# TWO PARTITIONS: POSTCOLONIAL CULTURE AND NATION IN BANGLADESHI AND SOUTH ASIAN ANGLOPHONE LITERATURES

By

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ABSTRACT

TWO PARTITIONS: POSTCOLONIAL CULTURE AND NATION IN BANGLADESHI AND SOUTH ASIAN ANGLOPHONE LITERATURES

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As a comparative and interdisciplinary study of South Asian literatures, this project traces the fracturing of the subcontinent in 1947, and the subsequent emergence of Bangladesh in 1971. I analyze Global Anglophone, diasporic and Bengali novels from 1956-2014 as a prism through which I interrogate Bangladesh's birth through specific historic transformations: the 1947 Partition, the entity East Pakistan (1947-1970) and the 1971 War. My analysis methodologically deploys historiographical concepts and postcolonial theory to illuminate Bangladesh in its multiplicity, including the nation's peasant identities, religious minorities and their insecurity, gendered hypermasculinist nationalism and related diasporic perspectives. My readings at the intersections of literary works and historical documents recasts the 1947 Partition and its legacy in South Asia, pointing to interconnections between East Pakistan's proto-national character leading up to the 1971 war and the postwar formation of Bangladesh, responsible for the country's ongoing religious and ethnic fragmentations.

In Chapter 1, "Counter-Imaginations of Partition: East Bengal and Peasant Identities in Adwaita Mallabarman's *A River Called Titash* (1956) and Shaukat Osman's *Janani* (1961)," I invoke the short-lived idea of a United Bengal just before the 1947 Partition to interrogate Partition-era nationalism's adverse influence on the Hindu and Muslim peasantry in Bengal's countryside. Chapter 2, "'Looking-glass Border' Novels: Reading East Pakistan's Hindu Minority in Amitav Ghosh's *The Shadow Lines* (1988) and the Unified Bengali Identity During the 1971 War in Dilruba Z. Ara's *Blame* (2015)," analyzes the antagonizing of the Hindu

minority during the 1965 war between India and Pakistan and the subsequent policy of Hindu extermination during the 1971 war. The third chapter, "Fracturing Pakistan, Forming Bangladesh: Class and Gender Insurgencies in the Time of 'Passive Revolution' in Akhteruzzaman Elias' *The Sepoy in the Attic* (*Chilekothar Sepai* 1987) and the Many 'Birangona' Stories in Shaheen Akhtar's *The Search* (2004)," simultaneously considers the Mass Revolution of 1969 and the 1971 war to trace the patriarchal underside of Bengali nationalism, which was an ideological force against the repressive Pakistan state. In the final chapter, "'Us' Beside 'Them,' Not 'Us' Versus 'Them': Cosmopolitan Imagination and Familial Reckoning of 1971 in Zia Haider Rahman's *In the Light of What We Know* (2014) and Kamila Shamsie's *Kartography* (2002)," I problematize the nationalized war narratives in present day Bangladesh and Pakistan. The chapter argues that the intricate network of South Asian kinships and diasporic belongings can create a cosmopolitan understanding of the 1971 war.

*Two Partitions*, therefore, argues that Bangladesh's historic emergence is intertwined with the Bengali Muslim adoption of two-nation theory during their participation in the Pakistan Movement before 1947, and their subsequent jettisoning of the idea of Pakistan in support of Bengali ethno-linguistic nationalism in postcolonial East Pakistan (1947-1970). Thereafter, the two ideas of belonging continue to inform the complex postcolonial identity of the citizens of Bangladesh.

To my family for their love and patience

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This dissertation is the result of my attempt to come to terms with the suffocating atmosphere generated by the never-ending bickering between Bangladesh's two nationalisms – Bengali nationalism and Bangladeshi nationalism. Both the nationalisms have a perverse influence on the lives of both Bangladeshi citizens and Bangladeshis of the diaspora. They are also sustained by the uneven and sometimes divisive memories of the generation that survived through the 1971 war. In fact, the interpretation of 1971 relies on two distinct responses to state-sponsored violence. Firstly, the Bengali nationalists interpret Bangladesh's history in relation to the atrocities committed by the Pakistan army and their collaborators, while the Bangladeshi nationalists frame their understanding of 1971 in relation to their post-war experience of anarchy and widespread chaos that overtook independent Bangladesh from 1972 to 1975. Regrettably, the decades following the war and post-independence disorder have also been mired by morbid violence and counter-violence, to which Bangladeshis have now grown an eerie familiarity with.

To navigate such a terrain of authoritarianism and periodic uncertainties, a scholar writing about Bangladesh must carefully yarn a critical narrative in the intersection of literature and history. *Two Partitions*, therefore, needed a committee that would not only be kind and caring, but also take the mantle of being scholarly guides to my quest for finding ways to critically situate Bangladesh beyond the two nationalisms. In this regard, I found a very supportive dissertation committee in Dr. Jyotsna Singh, Dr. Salah Hassan, Dr. A. Sean Pue and Dr. Cara Cilano, to whom I want to express my heartfelt gratitude.

