* writes about the survival instinct of migrants. In *Housing Society*, he says the two journalists epitomise this tendency:

They weep, get drunk, and recite random lines from poems by Faiz Ahmed Faiz and Ali Javad Zaidi about the martyrdom of idealists, but subsequently fight over who should get

the credit for breaking the news of Salman's murder. Like many other migrants in fiction and real life, they discover that it is safer and more pragmatic to furnish their moral and religious "home" with poetry and, at the same time, get money to construct a house of brick and mortar for their physical survival. (7)

Later in the day, Salma gets a letter from Jamshed which he could have jotted down before boarding his flight to Europe. He has apologised for last night's misdemeanor. He says the present job is not good for her dignity, and he would get her a better and dignified job. Almost like an elder brother, he says he would get her a good flat in a good locality like Pakistan Cooperative Housing Society and find her a good match. He is happy that she had done her job of getting the foreign visitors from the airport and checking them into a big hotel. He also praises her for arranging a luncheon for the guests and keeping them entertained. They were highly impressed by the efficiency, sophistication and courtesy of the hostess.

Meanwhile, Salma buys books, shaving set, packets of cigarettes, plenty of chocolates to be sent to her brother. After showing it all to her mother, she carries the parcel to her office. While looking up for the man's phone number who would deliver it to Salman, she is handed a letter from Jamshed. He apologises to her and offers to help her in settling down to a comfortable life. His brotherly advice startles her. Overwhelmed, the letter drops from her hand. Nearby, lies the newspaper announcing the death of Salman. The story ends here. The title, Naim informs, "refers to what was once considered the apex of wealth and power in Karachi: a residence of your own in the prestigious Pakistan Employees' Cooperative Housing Society (P.E.C.H.S.) – commonly known simply as the 'Society'" . (Introduction, xii)

Nation

Nation and nation state have got a significant play in this novella. About one-third of the story happens in India for several major characters, the rest happens in Pakistan. For many of them it is always here because they have chosen to stay back in India as Muslims. The rest are Hindus.

The pattern of human relationships in India is different from that in the newly established nation state of Pakistan. The hero, Jamshed, needed to respect and even be fearsome of the Hindu elders in his village whom he called *dada* (grand uncle) and *chacha* (uncle). Gobindwa, a lowly *ekka wallah*, who was below in his station of life, as compared to his family, disapproves of his furtive smoking and Jamshed has to beg him not to let out the secret before his family. He accepts the request after clearly making the point that it is not good for him to smoke. He says, "I would not tell anyone, but don't go and pick up any city habits." As the *ekka* rolls on,

> Jamshed took a long puff and exhaled through his nostrils. Soon, Gobardhan *chacha* came into sight. He carried a plough on his shoulders and was driving a pair of bullocks towards his field. Jamshed, agitated, hid his cigarette in his hand.
>
> If Gober *Chacha* had seen the cigarette, he would have pulled Jamshed down from the *ekka*, hit him with a shoe fifty times, and would not have counted even one blow. (139)

Such scenes of concern for each other's wellbeing across faith communities are not there in Pakistan, where Hindus are not visible in the immediate environment surrounding the characters who have come in from India. The new state is home to a large number of desperate, resourceless, clueless refugees. However, as a new state being built from ground up (Pakistan does not have the prestige of being British India's successor state either), there are a lot of opportunities for the daring and enterprising among the people who have come in from India.

The places from where the Indians had gone to Pakistan had memories of generations of people, their places of worship, common values and relationships among different faith communities. The place where they end up has no such memories, no history that involves their ancestors. No place to call their own. Trying to find a roof over their heads and earning their next meal is all that they can look up to. There is hardly anything like a

community as ruthless competitors don't a community make. There is no nation without a common history, common memory. For these people Pakistan is yet to become a nation.

It is a great struggle for survival. Not everyone survived the train journey to Pakistan as a lot of them were cut to pieces, the young woman abducted. Once the refugees reach there they are disoriented and unable to find their feet on the new soil. However, not all of them are equally unlucky. The better off manage to travel to the new land by air though they are barely able to carry even the smallest proportion of their wealth with them. Some, like Salma, her mother and father (the former collector) travel by road in an army convoy. It is another matter that they leave palatial bungalows in Allahabad and Mussoorie and have to settle in a hovel in Karachi, trying to fend for themselves in a new land, their lavish life in India a fading memory.

Their beloved daughter, Salma, brought up like a princess, is reduced to a commoner, travelling by overcrowded buses full of leery men. She feels humiliated as former acquaintances from India zip by in flashy cars ignoring her as she waits for her bus.

Salma, in a lot of ways, is like Sita of *Sita Haran*. Sita has to leave her beloved Sindhu Desh and come to India, the Hindu-majority country where there is little that she can identify with. She leaves behind a lot of family riches, her people's place, their history, their memories. Salma, too, leaves behind all the family's riches their history, their forefathers' graves, mosques, dargahs and imambarah and come to a land where there is little she can identify with. Even the people who, by a great stretch of imagination, can be called her "community", the crowd of refugees from India, are not a community at all.

Salma has left behind a full-blooded, richly textured, diverse and yet united community of Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs, Christians and Parsees. Here, what passes for a "community" is a desperate jumble of unrelated folk who have yet to remember the facts of the new nation and forget the older national narrative. Sita, too, is not faring any better in India. The newly poor status thrust upon them hurts and humiliates them. Sita and Salma are sisters in sorrow, unbeknown to each other.

What the Indians of Pakistan have left behind is a sense of nationhood. Such sense is nicely captured by Mushirul Hasan and M. Asaduddin in their Introduction to *Image and Representation: Stories of Muslim Lives in India:*

> [T]he essence of Indian culture and of Indian Islam is its mixed traditions and…it is misleading to assume the existence of a homogenous tradition or social category. Quite often, however, this reality is replaced, even in Muslim circles, by the insistence on the uniformity and homogeneity of Indian Islam. Similarly, it is after the case that Indian culture is discussed in exclusivist and excluding terms, a description that Salman Rushdie pointed out, leaves out the minority communities. It is needless to emphasise that such descriptions only serve to obscure the multicultural realities of our society.…[T]here has not been, despite the rhetoric of theologians and publicists, a single, inalienable Muslim identity. (Introduction 14-15)

The reality of Partition has created a new nation that is not prepared for itself. People from a landlocked United Provinces (UP) are transplanted in Karachi, Sindh, a land hemmed in by sea on one side and a desert on the other. They are not part of the local Sindhi society, their history, their folk-lore, or their traditions. They are not welcome either. What they encounter is nationalism at terrible play. As succeeding years proved, Sindhi nationalism and Pakistani nationalism were not compatible, like Bengali nationalism and Pakistani nationalism were not compatible. Hyder gives a graphic account of the newly formed country where a mix of people are striving to carve a niche for themselves. Salman on his way to an interview witnesses:

> … It was very noisy in the bazaar. A babel of languages with their different accents. Colourful dresses. The hawkers' cries. Everyone was struggling to make a go it in this new land…. People from eastern India whose faces bear an unerasable sadness. Dandies from Rampur and Bareilly wearing round velvet caps and velvet waistcoats. Utensil makers from Moradabad. Locksmiths from Aligarh… carpet weavers from Mirzapur. (158)

Men don't stop at anything to get rich quick. Jamshed, for instance, divorces his illiterate, meek wife and expands his business through illegal means. Shagufta Shaheen writes:

> The characters of this story are far from being apologetic of their depravity. They seem to openly flaunt this trait, possibly attributing their success in life to the complete break from traditional modes of conduct that imposed restrictions hampering material success. (96)

After establishing himself in his new nation, Pakistan, Jamshed returns for a short while to his village after 11 years to take his daughter to this new country. He finds the same old community of different religions and castes with the same warmth and concern for each other's wellbeing:

> There was no limit to his astonishment when he arrived at the station and saw that Gobindwa with his *ekka* was waiting for him as if Jamshed had just come home from the college for the Dussehra hodlidays.
> "Bhaiya, you have come!" Gobindwa said, approaching him. "Gobind-*Chacha*-?" he hesitantly added. "*Chacha*, what brings you here?"
> "Younger Shahji told me that you would be coming by train today."
> Jamshed had difficulty getting up into the *ekka* and embarrassed, looked at the creases in his trousers. Almost the entire village had gathered at Syed Mazhar Ali's house. Shambhu Dada, Shaikh Ramzan, Maulvi Mohammad Hasan, Tauqir Miyan, Pandit Laxmi Narayan, Gobardhan Chacha, Rahmat Bhaiya, Gosain Kaka and many others. (161)

Everybody is happy to see him back home, albeit for a short while. Everybody is concerned about his wellbeing. Everyone is curious about the new country called Pakistan. Pious men like Maulvi Mohammad Hasan imagine Pakistan to be a land of spiritually-oriented Muslims, observing all religious rituals, abstaining from sins like drinking. The fact is that Jamshed goes to club every evening in Karachi to drink and the rest of Pakistan's Muslim population is no more religious than Indian Muslims. Jamshed

does not tell all this to the simple folk, who would find it difficult to grasp that Pakistan is not about Islam. Then, what it is all about? Jamshed spares them the trouble to ask such questions. Such questions about what Pakistan stands for as a nation do recur once in a while. The questions come during conversations as well as in situational contexts that seem to be resonant with such wonderings.

The Indian Muslims who have gone there have yet to imagine a national community in the sense Benedict Anderson calls nation an imagined community. Nor have they got decades and centuries of life together behind them as they had in India. At best, it is a nation in the making, unlike India, which is a "finished product," so to say.

Gender

There are three major female characters, all of them pre-teen girls at the beginning of the novel, and all three are young adults at the time of the Partition. They come from entirely different socio-economic backgrounds and follow three different trajectories in life. Two of them – Salma and Suraiya – have the benefit of college education and cope with life's vicissitudes in a new land rather well. Manzur-un-Nisa, born and brought up in a village in UP in a traditional way, is not equipped with college education as the other two are.

Manzur-un-Nisa's mother brings her up strictly to become an obedient future wife. The child is admonished and beaten up even for her innocent questions and play. Her mother inculcates in her the sense of responsibility and obedience of a future wife right from her childhood. She is pushed into a loveless marriage to her cousin, Jamshed, an ambitious young man who tries desperately (and successfully) to get out of generations of genteel poverty. The attitude of Manzur-un-Nisa's parents about gender is that a woman is born to serve her husband and work tirelessly for him and his family:

> When his daughter's red palanquin was carried from under the *neem* tree, bidding farewell he said to Jamshed in a tearful voice, "Bhaiya, this tongueless, poor girl will always be your slave. Please don't make her unhappy" (142-143).

It is not that Manzur-un-Nisa is deaf and dumb – "tongueless" – as her father says. Girls were brought up like that, never encouraged to have their say, never expected to protest. That was the gender role ascribed to them in traditional Muslim society in north India. The other two young women, in their own way and circumstances, escape this indoctrination.

Being the collector's daughter, Chhoti Bitiya gets a good upbringing and modern education. Though not similarly advantaged, Suraiya too ends up with a fairly good college education, and training in painting. The good-hearted collector had provided her mother and Suraiya with shelter and food at his mansion in Allahabad to protect them from Bhure Nawab and Miyan Nauroz. In turn, her mother was assigned to sing religious hymns. Besides the collector's protection, Suraiya is a strong-willed person right from childhood. Nobody could break her will. At the beginning of the novella, when the child Suraiya sees the even younger "princess" Chhoti Bitiya, sitting in a howdah, passing by her she draws on the wet ground an elephant and a child sitting on it. After finishing it, she declares, "I am the princess" (125).

Salman's question to Suraiya whether would she accompany him across the border on a party mission reminds us of Rehan asking Jehan Ara to run away from home and marry him. Rehan took pride in Deepali for accompanying him on dangerous missions. Suraiya is stronger than the former and more mature than the latter. While Jehan Ara is not ready to defy patriarchy and Deepali is too naïve to join Rehan in Sunderbans on a false pretense, Suraiya patiently waits for Salman to return. Later, she adapts to her situation in order to survive.

Like in other novels, Hyder makes good use of a letter to bring forth the events in a character's life. Suraiya writes a long letter to Salman at the end of her six years stay in Sylhet, East Pakistan.On her 31st birthday, she has decided to write an equal number of pages to him. She intends to add another thirty-eight pages, which is Salman's age:

> According to this calculation, our collective age is sixty-nine, so that we are old people of sixty-nine years of age. Just now I have closed my eyes and imagine spending sixty-nine years together. Passions, longings, dreams of youth.The emotional balance of maturity.The sympathy, companionship, quietness.
> 'Calm of mind all passion spent!' (167)

On the other hand, Manzur-un-Nisa is condemned to a short, unhappy life of drudgery, the older gender role model of an uncomplaining, self-sacrificing woman, born to serve her husband and in-laws:

> Manzur-un-Nisa took care of all the housework like a machine. She cooked and cleaned and she looked after her mother-in-law and took all her chiding remarks. She was good to her brother-in-law and in great awe of (sister-in-law) Alia. Jamshed never spoke to her pleasantly, but even this did not bother her. It was her duty to serve her husband, and she worshipped him. (143)

For all her pains, she is treated like a doormat by her husband and in-laws:

> But after she returned to Mohammad Ganj to bear her first child, Jamshed never called her back to city.… Three years passed since the war started. Jamshed became a havildar clerk in the department of military stores. After a year, he was promoted, so he rented out his city house and moved his household to large, spacious quarters in the cantonment area. He was making four hundred rupees a month and there was a continuous flow of goods from the canteen. He could not apply for an emergency commission because of his weak eyes, which made him very sad. During this period, after smoking a whole tin of cigarettes in a single night, he sent Manzur-un-Nisa a letter of divorce. (143)

After the divorce, Manzur-un-Nisa gives birth to a daughter, Farhat-un-Nisa, and "only barely escaped death in childbirth" (144). Even at her parents' home she works all day, taking care of her daughter while doing all the household chores. She pines for a husband who unceremoniously divorces her for no fault of hers.

> Often while she was rolling *rotis*, braiding Farhat-un-Nisa's hair, or winnowing rice, she would hum couplets which she had heard from Maulvi Mohammad Hasan's wife: *Two flowers bloomed together, but their destinies are different / One has been placed upon a grave and one is woven into a bridegroom's floral veil.*(146)

Manzur-un-Nisa, Salma and Suraiya are of the same sex, but the play of gender has been different in each case. Sex being biological, a certain "natural" bodily sameness is shared by them, but gender (a cultural construct) is at the most adverse play in Manzur-un-Nisa's case. For her culture, modern education for women is not desirable, even though it is a great equaliser. (It equalises, ultimately, Salma, who had a privileged background and Suraiya, who did not.)

Modern education does not equalise women to women only, but women to men also. Maybe, in a perverse way, men opposed to modern education for women took the position because they did not like women become equal to men. Fortunately, Suraiya finds a job as a teacher in Dacca. Gargi Chakravartty in *Coming out of Partition* writes:

> With the migration of Brahmo and Hindu women to West Bengal from East Pakistan after partition, a vacuum was created in the sphere of education and culture…. A crisis in education prevailed throughout East Pakistan because of the retrenchment of many women teachers and, on 15 November 1948, women spearheaded a protest in the form of a strike by students and teachers, against the Government's policy of curtailment of educational funding; thus, the demand for education became a part of the women's movement in East Pakistan. (120-121)

There are subtle differences in the way Salma and Suraiya respond to their situation in Pakistan. Salma, who initially wants the job of a businessman's personal secretary because it pays better than the teacher's job she is holding, baulks at it when she realises that female private secretaries are expected by their bosses to socialise with their business clients without inhibition. The boss's clients think that as his secretary she is also his mistress. Brought up in an environment where "ladylike" behaviour is inculcated in young women, the gender role of a private secretary looks demeaning to Salma. On the other hand, Suraiya, brought up in adversity, finds life in Pakistan an easier sail. Gender roles of their earlier society do not seem to bother her too much.

One's unconscious complicity with patriarchy is evident from Memsaheb's angry outburst at her ironing woman, Bulaqan. She calls her a wretch: " Bulaqan's parents perished because of her, and her husband took another wife. The house was ruined. But, what can that wretched woman do? One receives the fruits of one's actions." (132)

Early in the novella, there is foreshadowing of Manzur-un-Nisa's fate: "The legs of Manzur-un- Nisa's tight red twill pyjamas were soiled with mud because all day she had been building clay castles in front of the verandah" (127). Despite working very hard to please her husband and in-laws, she is unable to keep her 'clay house' from crumbling into dust.

The symbolic association of women with footwear continues. Manzur-un- Nisa adores her cousin so much that she stops crying (after being chided by her mother for playing instead of getting water for her father's ablution) when he asks her to put his sandals in the room: "Manzur-un-Nisa …lovingly held the big dusty sandals in her hands as if they were her dear dolls, and went inside" (131). When Jamshed gets up on an early winter morning to go to Kanpur, his little cousin gets up with her mother to prepare food for his journey. Again, she fetches his chappals from the shelf and happily gets his things ready (137).

After slapping the bully Munnan Khan Jamshed hides near a graveyard. He overhears a woman saying to another: "That is the grave of a newly-wed bride – that's why the jasmine gives off such a strong fragrance at night" (130). Jamshed shudders partly because of cold and partly due to fear. The scene recurs when his wife dies. She pardons him, so does her father, Jamshed's uncle. Jamshed has been drunk in his lavish party. What follows is a dream-like sequence:

> A graveyard-like silence began to rustle in the room. All the dargah's shutters blew open in the wind and began to bang. Oh, Almighty God, you bestow your lover with such great bounty, the bounty of patience. Elder Uncle shook his tresses, gathered his orange robe and peeped out from his empty cell…. [A]nd again entered his grave. (194)

Jamshed hears the same words about the newly- wed's grave. He breaks down (195).