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# Introduction

"Two Partitions: Postcolonial Culture and Nation in Bangladeshi and South Asian Anglophone Literatures" is a multilingual literary project focusing on the historical formation of Bangladesh, passing through a series of partitions, culminating in 1971. Within this historical process, by interrogating Anglophone and Bengali literatures – some of which are translations – I trace how Bangladesh's national identity has evolved through Bengal's partition in 1947, the East Pakistan experience from 1947 to 1971 and the 1971 war – known as the "Liberation War" in Bangladesh.[1] The project's overall argument is that the citizens of Bangladesh have inherited a complex postcolonial identity embodied in their participation in the demand for Pakistan before 1947, their reinventing Bengali ethno-linguistic identity as East Pakistan's residents from 1947 to 1971, and finally their responding to subordination and their experiences of the war in 1971 through which "Bangladesh" emerged as a nation. Subsequently, some major political upheavals in the immediate aftermath of 1971 have further transformed and divided the citizens of the country into followers of two divergent and dissonant narratives of nationhood. Competing against one another, these rigidly inscribed nationalist discourses have shaped Bangladeshis since. On the one side is the secular nationalism,[2] emerging out of the failed experiment of the Pakistan project and is rooted in the non-sectarian ideals of a political community in Bengal. The

[1] My literary project offers an insight into Bangladesh's formation. This project is simultaneously built on as well as a departure from contemporary scholarships on the 1947 Partition and the 1971 war (Mufti 2007; Cilano 2011; Jahanara Kabir 2013; Mookerjea-Leonard 2017).

[2] In contradiction to the two-nation theory, Bangladesh's founding constitutional principles, growing out of the bitter experiences of sectarian strife in Bengal and in post-1947 Pakistan, drew inspiration from the region's composite religious culture. In 1972, the nation adopted a constitution with the following preamble: "Pledging that the high ideals of nationalism, socialism, democracy and secularism, which inspired our heroic people to dedicate themselves to, and our brave martyrs to sacrifice their lives in, the national liberation of struggle; shall be the fundamental principles of the Constitution" (Bangladesh's Constitution of 1972, reinst. 1986 rev. 2014 9).

other is an Islamic nationalism,[3] like Pakistan's two-nation theory,[4] which at the onset of military dictatorship attempted to define Bangladesh by its Muslim heritage. This project illuminates the political and temporal realities of Bangladesh's two successive births in 1947 and in 1971; it tells the story of a layered national formation via the regional, national, and global literatures through which we can witness a multiplicity of voices and affiliations beyond Pakistan's "two nation" theory and the mutually exclusive Bangladeshi nationalisms.[5] These literary and cultural representations embody plural and multi-vocal "imagined communities" which counter and disrupt the singular narratives of the nation.

In *Two Partitions*, the literary archive I draw from articulates the heterogeneous narratives against reified nationalist narrations of Bangladesh's emergence in South Asia. I engage twentieth century and twenty-first century Bengali vernacular, Bangladeshi anglophone, and South Asian global novels to broadly contextualize the causes and impacts of the 1947 Partition. Next, my project further explores how 1971 contributed to similar forms of sectarianism, ethnic and religious divisions, as well as elicited new forms of marginalization of specific communities.

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[3] In the evolved present constitution, the role of Islam is designated in the following manner: "The state religion of the Republic is Islam, but the State shall ensure equal status and equal right in the practice of the Hindu, Buddhist, Christian and other religions" (Bangladesh's Constitution of 1972, reinst. 1986 rev. 2014 9). The present constitution thus guarantees rights of religious minorities; however, the Muslim faith of the majority is privileged as "state religion."

[4] Ayesha Jalal's seminal book *The Sole Spokesman: Jinnah, the Muslim League and the Demand for Pakistan* (1985) analyzes the demand for Pakistan as Muhammad Ali Jinnah's political project that framed South Asia's Muslims as a distinct national community. As the influence of the two-nation theory grew, it was endorsed by key political figures in Bengal including Huseyn Shaheed Suhrawardy. His *Memoirs* identifies the demand for Pakistan as essential to preserving the interest of South Asia's Muslims: "With the possibility of Home Rule and later independence being granted to India, the Muslims felt that unless they came to an understanding with the Hindus, who formed the major portion of the population of India, they would be crushed by the mill-stone of the Hindu majority" (100). Therefore, the two-nation theory emerged as a significant idea of Muslim nationhood.

[5] The War Crimes Tribunal initiated by the Bangladesh government in 2009 contributed to the escalation of the delicate relationship between Pakistan and Bangladesh – the citizens of the two nations also became embroiled in the conflict by lending support to the contradictory nationalist discourses in the cyberspace. This popular support for nationally sanctioned narratives in the two South Asian countries enunciates the threat of censoring many fragmented narratives posed by monolithic national discourses.

Subsequently, this project as a comparative undertaking of the vernacular and Anglophone literary traditions across the national borders of South Asia, is a study of a variety of literary works from 1956 to 2014, is also an exploration of the complex imaginings of Pakistan and Bangladesh and their relationship to official national discourses. Key works that I explore in this project, for example, Adwaita Mallabarman's *A River Called Titash* (1956), and Shaukat Osman's *Janani* (1958), are important to understand the impact of intercommunal relation in East Bengal. Following these novels in Chapter 1, I draw on other key literary works including Amitav Ghosh's *The Shadow Lines* (1988), Akhtaruzzaman Elias' *Chilekothar Sepai* (*The Sepoy in the Attic*, 1987), Dilruba Z Ara's Blame (2015), Shaheen Akhtar's *Talaash* (*The Search*, 2004), Kamila Shamsie's *Kartography* (2002) and Zia Haider Rahman's *In the Light of What We Know* (2014). When read alongside one another, the literary narratives constitute a discursive field marked by gaps and absences that the dominant, official discourses of nationalism – both in Bangladesh and Pakistan – repress or block off from interpretation.

Since these Bengali postcolonial narratives and the emergent and internationally recognized Bangladeshi, Indian and Pakistani Anglophone novels make visible plural identities and illuminate Bangladesh's birth through multiple postcolonial transformations, and thereby, offer multiple forms of individual and collective imaginings, I strategically define them as "contested narrations."[6] These literary narratives emphasize the fluidity of plural representations, which the one-dimensional narratives of the nation, national identity, and nationalism tend to blur or put in the margins. It should also be noted that some Bengali writers, canonized in Bangladesh's national culture, have reproduced a nationalist version of history in the cultural

[6] Contemporary Bangladeshi Anglophone literatures, following the vernacular tradition, have fictionalized the 1971 war. Similarly, Pakistani Anglophone writers depict the war in opposition to the nationally imposed silence regarding 1971. The project undertakes a comparative analysis of Bangladeshi and Pakistani Anglophone literatures.

arena by narrating commonplace and frequent stories of the war. Subsequently, they impose a sense of national self-aggrandizement in their writing when they highlight the 1971 war.

These literary narratives such as the novels like Anwar Pasha's *Rifle, Bread, Women* (1971), Selina Hossain's *Hangor Nodi Grenade* /*River of My Blood* (1976/2016) and Jahanara Imam's *Of Blood and Fire* (1986) are heavily inscribed in the nationalist cultural and political consciousness of Bangladesh, since they dramatically highlight the Pakistan army's violence against the Bengalis during the 1971 war. This project bypasses literary narratives of the Bengali nationalist persuasion by focusing on two major vernacular writers, Akhteruzzaman Elias and Shaheen Akhtar, who in their fictions address Bangladesh's emergence through the two partitions.

In *Two Partitions*, I offer the "contested narrations" as my literary framework to understand Bangladesh because the nation's emergence through the successive partitions of 1947 and 1971 is informed by political shifts encapsulating contradictory ideological processes. During the 1947 Partition, the Bengali Muslims resolutely supported the Muslim nationalism central to the formation of Pakistan. If the Bengali Muslims supported the "two-nation theory" that played a pivotal role in Pakistan's creation, they were soon disappointed.[7] In postcolonial

[7] According to the autobiography of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman – widely considered as the architect of Bangladesh's creation – the Muslims of Bengal felt a need to assert their Muslim religious identity over their Bengali ethnic identity before 1947: "I believed that we would have to create Pakistan and that without it Muslims had no future in our part of the world" (14-15). Rahman's articulation is echoed by Bangladesh's vernacular intellectuals active in the 1940s and 1950s. They also point out they were disillusioned with the new-born Pakistan no sooner than it was created. Abul Mansur Ahmad of the Bengal Muslim League argues in his memoir *Amar Dekha Rajnitir Ponchas Bochor*/ *Fifty Years of Politics As I Saw It* (1969) argues that the ruling class of Pakistan, including Jinnah, saw Bengalis as insignificant from the beginning of the nation's journey: "Neglect towards East Pakistan was not limited to land, property and wealth. Miserly attitude was shown when it came to recognizing the Bengali contribution to Pakistan's creation. Thus, Quaid-e-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah would only visit East Bengal, home to the majority of the Pakistanis, after 8 months of its creation" (*my trans.* 228). Others highlight the derailment of the democratic process in Pakistan. Huseyn Shaheed Suhrawardy, who became prime minister of undivided Bengal in 1946 and then prime minister of independent Pakistan in 1956, claims the West Pakistani ruling elites did not allow for democracy to function: "The course of politics in Pakistan, even since its creation on 14 August 1947, leads one irresistibly to the conclusion that it has been conditioned by the desire of those in real authority, the forces that actually determined the government policies and actions, to delay the introduction of democracy as long as possible

Pakistan, the nation's eastern wing with its Bengali Muslim majority remained marginalized. Subsequently, Bengalis participated in cultural and political movements, including the 1952 Language Movement, which evolved into a regional national identity and facilitated the growth and solidification of "Bengali nationalism."[8] Bengali vernacular intellectuals have captured the political shifts from 1947 to 1971 within the Pakistan territory.[9] The culmination of the Bengali nationalist struggle was the armed resistance against the Pakistan army in 1971.[10]

Known as the "Liberation War" in Bangladesh, the war in 1971 began on 25 March 1971, when Pakistan's military launched an offensive aimed to quell agitations in East Pakistan kick-starting episodes of violence and bloodbath. It was an outcome of several decades of deadlock between West Pakistan's irresolute civil-military junta and a spirited Bengali political leadership opposed to West Pakistani authoritarianism.[11] Furthermore, the immediate cause of this full-

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and, just when it was on the verge of fruition and all steps had been taken to enable it to function, to suppress it altogether" (*Memoirs* 77).

[8] Different interpretations exist amongst the vernacular scholars of Bangladesh, as they try to define the Bengali nationalism that took shape in East Pakistan. Salauddin F. Ahmed (1994) claims Bengalis were responding to safeguard their political and economic interests because "after the establishment of Pakistan the non-Bengali ruling elite sought to strengthen and perpetuate their [hegemonic] position [over the Bengalis] by resorting to various kinds of stratagem and machinations" (83). Rounaq Jahan (1994) argues that "the process of national disintegration [began] during the Ayub regime," as the military regime failed to keep the two wings of the nation together (142). Badruddin Umar (*Emergence vol. 1* 2004) opines that the nationalist movement did not promise any revolutionary change and was primarily a Bengali middle-class attempt to replace the non-Bengali middle-class as the society's ruling elite.