Identity

National and religious identity do not seem to be strongly marked in Hyder's novels, including the present one. In her different novels the partition of India and creation of Pakistan have been portrayed. In *Fireflies in the Mist* the Partition of Pakistan and creation of Bangladesh completes a three-way partition of India and the establishment of three nation states: India, Pakistan, Bangladesh. To Hyder, nation is a less stable category than civilisation.

National consciousness and national identity are not pronounced in *Housing Society*. National belonging seems more to be an accident than anything more substantive. People are forced to leave their homes and migrate across new national frontiers to lands and among people with whom they do not identity. In India their homes are burnt down or expropriated by irate mobs and many of them are either killed or maimed on the way to their new homeland. Often their women are kidnapped and separated from them forever. This is not the time to cultivate a national identity. There are more immediate concerns of survival to address.

In *Housing Society* religious identities, too, are not pronounced either, as most people have only a nodding acquaintance with religion without much knowledge of its texts, doctrines or rituals. Hyder reiterates that there was greater harmony and hardly any communal problem in villages. In *My Temples Too*, she writes how city people came in jeeps carrying their flags and indoctrinating the 'ignorant' villagers. There is little reason for Hindus, who are "chachas" and "kakas" of these Muslim villagers in Mohammad Gunj in India to be seen as the other, while in Pakistan the religious other, the Hindus, are not seen anywhere.

In Larkana (Sind), Salman's family is staying in a small house that belonged to a Hindu shopkeeper. It has statues of Hanuman, Lakshmi and Ganeshji fixed above the door (155). It reminds us of Sita (*Sita Betrayed*) whose family seeks shelter in a poor Muslim's house in Karol Bagh. Her mother returns to Bilqis the frame which says "There is no God, but God, and Muhammad is His Prophet (47). She had kept it carefully all these years so that no one could accidentally be disrespectful towards it. This reflects that the Partition somehow fails to completely destroy the syncretic ethos of the subcontinent.

There is a rich description of village life – the entire community of dancers, pandits etc. The dowry given to a woman on her marriage, how she is expected to *salaam* everyone with her eyes closed and the rituals associated with child birth are described in detail. Despite the family's poverty the rituals are performed necessarily. Azan is said in the baby's ear and aqiqa is performed when she is given a name. The village dancer considers it her right to demand money from the child's grandfather. Also Manzur-un-Nisa had barely escaped death in childbirth probably because of her tender age and poor health care.

The night of drunken raucousness ends on a strangely quiet and sober note with what Corinna Byer calls "rediscovery of the primary self" by Suraiya, Salma and Jamshed. Byer writes:

> The notion that every human being possesses an essential character or identity, a kind of primary self which has been with him from his childhood and which somehow manages to resist the forces of change which throughout life mold a person into something new and even unrecognisable, is one which has been explored by many writers…. [S]uch realization and acceptance are essential for a person to move forward in his life and discover his true capabilities. (176)

With the discovery that Suraiya and Jamshed had been trying to put on a different identity of false sophistication in Pakistan and constantly running away from their origins in Mohammad Ganj in UP, India, the tension is released. Basanti Begum had changed her name to Suraiya while in college at Allahabad because it was a reminder of her traumatized childhood. Her journalist friends gave her publicity by creating a false haloed background. Even Salma has Mohammad Ganj connections. Brought suddenly face to face with who they were actually they quieten and a new clarity of perspective emerges.

Suraiya comes across Salma in Karachi for the first time at Jamshed's house warming party. She was commissioned to do a mural for the mansion and she had painted a brilliant mural in the reception area of the house. The mural's elephant represents the haunting memory of the elephant she had seen as a child on which Salma (Chhoti Bitiya), the collector's daughter, was travelling.

Seeing Salma at the party has a strange effect on Suraiya. As the world she constructed by denying her past begins to break down, Suraiya has a vision of her old existence which imposes itself in a frightening manner upon the reality of Jamshed's mansion:

> Suraiya closed her eyes in fright. This was not the ultra-modern Jamshed House designed by an Italian architect and shining with Belgian cut glass candelabras. No, this was the half-lit Castle of Durgakund village where she, Basanti Begum herself, was imprisoned. Then Durgakund Castle changed into Jamshed House where Chhoti Bitiya was confined. (189)

The moment brings Jamshed and Salma also face-to-face with their primary selves that at some stage intersected with Suraiya's. This is a great moment of enlightenment about their basic identity about who they were really. Munibur Rahman (quoted by Shagufta Shaheen) writes:

> The character of Jamshed is typical of the *nouveau riche* in any society. But as far as the Muslims of the sub-continent are concerned, the rise of such persons as a class was the direct result of the creation of Pakistan. The mass exodus of Hindus and Sikhs who controlled the business and commerce of the region in pre-Partition days, left Pakistan with an economic vacuum which was profitably utilized by individual Muslims, often with limited abilities and obscure backgrounds, to gain position of wealth and honour. This is the new power group which, as the writer indicates, has replaced the feudal system in Pakistan's social hierarchy. The change in the class pattern, however, is not accompanied by any comparable improvement in the life of the people, but signifies merely the substitution of one dominant group by another, equally unscrupulous and degenerate. (149)

Court cases take inordinately long to be settled. Everything that Buta Begum had is devoured by the case just like in Dickens' *Bleak House*. Hyder depicts the old world order where the rich provided support not just to their own families, but relatives and a whole lot of servants: "Meals were set on the *takht* twice a day for Boota Begum, Basanti, and Salman's old nurse, Niyazi Bua" (147).

Translation, Craft

As mentioned earlier, the English rendition of her Urdu works was done by Qurratulain Hyder herself. Novellas like *Sita Betrayed* and *Housing Society* are an exception. *Housing Society* is included in two collections, *The Sound of Falling Leaves* which mentions that the translation was revised by Prof. Munibur Rahman and *A Season of Betrayals*, edited by Prof. CM Naim. Both versions are Schwartz's translation.

Schwartz's translation is literal, rendered word by word from the Urdu into English. While on the way to the railway station in Gobindwa's *ekkah* to catch the train for Kanpur, Jamshed lights a cigarette and begins to smoke furtively. Gobindwa is upset to see him smoking and asks him not to catch "city habits". Meanwhile, another village elder, Gobardhan Chacha is going to till his fields with his two bullocks in front and the plough on his shoulder.

Jamshed conceals the cigarette so that Gobar Chacha does not see it. For, if he sees it, "*toh woh ekke perse utaar kar pachas joote lagayenge, aur ginenge ek nahin*" (255) It has been translated as "he would have pulled Jamshed down from the *ekka*, hit him with a shoe fifty times, and would not have counted even one blow" (139).

What the author wrote in Urdu may not mean something as drastic as pulling the poor lad down and beating him with a shoe fifty times without counting a single blow. In the first place a ploughman in north India in those early years rarely had a pair of shoes to put on to work. In common parlance the expression would only mean that "Gobar Chacha would have been annoyed and would have reprimanded him severely."

The very title of this collection of translated stories is problematic. The English title is, "The Sound of Falling Leaves." The Urdu original is "*Patjhar ki Awaz*." "*Patjhar*" is a season, autumn. The literal translation would be "autumnal sounds." The Urdu translation of "The Sound of Falling Leaves", literally would be "*patte jhadne ki awaz.*" However, this small departure from the literal makes it more appropriate as "the sound of falling leaves" is more evocative than "autumnal sounds." Suraiya is written as Surayya and Manzur-un-Nisa as Manzurun Nisa by Naim. There is difference of spelling within the Munibur Rahman edited text. Suraiya is wriiten as Suraiiyya at one place (125). Buta Begum on page 125, changes to Boota Begum later.

The Pakistani writer Aamer Hussein, an admirer of Hyder, sums it up neatly:

> [T]he collection consists of some of her best and most representative work, including the short novel, *Housing Society*, which is the greatest ever evocation in fiction or non-fiction, of upward mobility, shifting or assumed identity, financial scams and political repression in post-independence Pakistan. (xiii-xiv)

Translation -- Urdu version followed by Gilbert's translation (revised by Prof Munibur Rahman) and C. M. Naim's editing of Gilbert's translation)

1. **Shabbarua Mashalchi**

i. Tajalli toor ki Moosa Kalima ban ke niklenge Muhammad[1] Mustafa mahsar mein dulha ban ke niklenge (234).

Moses will appear blazing like the light of Sinai
and Mohammad will show himself on Judgement Day
Adorned like a bridegroom. (122)

Moses will appear blazing like the light of Sinai;
Mohammed will show himself on Judgement Day adorned like
a bridegroom.(177)

Note: Convention (SAW) after the prophet's mention, represented in Urdu by a single letter is disregarded in both translations apart from change in punctuation and break in line. However, SAW is not commonly followed in English.

ii. Dekhna saki ghata guljar par chhai na ho (234)

[1] The original Urdu carries a swadh here which is short form for Sallallaho alaihe wasallam (SAW), which means peace be upon him, often indicated as PBUH within parentheses.