[9] Harun-or-Rashid's *The Foreshadowing of Bangladesh: Bengali Muslim League and Muslim Politics, 1906-1947* (2003), Badruddin Umar's *The Emergence of Bangladesh, Vol 1. & Vol.2* (2004), and Rounaq Jahan's *Pakistan: Failure in National Integration* (1994) trace the evolution of East Pakistan as a political entity through the Language Movement in 1952, the United Front's election victory in 1954, the mass demonstration against military authoritarianism in 1969, and Sheikh Mujibur Rahman led Awami League's election win in 1970.

[10] Besides articulating political dissent, Bengalis initiated an oppositional cultural project by adopting Tagore as the secular icon of East Pakistan's Bengalis. The Pakistan state responded with religious nationalism. West Pakistani officials banned Rabindranath Tagore's songs, once in 1965 and then in 1967, in the pretext that he was a Hindu.

[11] The political crisis in East Pakistan intensified after the military take-over of Pakistan in 1958. Ayub Khan, the military ruler of the country, introduced the Basic Democracy program to promote his development agenda, which widened the gap between East Pakistan and West Pakistan. With an aim to curb the influence of established political parties agitating for more democratic space in both the wings, Ayub Khan imposed the Martial Law. Consequently, the Awami League and its more youthful section led by the charismatic Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and the progressive left-wing parties began to protest authoritarianism. A major articulation was the 1966 Six Points demand, which was rejected by the West Pakistan's ruling class. Their opposition is captured in the following New York Times April 21, 1966 report: "Publication by Mr. [Sheikh Mujibur] Rahman of a six-point demand for autonomy, called 'Our

blown crisis was the military regime's refusal to accept Sheikh Mujibur Rahman as Pakistan's prime minister after his party Awami League won Pakistan's first general election held in 1970. Indeed, political differences were not sorted out amicably in postcolonial Pakistan; instead, the state took repressive measures that further escalated the tension in East Pakistan.[12] By sidelining a political solution to the problem, the state decided, the East Pakistan problem should be handled militarily.

1971 exposed the many strains of bitterness South Asia previously witnessed during the first partition. Sectarian and ethnic tensions of 1947 were fleeting but muzzled during the East Pakistan years, but in 1971, they broke loose. The Pakistani army did not hesitate to indiscriminately kill Bengalis, who were mostly Muslims.[13] Conflicts symptomatic of the 1947 Partition re-emerged as East Pakistan's non-Bengalis and Bengalis turned against one another, while the army's mass sporadic killings also targeted the Hindu minority of the region.[14] If ethnic and religious tensions resurfaced, so did the refugees who fled the ongoing violence across the border to India for safety. Furthermore, the incumbent Pakistan military, their Islamist allies, and

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Right to Live,' brought charges by the Ayub Government that he is a 'disruptionist' bent on wrecking the 'intergrity' of the nation" (*New York Times*).

[12] In his now famous "7th March Speech," Sheikh Mujibur Rahman urged East Pakistan's Bengalis to remain prepared for an armed resistance, as negotiations with the Pakistani authorities were leading to a dead-end. However, in the Pakistani official version, as is illustrated in *White Paper on The Crisis in East Pakistan* (1971), Bengalis are solely blamed for the crises in the nation: "Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and the other leaders of the Awami League . . . progressively escalated their demands, with complete disregard for the fact that their mandate was for autonomy within a Federation, even in terms of the League's own six points" (54).

[13] Bangladesh's official position, as is reflected in the casualty numbers mentioned in the Liberation War Museum website liberationwarmuseumbd.org: "Between March 25 and December 16, estimated 3 million Bengalees were killed, 2, 00, 000 women raped and 10 million were displaced."

[14] The Pakistan journalist, Anthony Mascarenhas, published an expose of the military operation in *The Sunday Times* on June 13, 1971, in which he used the term "genocide" to define the Pakistani military's actions in East Pakistan: "The pogrom's victims are not only the Hindus of East Bengal –who constitute about 10 percent of the 75 million population –but also many thousands of Bengali Muslims" ("Genocide"). Mascarenhas notes that two sets of ethnocides occurred in East Pakistan. It began with the killing of non-Bengalis by Bengalis, but, later, the Pakistan army and its allies started killing Bengali civilians on a mass scale. While the military attempted to annihilate the Bengalis, the state attempted to cover up the genocide: "The government of Pakistan has let the world know about that first horror. What is suppressed is the second and worse horror which followed when its own army took over the killing" ("Genocide").

in some cases, the Bengali insurgents committed many atrocities including sexual violence. The resulting trauma and the experiences of war-time violence have significantly shaped the Bangladeshis since the nation's birth in 1971.

When Bangladesh emerged as a free country after the nine months of war on 16 December 1971, another partition took place in South Asia this time, as Pakistan was now dismembered. Pakistan was created in 1947 to safeguard the interests of South Asia's Muslims but the nation's narrative of an inter-South Asian Muslim unity was eclipsed by the secular identity of Bangladesh's national formation. The identity of the new nation was based on the unity of Hindus and Muslims; therefore, it was imagined as a Bengali nation.

In post-1971 Bangladesh, political disunity returned amidst domestic turmoil as rivalry amongst the civil and the military factions contributed to subsequent political shifts in the 1980s. Islamists targeted the non-sectarian fabric of the nation, while the country's military regimes espoused an Islamic national identity that replaced secularism. Emblematic of the two-nation theory, a form of religious nationalism became powerful in Bangladesh's politics.[15] The effect of this transformation was the reestablishing of sectarianism to define socio-political identities in accordance with the 1947 Partition.

Insights into this ideological shift vividly emerge from the work of writers who have engaged with this socio-cultural transformation in literary narratives to invoke the two Partitions' legacy in the story of Bangladesh. For instance, Taslima Nasreen highlights the retaliatory violence against Hindus in Bangladesh at the onset of Babri masjid destruction in India in 1992

[15] According to the historian Willem van Schendel (2009) the religious nationalism of the 1980s mimicked the religious vision of Pakistani nationalism: "It did not see the creation of Pakistan as a misstep that had been rectified with the emergence of Bangladesh. On the contrary, it stated that the Bangladeshi nation was the ultimate manifestation of the delta's Muslim-Bengali identity, which had been maturing the during the British and Pakistan periods" (203). This nationalism sees "the delta's Muslim-Bengali identity" as part of the narrative of Muslim separatism that is the backbone of two-nation theory. This nationalism, known as Bangladeshi nationalism, prioritizes the Muslim identity of the Bangladeshi citizens.

in *Phera* (*Homecoming* 1993). She compares the situation of the Hindus in the 1980s Bangladesh to the insecurity of the minorities in post-1947 East Pakistan. Another major writer, Hasan Azizul Huq in *Agunpakhi* (translated as *The Firebird* in 2007), narrates the saga of a Muslim woman who refuses to migrate to East Pakistan from a Hindu dominated Bengali district that would become part of India in 1947. One of the most trenchant critiques of Pakistani nationalism and Bengal's partition is Akhteruzzaman Elias' *Khoabnama* (1996), a novel that portrays nationalism as a deception imposed on the peasantry.

While these literary engagements with history have produced rich counter-narratives of the historical partitions, it should be noted that, Bangladesh's official history excises the terms and conditions of the first partition (1947) that set the stage, prefigure, and even contribute to the major causes of the second partition (1971). Bangladesh's fractured rendering of history is achieved by remaining silent about 1947 and glorifying 1971.[16] The overwhelming presence of 1971 implies that Bangladesh's history began with independence, without the pivotal role of 1947. In fact, "remaining silent about [1947] partition and focusing on linearity and periodization enables civil society to close history, while fixing signposts leading up to 1971," as Nayanika Mookherjee (2015) has remarked. The official ideological conceptualization of Bangladesh does not consider 1971 as a pattern of partitioning induced by 1947 in the South Asian region.[17]

[16] This limitation in Bangladesh's nationalist historiography has been addressed of late during the 70th anniversary of the 1947 Partition. The prominent Bangladeshi English language newspaper *The Daily Star* published on 25 August 2017 a special edition on partition, in which the editor Mahfuz Anam mentions the forgetting of 1947 in the light of 1971's immediate visibility: "For us the history of our Liberation of 1971 appears to have completely overwhelmed our memory of 1947. Since Pakistan was an outcome of communal politics and Bangladesh that of nationalistic values, our feeling has been that there is very little for us to learn from the experiences of Partition." Anam's observation reflects the disappearance of 1947 to make way for the nationalistic values Bangladeshis draw from 1971. As a result, the ideologies of the "nation" and "nationalism" are further strengthened, without any reflection on how the first partition drew borders between the "self" and the "other."

[17] The section "Emergence of Bangladesh" in the "Liberation War Museum" website states that Partition "on the basis of religion" was "an unnatural separation of the Bengali society" which was "pluralistic." It describes the Pakistan era as oppressive without any mention of the complexity of Partition.

Instead, with its narrow focus on the cultural and political conflict between East Pakistan and West Pakistan, the national discourse fails to identify the connections between the human catastrophe of the 1947 partition and the genocidal designs of 1971. The nation's attempt to overemphasize 1971 as a distinct event of history and to relegate 1947 as unfit for the glorified narrative of national historiography erases as well as obscures stories reflective of the enduring influence of 1947.

My literary analysis broadly situates the war of 1971 in the context of Bengal's 1947 partition – when the Muslims of Bengal gave their support to buttress Pakistan's formation, and the political transformations in East Pakistan from 1947 to 1971. I mobilize fictional narratives that depict the adverse effect of nationalist politics on rural Bengal's subaltern communities at the time of the 1947 Partition, the marginalization of the Hindu communities in East Pakistan and their persecution during the 1971 War, the various dimensions of local politics besides Bengali nationalism and war time gendered violence and the war's aftereffect on the present-day Bangladeshi and Pakistani societies and their diaspora.

Overall, my cross-disciplinary undertaking draws from scholarly works in the disciplines of history, gender studies, political science, and anthropology to deepen and complicate my literary analysis, while I also generate conversations with scholarship traversing the following interdisciplinary areas: Postcolonial Studies, Partition Studies and South Asian Studies. *Two Partitions* therefore is a new contribution to literary scholarship interrogating South Asia's historic junctures including the 1947 Partition, and the 1971 War. To present my case of Bangladesh as a complex entity embedded in its historical formation through the 1947 Partition, the East Pakistan era (1947-1971) and the 1971 war, I read literatures through a methodological framework that combines historiography and postcolonial theory.