See, O Saqi, there may be clouds
hanging over the garden. (122)

See, O Saqi, if the clouds hang over the garden. (177)

Note: Naim's version is more in the form of command while Gilbert's translation shows hesitation, tentativeness which is closer in tone to the Urdu version.

2. **Jheenga Pasi**
(From *Raja Harishchand Nautanki*)

" Hum mahlan ke basi re pandit
Kit tak door tori Kasi. Kit tak door…" (236)

We dwell in palaces, O Pandit;
How far is your Kashi? (123)

We dwell in palaces, O Pandit:
How far away is your Kashi? (178)

Note: Change in dialect evident in the Urdu version is not clear in the English translation. Kasi, the impure form of Kashi, is given up in both English versions for some reason.

3. **Nawab Bhure's nephew—Munnan Khan**

Murghane chaman dete hain ja jheel mein ande
Mukhtar log dete hain taatel mein ande (244)

Birds lay eggs in the lake.

Mukhtars lay eggs during holidays (129)

Garden birds go to the lakes to lay eggs;
but Mukhtars use the holidays to lay eggs. (185)

Note: C.M. Naim makes clear that these are garden birds.

4.**Manzur–un-Nisa**

i. Danda haraya gulli roat hai
Dande ki maan roti poat hai (245)

Danda has lost and the gulli is crying;
Danda's mother is baking bread. (131)

Danda is lost, gulli is crying.
Danda's mother is busy frying. (187)

Naim's translation arises from "heraya" (lost – opposite of found) not "haraya"(losing in game). Baking and frying are different processes though. Making roti, the Indian way, differs from frying in any case.

(munajaatein—supplications)

ii. Toee Sarwari aur toee Akbari
Mari bar kyon der itni kari (264)

You are Great. You are the king.
Why did you delay so much when my turn came? (145)

You are the Master. You are the Almighty.

Why did you delay so when my turn came? (202)

Note: Naim's choice of the words "Master" and "Almighty" are very different from Gilbert's.

iii. **Milad-e- Akbar (Prophet's birth)**

Jab bagh-e-Jahan ke mali ne ki dekha bhali phoolon ki
Ik phool us mein se chhant
Liya thi jitni dali phoolon ki (265)

He chose one of them from all the boughs which were there. (145)

When the Gardener of the World started
tending the flowers,
He chose one flower from all that were there. (202)

Note: Gilbert's translation of the verse is preceded by the context that Manzur-un- Nisa would sometimes read the " *Milad –i- Akbari* which contained the popular account of the Prophet's birth…" Naim, on the other hand, translates the full verse from Urdu.

iv. Teri zaat pak hai ae Khuda
Teri shaan jalle jalalahu
Tera naam Aadil-e- Kibriya
Teri shaan jalle jalalahu
Jise chahe jaisa bana diya
Teri shaan jalle jalalahu (265)

Your Person is holy, O God, and most high is your glory.
You make anyone as You wish, and most high is your glory. (145)

You are Holy, O God, and Most high in Your Glory.

You are the Just Lawgiver, and Most High in Your Glory.
You mete out as you wish, O Most High in Your Glory. (203)

Note: Naim capitalises "Holy", "Glory" etc. and talks about God's laws.

v. Do phool saath phoole qismat juda juda hai
Ik qabr pe chadha hai ik sehre mein gundha hai (265)

Two flowers bloomed together, but their destinies are different.
One has been placed upon a grave, and one is woven into a bride-
groom's floral veil. (146)

Two flowers bloomed together, but each with a
different fate.
One was placed in a wedding garland, the other
upon a grave. (203)

Note: It is amazing that the illiterate Manzur-un-Nisa can pronounce the words "qismat" and "qabr". The more likely pronunciation is 'kismat' and 'kabr'. Apart from choosing the word "fate" over "destinies", Naim also inverses the order of the second line while Gilbert sticks to the Urdu order.

5. **Madar Bakhsh, the khidmatgar**

Chiragh roshan , murad haasil salato
Salato salaam alaikum ya Munkar Nakir—
Dil mera imaan qabr mera makaan (247)

May the lamp be lighted;

May my object be achieved.
Blessings, blessings, peace be upon you, O Munkir Nakir;
My heart is my faith, the grave is my home. (132)

May the lamp be lighted; may my object be achieved. Blessings, blessings.Peace be upon you, O *Munkir Nakir*. The faith is my heart, the grave is my home. (188)

Note: Naim doesn't italicise these lines to set the verse apart from the text. He integrates it into the main text and chooses to italicise only Munkir, Nakir . He also gives pre-eminence to faith over the heart.

6. **Deputy Collector**
(Quoting Mir Anis)
Na aish na dukh dard na aaram rahega
Aakhir wahi Allah ka ik naam rahega. (279)

Not pleasure nor pain, nor comfort will remain;
In the end only the name of God will survive. (156)

"No pain or pleasure will remain;
In the end, only God's name" (214).

Note: Again Naim inverses the word order while Gilbert sticks to the Urdu verse order.

7. **Jamshed**

i. Guzar gaya ab who daur saqi ke
Chhip ke peete the peene wale
Banega sara jahan maikhana har koi
Badah khwar hoga. (289)

O saqi, the times are passed when drinkers used to drink

secretly.
Now, the whole world will become a tavern, and every
person a drinker. (163)

'Saqi, the time has passed when drinkers quaffed secretly//Now the whole world will be the tavern, and
everyone a drinker.' (221)

Note: Naim chooses quaffed over drink and prefers 'the' over 'a' tavern.

ii. Agiya lagi. Sunderban jal gayo re (331)

The fire was kindled and Sunderban was burned down. (192)

"The fire was kindled, the Sunderbans burned down…" (251)

Note: Naim doesn't italicise the lines and replaces Sunderban with the Sunderbans.

iii. Mein aafat ka parkala hoon
Nach nachaoon dam bhar mein—Aag laga doon dam bhar mein.
Jis ki taka us ko mara- pau barah hain
Pau barah- pau barah hain pau barah-
Pau-barah hain pau barah- hurray- hip-hurray hip
Hurray hip, hip-hip (331)

I am a spark of mischief. I make them dance on
the double.
I start fires within an instant.Whichever piece I select,
I beat, I am lucky. Hooray, hip,hip. Hooray,
hip, hip- (192)

I'm a spark of mischief.
I can make them dance. I can set them on fire.
I never miss a throw.
I'm lucky, I'm lucky, I'm lucky… (251)

iv. Yah sab ko sair ajayeb dikhai Shirin ne
idhar to hathon mein mehndi lagayi
Shireen ne" (332)

Shirin showed wonders to everyone.
When she reddened her palms with henna.
Farhad's heart was on fire Sunder
Sunderban was burned to cinders. (192)

Shirin showed wonders to everyone.
When she reddened her palms with henna.
Her lover's heart was set on fire
And the Sunderbans burned down. (251)

v. Gulal zulfon mein unki pada tha holi mein
To lalah bamola ke mashk khatan mein aag lagi hai (332)

Her hair was sprinkled with red powder
On Holi and the tulip said that
fire has been kindled in the musk of Cathay. (193)

Her hair was sprinkled with the red powder
Of Holi , but the tulip said No, it's a fire
set in the musk of Tartary.
And the Sunderbans burned down. (252)

vi. Yeh wasf tujh hi mein dekha nigar ghusse mein
hua hai chehra tera zard yaar ghusse mein (332)

Only in you, my love, did I see this characteristic,
That when you are angry, your face becomes pale.
The nightingales also think that the garden has been set on fire.
Oh, what a fire has been kindled.(193)

Love, only in you, did I see this happen
that when you were angry your face turned crimson.
The nightingales thought that the garden was on fire.
And the Sunderbans burned down. (252)

Note: Naim changes pale to crimson because turning crimson with rage is more common than turning pale with anger (pale with fright is more conventional).The Urdu verse suggests that the lady shows unusual characteristic in turning yellow rather than red.

vii. Main bholi baton ka us ke karun bayan kya
Shafaq ko dekh ke kahta hai naujawan mera
Ajab tamasha hai charkha kohan mein
Aag lagi
Aji haan aag lagi- (333)

What should I say about her innocent words?
The young lady says, seeing the twilight.
'It is strange that the old heaven has been set
on fire, yes, it has been set on fire.' (193)

What can I say about her innocent ways!
My love sees the twilight red and says,
'How strange ! The old heaven is on fire.'

And the Sunderbans…. (252)

Note: Here Naim qualifies twilight with the colour red.

8. **Mansur**

i. Jaan bechne ko aaye to bedaam bech di
Ae ahl-e- Misr wazae takkaluf to dekhiye (336)

When I decided to sell my life, I sold it
without asking a price.
Oh, people of Egypt, note this ceremonious gesture. (195)

When we decided to sell our lives, we sold them without
asking a price.
Oh, people of Egypt, note our ceremonious ways.(255)

Note: The footnote in both texts says that these lines are from Faiz. The allusion is to King Joseph's sale in a bazaar. Naim prefers the royal 'we' instead of the common I but life also becomes plural with it.

ii. Yeh shaame gham ka aks tha yeh ek
antbah tha—hamiin ise kuchal
nah dein abhi- yeh ravind ne ki
cheez kyon bane amanat-e- zameen? (338)

It was a reflexion of the sad evening. It was a warning.
Why shouldn't we crush it now?
Why should this thing which deserves to be trampled,
remain in the earth's safe- keeping? (197)

" 'It was a reflection of that grievous dusk/ It was like a warning shot/It was a something to trample upon/ Why should it be saved in a grave?' " (257)

Note: Naim uses the modern spelling "reflection" rather than the archaic " reflexion".

iii. Khizan ka ghuncha hai yeh laash –
Yeh maut ka majasma dara raha hai der se
Lahoo mein tar batar hai sar se paon tak-
Jame hue lahu mein hai mere hi khoon ki mahak (340)

This corpse is the bud of autumn
This icon of death has long been frightening us.
It is soaked in blood from from head to foot.
This congealed blood smells like wine. (197)

'This corpse is like an autumn bud/
This figure of Death has scared us enough/ It is soaked in blood from head to toe/
The congealed blood smells of me…' (257)

Note: Naim personifies death making it more dramatic, powerful and scary while Gilbert's translation deals with it in a matter of fact way—a finality that horrifies mortals. Gilbert's translation that the "congealed blood smells like wine" seems to stem from her misunderstanding of 'jame' (congealed) for jaam –e (something to do with wine goblet). Naim's translation is more convincing.

9. **Suraiya (Chapati Clown's song)**

Din ko aa sakte na the
Aane ko kya raat na thi
Mehndi paon mein na thi aap ke
Barsat na thi-

Kaj adaai ke siwa aur koi baat na thi
Sach to kehte ke manzoor mulaqat na thi
Manzoor mulaqat na thi. (325)

You did not come by day,
But could not you come by night?
You did not have mehndi on your feet.
Nor was it raining,
There was no reason but indifference.
In truth, you had no desire to meet me.
You had no desire to meet me. (202)

You did not come by day,
But couldn't you have come by night?
You didn't have henna on your feet to stop you,
nor was it raining.
There was no reason but indifference.
In truth, you had no desire to see me.
You had no desire to see me…. (261)

Note: The two translations are similar except that Naim's is more colloquial, informal and natural because of contracted forms (didn't ,couldn't) and the use of "see" rather than "meet".

10. **Abid + Mansoor (random lines from Faiz Ahmed Faiz and Ali Jawad Zaidi)**
Yeh kis ne-- laash phenk di—jawaniyon ki raah mein? Abhi guzar rahe the hum jaware razmgah mein…
Ye jor u zulm ki kalaiyan marod kar nikal pada…
Andheri raat thi magar yeh chal pada
Magar ye kis ki laash thi ke bediyan padi hain ab bhi paon mein… (337-338)

Who was it that threw the corpse- in the path- of youth?...
"We were just passing by the battlefield-- hic!"...
"This one set out twisting the wrists of tyranny,"...
"The night was dark, hic! But he set out,"...
" But whose body was it whose feet are still chained?" (196)

" 'Who was he...who cast his corpse...on the path...of youthful days? ... "We had just then passed...by the battlefield...' " ...
" 'He twisted the tyrant's wrists and set out,"... " 'It was a desolate night...yet he set forth,' " "But whose corpse was it that its legs were still chained?' " (256)

Note: Gilbert personifies tyranny and youth while Naim personifies tyrant. "Desolate" conveys the mood of the poet and journalists better than dark.

CONCLUSION

The conclusion of a research thesis is like summing up of all the impressions, ideas, hunches, insights and intuitions drawn from work on a considerable body of literature. Drawing a conclusion from the literary output of a highly complex and nuanced writer like Qurratulain Hyder is interesting as well as challenging for she speaks in several tongues, articulating different, and often mutually contrasting, and contending positions on a single issue through different characters.

One can rarely guess from the drift of the story and the larger plan of a novel or novella as to which character, or position, has Hyder's sympathies more than that for others to know what inferences to draw. However, that is not the only challenge as Hyder's works are no-judgmental, their worldview open-ended and tentative. In a way, it is in the mould of classical Hindu thought, for which she had an enduring fascination.

That is, she is non-categorical, often wondering, musing, guessing in an amazed way about life, human relations, nature, change and continuity and inscrutable ways of time as we know it in terms of morning, noon, evening, night, dawn. Or, in terms of seconds, minutes, hours, days, weeks, months, years, centuries, millennia. Or in terms of geological time like Stone Age, Bronze Age, Iron Age. Also, in terms of larger units of cosmic time, perhaps Time.

So, how do we begin to encapsulate the work of a woman who is talking about the moment her characters are living in, and in the same breath moves on to Brahma Yug. At once Hyder seems to be living alternatively and simultaneously, in different time frames. So do her characters.

However, coming to a conclusion about a set of her novels and novellas – *River of Fire*, *Fireflies in the Mist*, *My Temples Too*, and *A Woman's Life.* (also published as *Street Singers of Lucknow), Sita Betrayed* and *Housing Society* —is relatively easy, particularly so when we put the study in the framework of "Partition and the Muslim Woman: Nation,

Gender and Identity." Finding these elements in her above-mentioned work and her treatment of these seems less daunting.

What follows contains a statement of the gist of impressions drawn from a close reading of the books over a period of time, often aided by other works, mainly Hyder's own, as well as works on issues like Partition, Nation, Gender and Identity. Most of the women characters here being Muslims, it is also about religion and different understandings of it. Partition was based on a version of Islam that was said to be incompatible and uncomfortable with India's plural ethos.

Hyder was 20 when the freedom of India came, along with the dreadful Partition (often spelt with a capital P, like Pakistan). In fact, Partition was part of the package that involved freedom. To many Indians, it was at best a mixed blessing. A line from an Urdu song of those days was "*Naha ke khoon mein ayee thi fasl-e-azadi"* (Drenched in blood came the harvest of freedom). The blood in which freedom was drenched was Indian, that also included Pakistan. Like, when we say, "Man is a social animal," we mean both man and woman; when we say India of that point in time, we may mean Pakistan as well.

Hyder, who was born at the peak of the Freedom Movement in 1927, grew up witnessing the steady national march towards freedom, with all its glory, sacrifices and heart-breaks. She was an adult when freedom came and, of course, its evil twin, the Partition.

She was so deeply immersed in it that across the body of her work Partition's presence looms. She was not only deeply influenced as a writer by India's Partition, but that of Pakistan as well, in 1971, to create a third nation state within what was the territory of an undivided India. The third nation state, Bangladesh, was created within 25 years of independence and Partition of India, putting a question mark on the rationale of Partition. If Hindus and Muslims could not live with each other and needed Partition, then why did Muslims need another partition?

Also frequently asked was the question in 1971, and later, whether religion was sufficient ground for the creation of a nation state. India's top ulama (Muslim religious scholars) had warned much before Partition that religion could not be a basis for a nation. Ulama like Maulana Abul Kalam Azad and Maulana Hussain Ahmad Madani frequently emphasised in their speeches and writings that Islam could not be made a sustainable basis for the creation of a nation state. For that matter, no religion could, as nation had something to do with nativity and motherland, rather than religious faith.

Maulana Madani argued that people living together in peace in a certain territory made a nation, even though they were of different racial origins and faiths and even if there was cultural and linguistic diversity in the land. Faith alone did not a nation make.

The maulana who was a great scholar and sufi, brought references from the main scripture of Islam, the Quran, and the life and traditions of the Prophet in support of his argument. The crux of the argument was that the country could not be divided on the basis of Islam as it was not permitted by the scripture.

He agreed that Muslims were responsible for both their nation, equally shared by non-Muslims, as well as for the wellbeing of the Ummah, the large body of Muslims spread all over the world. However, Muslims living in a nation state shared by non-Muslims have the priority of thinking and acting on behalf of that "composite nation" (the maulana's term), than about the Ummah, the global community of Muslims.

And if the demands of the Ummah conflict with the demands of the "composite nation" a Muslim lives in, what should he or she be doing? The maulana said such conflict was not inevitable, but if such a situation arose the Quran tells Muslims explicitly that they should not help other Muslims against the interests of their nation, composed of non-Muslims:

> This Koranic verse [8.72] makes it amply clear that a Muslim being part of the Ummah can also maintain a relationship with non-Muslims…. In the event that a clause of the agreement that a Muslim has entered with non-

> Muslims goes against the interests of the *ummah*, he would perforce abide by the clause of agreement and withdraw all assistance to and cooperation to Muslims. (Madani 136)

The maulana was convinced that the Indian nation was formed out of an unwritten contract, the loyalty to which was incumbent on everyone living within its territory. This, he said, was the intent of the Quran and Hadith as well. Trying to divide India on grounds of religion was a great mischief perpetrated by the Western-educated Muslim elite who had fallen under the spell of what he called "British magicians" (empire builders).