**Critical and Theoretical Foundations of the Project**

While founded on the major historical and theoretical works on nationalism and the nation-state that has had widespread currency in postcolonial studies, *Two Partitions* is also influenced by critical and literary projects having interdisciplinary currency. I draw from the early interventions, including Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities* (1983), Homi Bhabha's collection *Nation and Narration* (1990) and Partha Chatterjee's *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World* (1986) and its sequel *Nation and Its Fragments* (1993), that interrogate "nation" as a constructed entity, a "narrative," or a discourse and map the evolution of South Asian nations. Moreover, this project engages scholars who take up the case of Bengal's partition in 1947 in the light of Pakistan's fragmentation and Bangladesh's creation in 1971. While formed on the basis of ethno-linguistic Bengali nationalism, a complicated struggle for identity continues in Bangladesh even today. Therefore, my inquiry draws from scholarly studies that address Bangladesh's elusive quest for a homogeneous national identity and the nation's challenges in finding a balance between the conflicting definitions of belonging formed during its emergence through the two partitions.

The nation-state's struggle with inherent contradictions in its self-definitions is also explored by Ayesha Jalal (1985; 2014). Complicating Pakistani nationalism, Jalal (2014) argues that the nation has struggled to reconcile secular demands of the modern state with the imperatives of religion to construct a feasible national identity: "At the root of Pakistan's national identity crisis has been the unresolved debate on how to square the state's self-proclaimed Islamic identity with the obligations of a modern nation state" (12). The dominant national narrative of Pakistan was incapable of representing the multiplicity of sub-national

formations precipitating ethnic and religious tensions leading to Bangladesh's emergence in 1971.

Similarly, the tenuousness of Bangladesh's national political identity, which I study in this scholarship from a literary dimension, is the result of protracted cultural and political factors that contributed to the split national ambitions of the region's Hindus and Muslims leading up to 1947. In fact, recent scholarly works have addressed the complexity of Bengal's 1947 partition by re-conceptualizing the support for Pakistan among Bengal's Muslims.

Semanti Ghosh in *Different Nationalisms: Bengal 1905-1947* (2017) argues that the idea of Pakistan was one of the many different ideas of nationality that were competing with one another before Partition. In fact, for the Bengali Muslims, the political aspiration of Pakistan was not necessarily communal. According to Neilesh Bose's *Recasting the Region: Language, Culture, and Islam in Colonial Bengal* (2014), democratic struggle was at the heart of the national idea theorized in literary-cultural terms by the Muslims in Bengal. The ideological basis of this intellectual movement was modernization and inventing a liberating spirit through the domains of culture, but the region's Muslims were in favor of the Pakistan idea primarily because they identified with the communal angle of Muslim nationalism.

Since Partition Studies scholars are more focused on the intense and somewhat dramatic developments in Punjab and the Northern Indian side of the India-Pakistan border, the partitioning of Bengal province's two major religious entities Hindus and Muslims and their resulting communalization in 1947 – which in turn influenced the political transformation of East Pakistan, and later day Bangladesh – have received sparse scholarly attention thus far.[18]

[18] Scholarly works such as Vazira Fazila-Yacoobali Zamindar's *The Long Partition And the Making of Modern South Asia: Refugees, Boundaries, Histories* (2007) and Yasmin Khan's *The Great Partition: The Making of India and Pakistan* (2007) capture the major political transformations caused by the Partition including the flow of refugees from both the directions in India and Pakistan and the destruction of human lives and displacement of

The two distinct processes of communalization were powerful arbiters of Bengal's partition in 1947; they are explored by the following scholarly works: Taj ul-Islam Hashmi's *Pakistan as a Peasant Utopia: The Communalization of Class Politics in East Bengal, 1920-1947* (1992) and Joya Chatterji's *Bengal Divided: Hindu Communalism and Partition, 1932-1947* (1994). If the Pakistan Movement benefitted from the Muslim peasants' supporting the idea of a Muslim homeland in Bengal (Hashmi 1992), the sectarian Bengali *bhadralok* nationalists – who imagined Bengal as a Hindu nation and thereby abandoned the idea of coexistence with Muslims in a postcolonial polity – chose to join India in the hope of finding a monolithic nationality (Chatterji 1994). The enunciation of the 1947 Partition in these scholarly works provides the theoretical frame for the discussion of Adwaita Mallabarman's *A River Called Titash* (1956) and Shaukat Osman's *Janani* (1961) in Chapter 1, where I offer a critique of nationalism that impinge on Hindu-Muslim coexistence by splitting up communities in the rural society.

It should be noted that significant lacunae exist in the conceptualization of East Pakistan's transformation since the 1947 Partition through the politically turbulent decades when we see the emergence of Bengali nationalism up to the time of the war of 1971. And yet, scholarly interventions – prompted by the War Crimes Tribunal, a prosecution court set up by the Bangladeshi government to try the collaborators of the Pakistan army – have prioritized examination of sexual violence perpetrated by the warring sides and their hyper-masculine nationalisms in 1971.

Bina D'Costa's *Nationbuilding, Gender and War Crimes in South Asia* (2011), Yasmin Saikia's *Women, War, and the Making of Bangladesh: Remembering 1971* (2011) and Nayanika

millions. the enormity of gendered violence in Punjab during the 1947 Partition has also been the focus of South Asian feminist scholarship (Bhutalia 1998; Bhasin and Menon 1998; Das 2007).