As the leading light of Darul Uloom Deoband, the most important religious seminary of Muslims in the subcontinent, the maulana was at the cutting edge of a movement against the British. That movement had aligned itself to the Indian National Congress-led larger movement for national freedom. He, along with his teacher Maulana Mahmood Hasan and other senior leaders of Deoband like Maulana Obaidullah Sindhi, tried to create the awareness among Muslims that their good lay in a united India, not in Partition. Maulana Sindhi was part of an Indian government in exile in Afghanistan, with Raja Mahendra Pratap Singh as head. The government did not succeed as the British created dissensions among Afghan tribes with whose support the government was formed and run.

The Partition idea came as a rude jolt to the ulama who thought the Western-educated Muslim elite was enforcing Thomas Babington Macaulay's plans on Indian Muslims. The poet Mohammad Iqbal, who thought Muslims were a nation and deserved to be allowed to live in autonomous Muslim-majority provinces within an Indian federation, got offended by the maulana's assertion that Islam did not constitute a nation. Iqbal wrote a poem condemning the maulana, to which he wrote a long rejoinder from which the above quote comes. The maulana wrote that British imperialists did not want a strong Indian nation and were trying to divide it using the Western-educated Muslim elite on the basis of religion. Iqbal, who had done his Ph.D. in Germany was against the idea of nation, which he held responsible for the devastation of Europe in World War I. (He did not live to see the destruction of World War II).

Iqbal mistakenly believed that the platform for people to come together on was not nation, but religion. The ulama thought this argument was in line with the British design to divide Indians on religious lines.

The maulana said if Pakistan was created it would break up within 25 years. Maulana Abul Kalam Azad and the rest of the ulama of Deoband were of the same opinion. They said people from Bihar and UP running away from their areas to Sind and Balochistan would soon realise that they had more in common with their Hindu neighbours in India than with their newly acquired neighbours in those distant areas. Religion would not be sufficient to hold Indian migrants and their host populations together.

Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, India's first education minister, fiercely opposed Partition till the end, even though top political leaders of India, sections of Hindu, Sikhs and others had decided to accept Pakistan. The maulana opposed it even after Gandhiji had accepted it. He believed that Partition was not bad for the country alone, but bad for Muslims and Islam itself. He said the idea was un-Islamic.

In an interview to Shorish Kashmiri for a Lahore-based Urdu magazine, *Chattan*, in April 1946, he expressed disappointment with the looming Partition and prophesied that Pakistan's incompetent rulers might pave the way for military rule and that East Pakistan would break away from it. Both the prophecies came true. Maulana Madani had said it would break within 25 years. Bangladesh emerged after 24 years.

The Shorish interview was carried by the MJ Akbar edited *Covert* magazine in November 2009 and later in Akbar's book *The Past and Future of Pakistan*. It was translated from the Urdu original into English. It is also available on the net in an article called "A Man Who Knew the Future" by Shorish Kashmiri. Following are parts of Mualana Azad's replies in the interview:

> If Pakistan were the solution to Hindu-Muslim problem, then I would have extended my support to it. A section of Hindu opinion is now turning in favour. By conceding NWFP, Sindh, Balochistan and half of Punjab on one side and half of Bengal on the other, they think they will get the rest of India, a huge country that would be free from any claims of a communal nature. If we use the Muslim League terminology, this new India will be a Hindu state both practically and temperamentally. (Kashmiri 1)

Maulana Azad goes on to elaborate upon what he says and why:

> This will not happen as a result of any conscious decision, but will be a logical consequence of its social realities. How can you expect a society that consists 90 percent of Hindus who have lived with their ethos and values since pre-historic times, to grow differently? The factors that laid the foundation of Islam in Indian society and created a powerful following have become victim of the politics of Partition. The communal hatred it has generated has completely extinguished all the possibilities of spreading and preaching Islam. This communal politics has hurt the religion beyond measure. If they had taken their lessons from the Quran and the life of holy prophet and had not forged communal politics in the name of religion then Islam's growth would not have halted. (1)

Further, Azad the Islamic scholar, asserts the idea of Partition has no sanction in Islam:

> Regardless of the fact whether it is the right solution to the problems of Indian Muslims, it is being demanded in the name of Islam. The question is where and when Islam provided for division of territories to settle populations on the basis of belief and unbelief. Does it find any sanction in the Quran or the traditions of the holy prophet? Who among the scholars of Islam has divided the dominion of God on this basis? If we accept this division in principle, how shall we reconcile it with Islam as a universal system? (2)

Hyder's enduring interest in Partition, and also 'partitions', was only natural as it was such a monumental event that it changed the lives of people and families for ever, if at all they were lucky enough to survive. It was stuff of history as well as that of fiction for the latter tries to give flesh, blood and warm human breath to abstract and clinical historical accounts.

Partition was a watershed event in history, a foundational date by which the passage of time is marked. Hyder's abiding interest in this event, which is also the founding date of Pakistan's history (if we ignore their stretching back their history to Harappa and Mohenjodaro). As the evil twin of independence, partition spanned a huge body of literary writing in Urdu–both fiction and poetry.

The event's sheer size and impact was so huge that it burnt itself into the artistic consciousness of generations of writers and poets. The sheer size of the event could be known from the fact that 14 million people crossed the newly created Indo-Pak border during partition and 75,000 women were kidnapped and raped (Butalia, *The Other Side of Silence* 3).

As many as 3.4 million people were missing during Partition. It was the largest migration in history. An event like this will invite writers to return to it and learn from it for ages to come. Hyder was among the first to do that.

Despite its spectacular destruction, rapine, pillage and bloodletting, Hyder talked about other things when she talked of Partition. Hence, there is little mention of those horrors in her work, most of which has Partition in the background. Herself and her family being victims of Partition, she liked to move on rather than dwell on its horrors.

Her family survived the Partition riots, but her home in Dehra Dun was expropriated by incoming refugees from Pakistan. Her mother and she took a flight to Pakistan carrying whatever little they could, only to discover in Pakistan that the jewellery box she was

carrying with her was left behind in the washroom at Jalandhar airfield (*Kar-e-Jahan* 455-456). She discovered that Karachi was not the place she wanted to be at, and soon moved to London with her mother. In the 1960s she returned to India with her mother to finally settle down here.

Nation, like Partition, did not seem an attractive idea to her. She often mused about World War I and World War II which devastated the world, killed millions, uprooted and wounded as many, flattened historic cities. What was it all about? Nation. What was Pakistan? A nation. And Bangladesh? Another nation.

When did the concept of nation emerge for the first time? Political scientist Samuel P. Huntington traces it to the Treaty of Westphalia in his *Clash of Civilisations and the Making of a New World Order*. He says it was only after that the clearly-defined nations and nation states emerged in Europe within settled, inviolable boundaries. Before that it was kingdoms and princely states and people's loyalties were for the kings and princes, rather than the nation.

Territories and nation states could be divided, but civilisation was indivisible. Hyder thought of India as a civilisation – indivisible, eternal, *sanatan*.

Apparently, nation and nation state are not always the same. G. Aloysius *in Nationalism without a Nation* asks, "Can one nation have several states? Or one state several nations?" Then he goes on to state: "Finally, we have the term 'nationality', which may mean either legal membership in a nation state, or an ethnic community in transition" (11).

One wonders which category the Pakistan of Hyder's works falls in. Is it a "nationality" on way to becoming a nation? Or is it several "nationalities" as shown by the creation of Bangladesh? Are then several other "nationalities" within the present Pakistan – Sindhi, Balochi, Punjabi etc. – struggling to emerge as full-fledged nations? Or, was Pakistan a "nation" within the Indian nation state? These are some of the interesting questions that come to mind pondering over the issues of nation.

It is interesting to know what Hyder thought of the "Two-Nation" theory on which the new nation state of Pakistan was founded. Her first novel, *Mere bhi Sanam Khaney* (*My Temples, Too*) written at the time of Partition, when she was 20, showed that her sympathies were not with the "Two-Nation" theory as her heroine valiantly tries to resist it with her group of artists and journalists, who present the case of a united India in their newspaper articles and argue with Muslim League journalists and leaders against the demand of India's division.

At the end of it, when Pakistan is an accomplished fact, Rakhshanda (the heroine) is left clueless, babbling incomprehensively as riots erupt everywhere in the traditionally peaceful Avadh, the land of the vaunted *Ganga-Jamuni tehzib*, the composite culture that Hindus and Muslims had assiduously built over the centuries. At the end of it, that land lies desolate amid a great bloodbath and flight of refugees to Pakistan. Rakhshanda's brother Peechu, an officer of the IPS, is killed at the Shahdara railway station trying to stop rioting by a mob of refugees from Pakistan.

Her elder brother refuses to go to Pakistan and decides to live in India, not as a parasitical zamindar, but as a farmer who tills the land and grows food for the country. Her father is already dead, probably from the shock of events.

However, this is the end of the Muslims who tried to resist Partition, but Pakistan does not spare even its advocates. Syed Iftikhar, the editor of Muslim League newspaper who had consistently been undermining the nationalists, is left in India as he fails to go to Pakistan. His condition is pitiable: nobody wants him here and he cannot go to Pakistan.

Across her work, Partition comes as a highly disruptive phenomenon that uproots lives in the new Pakistan to transplant them in what remains of India: it also uproots people here to transplant them in the unfamiliar earth of Sind, Balochistan, West Punjab and East Bengal. Naturally, the Pakistani soil is not highly suited to people from other parts of India.

She created a counternarrative to the "Two-Nation" discourse with her magnum opus *Aag ka Darya*, a story of epic dimensions stretched over 2,400 years. Characters with same, or slightly altered, names emerge over the ages to live and interact with each other in a familiar pattern that makes some readers feel that it is about *awa-gaman* (transmigration of souls). Hyder said that this was not the case. It was only about recurring patterns of human life and relationships in India over the ages. With the story of the individual characters she seems to tell the story of a civilisation, a civilisation that has lived through its triumphs and tragedies. It represents a long racial memory that, from the middle of the 20th century stretches back millennia.

In that continuous flow of life, Partition looks like a rude intervention. However, there are certain hints of continuity despite the break, as personal friendships and shared experiences help some people across the borders to sustain their relationship.

Hyder does not blame anybody for the Partition in particular. However, her characters do talk about it inconclusively. For instance, when a Hindu character says Muslim League was the handiwork of Muslim rajahs and nawabs, a Muslim character says Congress too was propped up by Hindu landlords, businessmen and Hindu Maha Sabha. This is mere bickering rather than a fruitful analysis. One may say in Hyder's defence that a novel is not about political analysis. The nearest Hyder comes to an analysis of Partition's reasons is the following:

> Conversation raged around her. They were talking of Pakistan and Bangladesh. We did this. They did that.
>
> Suddenly she heard herself say aloud, "If Mr Jinnah had not created Pakistan, there would have been no Bangladesh today. Actually, he is the founder of this new country as well."

> People looked at her in surprise and said nothing. She continued to hold forth: "The concept of Mother India had been given to the rest of the country by the terrorists of Bengal. They worshipped divine power in the image of Kali the destroyer. They believed in the prehistoric concept of the mother goddess. The British branded them as terrorists. Indians called them revolutionaries. Many among them were anti-Muslim as well. Bankim Chandra's novel Anand Math was their bible. The cross-currents of the politics of Bengal's *Bhadrolog* and Muslim gentry gave birth to East Pakistan, and the internal politics of West and East Pakistan created Bangladesh. Individual personality clashes and temperament and actions of political leaders build or destroy entire nations." (*Fireflies* 332)

This is Deepali Sarkar, now Deepali Sen, the brightest character in *Fireflies in the Mist*. She should know, because as a college student she was a radical running with violent communist revolutionaries before independence, and Partition, came. Deepali's comrades, working from Dacca, spread all over Dacca, Calcutta and New Delhi as the revolution fades inexplicably. People get married and settle down to a peaceful domestic life. Some still continue to work for the revolution, others spread all over India and Pakistan to work for the mainstream communist party.

Meanwhile, Deepali marries a lawyer in West Indies and goes there to live a life of physical comfort cushioned by wealth. Over the years she also becomes cynical. The above-quoted observations she makes soon after the creation of Bangladesh. She is on a visit to Dacca and Calcutta and on a pilgrimage to the nearby Santiniketan, where she was a student in her revolutionary years.

Deepali, in certain ways, is like Hyder herself: independent-minded, confident, open-minded, modern. Hyder was a globetrotter like her parents and liked to keep in touch with developments. She had seen the division of Germany, Korea, Vietnam, Yemen and Palestine. Divisions often came in the wake of great violence or were accompanied by such violence. However, India's Partition seemed particularly tragic and violent.

The "Two-Nation" theory claimed that "the Muslim nation of the Sub-continent" was distinct in its history, faith and language from the rest of the population. Hyder's *Aag ka Darya* (*River of Fire*) subverts this narrative and seems to question the rationale for all the violence and the human catastrophe.

River of Fire shows a single, continuous stream of Indian history, accommodating a variety of faiths and celebrating a rich diversity of cultures and languages joining together to become India's famed "composite culture." The Sufi-Bhakta traditions and India's genius for synthesis negate the Pakistani claims.

Hyder does not take a polemical position on these issues. The sheer flow of life over 2,400 years in India goes on to contradict it. The Pakistani claims on Urdu make its position untenable in India, where Aijaz Ahmed (discussed earlier in this thesis) shows there were four times more Urdu speakers in 1948 in India compared to Pakistan.

Throughout the body of Hyder's work pervades an acute sense of history. One easily gets the impression that Partition is a parting gift from the British Empire. Retreating empires liked to leave behind debilitated and divided former colonies. India was no exception. Hyder's first novel opens with Indian soldiers returning from fronts in Europe. A Hindu batman in Iraq tells his Muslim officer that people are saying there is going to be a great war inside India. These are the first ominous rumblings of a civil war and Partition.

In a way, Partition is built into the inexorable march of events since 1857, guided and regulated by the Empire. At the end of the World War II the sequence of historical events culminated and the British, badly mauled by Germans and gasping for breath, had no option but to leave India. Before leaving, they partitioned it.

In his book, *Partition of India: Why 1947* Kaushik Basu (ed.) argues that Partition could have come in 1947 only. There is a feeling of such historical inevitability of Partition throughout Hyder's work.

The 20s and 30s, the growing up years of Hyder, were abuzz with excited talk about nation and national freedom and several takes on nationalism: Indian nationalism, Hindu nationalism and, finally Muslim nationalism. All these were sharply different from each other, but it was not unusual to see Hindu Maha Sabhaites and Muslim Leaguers working from the Congress stage. Towards the end, the League completely dissociated itself from the Congress, but Maha Sabha retained its close ties with the Congress. Interestingly, there were instances of Maha Sabha and League joining in government. In the earlier stages, different versions of nationalism had some compatibility with each other, or their enthusiasts seemed to think so.

Beyond all the polemics and ideological discourse on nationalism, certain things are clear. The following dialogue that takes place between Kamal and Champa Ahmad in *River of Fire* makes the point succinctly. Kamal, a nationalist, is forced to go over to Pakistan, but Champa Ahmad, who does not hold a strong opinion on anything, decides to live in India in difficult circumstances:

> "Are you a very staunch nationalist, Kamal?" she (Champa) asked him in awe.
>
> "Yes, every honest person should be a nationalist," he answered.
>
> "How is it that all the great Muslim intellectuals and scholars and theologians of India are nationalists? Have they sold their soul to the devil? Have a heart, Champa Baji."
>
> "Kamal, if your father thinks the Muslims' salvation lies in the establishment of Pakistan, you should have no quarrel with him at all. Don't you believe in freedom of thought?" said Champa.
>
> "You cannot drop your motherland like an old coat," Kamal shot back. (254)

In one of the quirks of history, it is the nationalist Kamal who is forced out to Pakistan by riots, killings and destruction of property. Kamal does not have anything left to hold on to, not even the prospect of a job as such opportunities had shrunken for Muslims in the wake of Partition. He had no option left except to go to Pakistan, unwillingly. On the other hand, the highly-educated, liberal Champa stays back, in reduced circumstances, as she says at the end that India is her land, she belongs here.

A close study of Hyder's work reveals that "nation," "gender" and "identity" are different facets of a single entity as identity derives from both nation and gender. There are some clear patterns in Hyder's idea of gender that have evolved over millennia in the subcontinent. From the lives of women in 4th century BC to women in the mid-20th century CE, women's worth seems to be limited to the years of their youth as they are largely prized for their looks, which fade with time.

As their looks wilt their value falls, and there are female characters in the body of her work who complain that their men have discarded them "like old shoes" for younger women. However, there are women in her work who retain their worth beyond youth. She talks of Razia Sultan, Rani Laxmi Bai, Begum Hazrat Mahal and others who were warriors, administrators and scholars. In her different works she refers to them.

In a man-made world, they would often arouse male jealousy and ridicule than admiration for their chutzpah. No wonder many of them had brief careers and short lives, cut down in their prime.

A woman-centric writer, Hyder has created some memorable female characters–women of substance – from different social strata, ranging from Muslim rajahs' and nawabs' daughters, upper-middle class and middle-class Muslim women, daughters of Hindu *Bhadrolok*, poor working women, domestic servants, high-class, glamorous, highly cultured, sophisticated courtesans, street singers, street walkers to beggar women. A certain kind of grace, patience and dignity is common to all.

Her 20th century female characters have a good number of educated women among them. Even they have their share of suffering, but they seem to cope better, remaining on top of the situation most of the time. From Champa Ahmad of *Aag ka Darya,* who comes from a well-off family (impoverished in Partition) and has studied abroad, to Rashke Qamar of *Street Singers of Lucknow*, who comes from a family of street singers and beggars (Rashke Qamar has learnt some Urdu at school and can read and understand classics well), Hyder's women who have got some education are more confident than others. Champa and Rashke decide to stay in India, braving difficulties rather than going to Pakistan.