Mookherjea's *The Spectral Wound: Sexual Violence, Public Memories, and the Bangladesh War of 1971* (2015) contextualize Bangladesh's creation in 1971 by examining the sanctioning of atrocities on gendered and sexualized identities within the framework of the political dynamics of South Asian partitions.[19] D'Costa (2011) blames gendered violence and the marginalization of the birangona as reflecting the exclusionary practices of the nation. Saikia (2011) argues that the Pakistan army utilized sexual violence and orchestrated rape against the Hindu minority and the ordinary Bengali women, as did the militias (*mukti*) of the Bengali insurgency as a retaliatory strategy against the Urdu-speaking non-Bengali Muslim women. On the other hand, Mookherjea (2015) has claimed, the competing internal political dynamic of Bangladesh is significant to understand how the ruling elite control memories of sexual violence. She stresses the need to "comb" history to find narratives silenced or utilized by the various state actors. These scholarly perspectives inform my analysis of the depiction of the war heroines in literature in Chapter 3, where I close read Shaheen Akhtar's *Talaash* to draw attention to the complex connection between nationalism, gendered violence and the quest for justice against atrocities committed in 1971.

My case, however, is a significant expansion of the trajectory of the two partitions elaborating on and moving beyond previous cultural and literary scholarship, which include the following: Aamir Mufti's *Enlightenment in the Colony: The Jewish Question and the Crisis of Postcolonial Culture* (2007), Cara Cilano's *National Identities in Pakistan: The 1971 War in Contemporary Pakistani Fiction* (2011), Ananya Jahanara Kabir's *Partition's Post-Amnesias: 1947, 1971 and Modern South Asia* (2013) and Debali Mookerjea-Leonard's *Literature, Gender,*

[19] The link between gender and war time sexual violence is traced in these works in the context of aggressive South Asian nationalisms. They are also in conversation with Sharmila Bose (2011) whose study of the 1971 War caused much controversy, while critiques contended if hers was an attempt to dismiss the atrocities committed by the Pakistan army (Mohaiemen 2011).

*and the Trauma of Partition: The Paradox of Independence* (2017). Cumulatively, these works of literary and cultural studies have generated a complex discursive field within which we map and analyze the fault-lines of the nation formation of "Bangladesh." Via diverse and varying perspectives, they question the dominant nationalist narratives and reclaim the marginalized communities as a significant marker of a dialogic understanding of South Asia. While they offer a useful template for my discussion, my project charts the unique conditions integral to Bangladesh's creation through the two partitions.

As I contextualize the creation of Bangladesh by focusing on a range of texts, the literary angles emphasize multiple possibilities of belonging and question the divisive ideological spaces including religion and nationalism. I postulate that the arbitration of the two partitions in the Bangladeshi identity formation is complex; therefore, many Bengalis emphasized religion in 1947, when they identified with the idea of Pakistan as a vindication of their Muslim identity, but, in 1971, they adopted an ethno-cultural identity and inspired the emergence of a new nation, Bangladesh.

Nationalization of a particular language at the cost of other languages has added to the crisis of the South Asian nation-states, Mufti's (2007) project tells us. Urdu's nationalization in Pakistan was undertaken to buttress the process of national identity formation in the country. However, the literature produced in the language has maintained a tenuous relation with nationalism and national identity, Mufti argues, by drawing examples of Saadat Hasan Manto and Faiz Ahmed Faiz. Their literary works opposed the hegemonic idea of Pakistan by exhibiting an exilic characteristic, thus, refusing to comply with the nationalizing process.

Though Mufti suggests Urdu has an uneasy relation to Pakistan's national identity, he fails to mention that nationalizing of Urdu in fact triggered the political crisis in East Pakistan.

Mufti does not discuss the question of the Bengali language, the culmination of which was the Language Movement in postcolonial Pakistan. The Bengali-speaking middle-class inherited a formidable Bengali literary tradition that played a key role in the formation of an oppositional political consciousness. While its development was gradual, it drew strength from the Pakistani ruling elite's neglecting the well-being of the provinces.[20] Mufti does not discuss the role of Bengali linguistic nationalism in the break-up of Pakistan in 1971.

In contrast to Mufti, Cara Cilano (2015) illuminates the struggle within Pakistan to come to terms with the loss of East Pakistan as well as the violence committed by the army in 1971. Through her close readings of Anglophone fictions on the conflict, Cilano contends that the outcome of the war influenced the Pakistani society. Her work mostly relies on Anglophone novels and does not address the important events leading up to the inter-regional conflict.

Debali Mookerjea-Leonard (2017) addresses within a limited framework the struggle between East Pakistan and West Pakistan. Her book promises to incorporate East Bengali narratives but focuses mostly on Indian perspectives of the forced migration of the Bengali Hindus from East Pakistan to India. Concentrating on the dominant Partition theme of trauma and displacement, Mookerjea-Leonard contributes to an already existing body of writing on West Bengal, which describes the uprooting of East Bengal's Hindus. While the Bangladeshi novels, Nasreen's *Phera* and Haq's *Agunpakhi*, are incorporated, Mookerjea-Leonard does not discuss the Bengali Muslim support for Pakistan.

Ananya Jahanara Kabir (2013) addresses the 1971 war as an aftereffect of the 1947 Partition. Her work explores the shared South Asian identities captured in films, literatures,

[20] Understanding Bangladesh's emergence from a literary perspective should take notice that the first political crisis defining Bengali opposition to the Pakistani state was around the question of language. On Jinnah's insistence that 'Urdu' should be the state language of Pakistan, Bengalis demanded that 'Bangla' should also be made state language. After the brutal crackdown of protesting students on 21 February 1952, the state recognized Bangla.

archeology, folk traditions, museums as well as family memoirs. Ananya Kabir deploys "post-amnesia [which] strives to retrieve" and then articulate "that which had initially to be forgotten," (31) but does not fully explore the complexity of the Bengali nationalism and anti-state insurgency as a connecting factor between the partitions of 1947 and 1971.