There are other women who go to Pakistan as they have to accompany their menfolk and their families to the new country. There is little choice for them. Even among them, the educated women are capable of making the best out of a bad situation. In Pakistan, Salma Mirza (a.k.a. Chhoti Bitiya) and Suraiya Sultan (a.k.a. Basanti Begum), both from India, find life difficult and challenging, but they are able to cope well because they are properly educated. On the other hand, Manzur-un-Nisa, from the same area in India where Salma Mirza and Suraiya Sultan come from, does not go to Pakistan. Her family of ancestral keepers of a sufi shrine does not decide to go to Pakistan. Manzur-un-Nisa is uneducated and trained only to be a housewife. She is not able to cope with her difficulties and dies an early death.

Hyder seems to believe that education is a great liberator for women. It is a key to women's empowerment, she seems to suggest. Sita Mirchandani, from a well off family in Sind, is uprooted from her land by the Partition and sent to India as a refugee. She seems to be a favourite of Hyder. Born in 1927 (like Hyder) and forced to move across the new borders (again like Hyder, though in the opposite direction), this heroine of *Sita Betrayed* has an American education. Amid all her personal troubles, a good education seems to be her only saving grace.

Her strong women like Deepali Sarkar and Rakhshanda hold out well because they are educated. However, Rakhshanda is devastated to see Partition as a *fait accompli* despite all the efforts she had made with people like herself to thwart it. Hyder feels that a good education saves women from being a perishable product, valuable only as long as she is young. A good education extends her warranty well beyond the years of her youth.

Nation, which involves a feeling of belonging to a large mass of people in a certain large area, their language, culture and their values even if we do not know most of the individuals, nor been to most of the areas within our nation state. This sense of belonging to an "imagined community" as Benedict Anderson calls it, is part of our sense of who we are, that is, our identity. Likewise, gender, too, is a good part of our identity. Being a woman brings both joys and challenges of a kind unknown to men. Social and family pressures, expectations of a certain kind of behaviour in a man-made world, the hidden hand of patriarchy entrenched for millennia that creates a glass ceiling for women in high positions, the unique demands of motherhood that force us out of our work for a time as competitors gradually steal a march on us—all these are part of our cognitive world that define who we are, that is our identity.

A major marker of identity is religion as well. Even though the leading ulema, most of whom were opposed to the secular Mr. Jinnah's religious politics, argued that India could not be divided in the name of Islam (as shown by Maulana Madani and Maulana Azad in the preceding pages), the country was ultimately divided in the name of religion. Though their prophesies – that the eastern wing of Pakistan would soon break away and political incompetence would lead to military rule in Pakistan – turned out to be true, Partition in the name of Islam was a *fait accompli*. Madani's and Azad's argument that religion alone could not hold a country together was vindicated by the creation of Bangladesh in 1971. Nonetheless Partition was accomplished to create a Muslim/Islamic state called Pakistan.

I use "Muslim"/ "Islam" here advisedly. A Muslim state is populated and run by Muslims in whatever way they think fit. An Islamic state is run on Islamic laws (Shariah) only. That way no Muslim state is an Islamic state, including Pakistan. The only one claimed to

be an Islamic state is Saudi Arabia. However, its understanding and implementation of Shariah is contested. Thus, Pakistan's use of Islam was only a clever ploy, as the ulema said. That seems to be Hyder's understanding too, as her characters discover in *Aag ka Darya* (*River of Fire*). They say the Pakistan movement had harmed Islam (by disemboweling it of philosophical, sufi content) and turned Urdu into an undesirable commodity in India. Her characters, men and women, identify themselves with Hyder's understanding of these crucial issues. When Sita Mirchandani visits Karachi, the capital of Sind, for attending a marriage in the family of her in-laws (who are Muslims and have shifted to Pakistan) she discovers that her religious identity had become a burden and she had become an alien in her own "Sindhu Desh", where she grew up and where her ancestors had been living for generations. She has to report her visit to the police in the company of one of her Muslim in-laws, who has migrated to Karachi recently. The Indian migrant is a reliable citizen in Sind, not the Sindhi Sita.

The Muslim in-law tells Sita that in India she, too, has to report to the police in the company of her relatives, and the police look at her in suspicion even though she was born and grew up in that location. These are moments when one realises that religious identity could, at times, become an encumbrance.

Sita, a non-practising Hindu, goes around the famous, but deserted, temples of Sind and looks at the wrenching scribbles on the inner walls of the temples like "Devi Ma, I'm going to India. Be kind to me. 12 November 1947." "Bhagwan, I'm running away to India. Be kind to me. 25 September 1947." "Great Mother, I'm leaving you behind. Now I'll never be able to make offerings to you. Please always be kind to my children. 19 December 1947" (70). Walls after walls are scribbled with grieving messages to Bhagwan by Hindus moments before embarking on a tearful and dangerous journey to India.

For Sita Mirchandani Sind is home that is no longer home. For her Indian relatives settled in Karachi, Sitapur in Uttar Pradesh is home that is not. Yet they nurse a futile longing for belonging to these places that have changed.

Religious identity is an issue in Hyder. However, her characters do not want to make an issue of it, as they are happy and contented in a mixed milieu where all Indian religions are represented, but their religions are not divisive.

Most religious women do not have a corresponding distaste for others. In *Street Singers of Lucknow* Rashke's aunt, Hurmazi Khala is a devout Muslim, but she does not discriminate against people on the basis of their religion. Moti, a Hindu young woman, has been given a "Muslim" name by her mentor, the Hindu Verma. She would be singing under her new name, Sadaf Ara (which means the same as Moti), but she resents the change as, she thinks, it does not signify any change in her status (of Verma's concubine), which she abhors. Moti treats Rashke and her sister Jamilan as her own sisters and takes great care of them. Nor is the destitute Muslim woman at Hande Shah's mazar hostile to non-Muslims.

There is an old woman who sweeps the floor of Peer Hande Shah and lives at the *dargah*. She works in the day in the neighbouring houses for a subsistence. She had a daughter whom her in-laws killed and got away by bribing the police. She prays all the time with full devotion even though the words of her prayers are imperfectly spoken and incomplete. She has remembered only that much, but offers them to God with a pure heart that bears malice to none. The author remarks that such people would inhabit paradise.

Hyder's women know their limitations, even the bravest ones. They know that it is a man-made world and Partition is a male project. Interestingly, important officials were given a choice to go to Pakistan or live in India. All were males. Nobody asked the women their choice. It was taken for granted that they would go where their males would. As a whole, Hyder's characters' religious identities are subdued by norms of civility, compassion and fellow-feeling. For such people a religion-based project like Partition holds little charm.

Hyder is a master craftsperson who grew from the simple narrative of *Mere bhi Sanamkhane* (*My Temples, Too*) to the complexities of the epic-scale *Aag ka Darya* (*River of Fire*) and the memorable *Aakhir-e-Shab ke Hamsafar* (*Fireflies in the Mist*) over the years.

The telling of the *Aag ka Darya* story required authentic scholarship on the life and culture (and the ever-changing kaleidoscope of rulers) of India's northern areas over 24 centuries, ranging from immediately after Buddha to post-Independence, Post-Partition India. It also needed formidable artistic skills to portray the languages, philosophy, religion and politics of the ages. The deftness with which she has pulled it off is amazing even in this age of shrinking attention spans.

The scope of *Fireflies in the Mist* also is pretty ambitious, its story beginning in pre-Partition East Bengal's Dhaka, Partition and creation of Pakistan (when East Bengal became East Pakistan) and Pakistan's partition to create Bangladesh in what was East Pakistan before that. The story continues for a few more years with snatches of life in Delhi, Calcutta and characters moving from Bangladesh to Calcutta, Delhi and beyond. The hero, Rehan, who began life in Dhaka, went to England for higher studies and came back to Dhaka, was sent to Delhi by his party, the Communist Party of India. He had settled down to a politician's life in Calcutta when Partition came, only to go back to Dhaka after the creation of Bangladesh. Deepali Sarkar, the heroine, gives up her life of a revolutionary, marries a rich lawyer in West Indies and settles down in a comfortable life.

Hyder uses an amazing array of techniques of storytelling, from flash back to direct narration, authorial narration, dreams, premonitions, diaries (In *Fireflies* Yasmin Belmonte has two diaries – "Good Luck Diary" and "Bad Luck Diary" – in which she records her good and bad experiences), letters and "providential" events. Her family saga, *Kaar-e-Jahan Daraz Hai*, which has no translation and is not part of this study, includes a wider range of techniques with which she carries forward the story. One of them is the *Tajik Dastango* (Tajik story teller) who describes the earlier stages of Hyder's ancestors before they migrated from Central Asia to India.

To sum up, Hyder's work is an endless adventure of the spirit, which is also a counter-narrative to the "Two-Nation Theory" on which Pakistan's foundation rests. Interestingly, Hyder's books are amongst the largest selling in Pakistan along with Iqbal and Faiz. The three do well in India as well, which proves that civilisations cannot be divided.

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