Therefore, while Mufti (2007) leaves out East Pakistan in his discussion of Pakistan's postcolonial crisis, Cilano (2011) relies on Anglophone fictions to address the war's legacy in Pakistan without discussing the novels exploring the dynamic political transformation of East Pakistan leading up to the war. Similarly, Mookerjea-Leonard (2017) and Ananya Kabir (2013) offer a limited perspective of the fictional works integral to understand East Pakistan's transition to Bangladesh and the limited cultural exchange between the citizens of the two countries since 1971.

My work has taken up the gaps in the abovementioned projects, as I move beyond their findings and claims to offer a more dynamic reading of both vernacular and Anglophone novels. My literary analysis highlights intricate narratives including the fissures, gaps, absences, "othered" identities, and oppressed voices and delineates historic complexities largely unknown outside of Bangladesh and have thus far been ignored in scholarship. The literatures I study belong to three distinct literary categories.

**Literary Categories: Bengali Vernacular, Bangladeshi Anglophone, and South Asian Global Literatures**

My project draws from an older debate – very recently revived – regarding the necessity to address non-Western literatures alongside Western literatures. My case is built on the iterations of Gayatri Spivak in *Death of a Discipline* (2003) and Aamir Mufti in *Enlightenment in the Colony: The Jewish Question and the Crisis of Postcolonial Culture* (2007) and *Forget*

*English! Orientalisms and World Literatures* (2016). They have argued that languages of the Global South cannot be ignored in global literary studies.[21] Therefore, I interrogate literatures that complicate our understanding of the postcolonial by comparatively considering vernacular and Anglophone novels from Bangladesh with the more internationally accessible tradition of South Asian English language literature. Since English is a dominant language in the South Asian context, Anglophone literary works often enjoy hierarchical prominence but also provide useful insights into the world of the unfamiliar local milieu.[22] In the context of the rapid worldwide circulation of diasporic Anglophone texts, the diverse literary works in the South Asian languages, many which are not available in translation, have far more limited readership, but in fact constitute the basis for sustaining national literary traditions.

A solution to the problem of the invisibility of South Asian vernacular literatures is to invoke the "postcolonial" model of literary studies, which having contributed to the globalization of South Asia's literary culture, also focus on the socio-political-cultural milieu of the partitioned national spaces of South Asia. Of particular significance is the tradition of Bengali literature, which has strengthened the theoretical intricacies of postcolonialism, argues Auritro Majumder (2016).

In fact, Bengali literature is immensely significant to the imagining of Bangladesh. Two major movements in East Pakistan substantiate the cultural politics of the vernacular tradition. Precipitated by Muhammad Ali Jinnah's derogatory remarks about the Bengali language, the

[21] While Spivak in *Death of a Discipline* (2003) talks about "a careful reading of literature coming out of 'the Third World,' with attention to language and idiom and respect for their grafting," (66) Mufti pleads for an overhaul of *postcolonial literature* by accepting "the challenge of undoing the Eurocentric structure of its knowledge forms and incorporating non-Western literary traditions on something like an equal footing" (*Enlightenment* 33).
[22] South Asian postcolonial literatures, according to Mufti (2007), offer "critique of the 'settled' forms of thinking and social imagination associated with nationalism and the nation-state," though the tradition signifies "the elite location and elite-making function of English, language and literature, as a formation in Indian [Pakistani and Bangladeshi] society since the colonial times" (245). The tensions created by the attempt to establish a proper definition can be located in my readings of the novels in this project.

Language Movement of 1952, memorialized as "Ekushey" in Bangladesh, was the first significant event to give credence to Bengali ethno-linguistic nationalism.[23] Another Bengali cultural front came into visibility in East Pakistan when Tagore was adopted as a secular icon by the Bengali cultural activists and vernacular intellectuals to oppose the two-nation theory of Pakistan. In 1961, the vernacular intellectuals decided to celebrate Tagore's 100th birthday with pomp in East Pakistan.[24] Tagore became the representative of a shared heritage endeared by East Pakistan's Bengalis and the Bengalis of India. Both the Language Movement and the influence of Tagore have shaped the vernacular literary culture.

In fact, Bangladeshi Bengali vernaculars is often imbued with the language of protest. Prominent writers – examples of some of their works include Zahir Raihan's *Different Spring* (translation of *Arek Bosonto*), Akhteruzzaman Elias' *Sepoy in the Attic* (*Chilekothar Sepai*) and Shaheedul Jahir's *Jibon O Rajnoitik Bastobota* – have captured the many political struggles of the delta by presenting them in the language of dissent. The current project considers these works alongside the emergent tradition of English writing from Bangladesh and South Asian postcolonial literatures.

In contradiction, the trend among South Asian literary scholars is to privilege English novels by neglecting the local language literatures.[25] Literary and cultural scholarship, heavily reliant on the English novels, has its limitations. Moreover, at a time when the assertive and hegemonic term "Global Anglophone" has become a marker of academic hiring procedures, the

[23] In a speech "National Consolidation" delivered during a public meeting in Dhaka, Jinnah declared that Urdu is unequivocally at the center of Pakistan's national identity (*Jinnah: Speeches and Statements 1947-1948* 150).
[24] Both Ayesha Jalal (2014) and Willem van Schendel (2009) point out Tagore's symbolic significance to the Bengali nationalist movement in East Pakistan. In fact, the growing popularity of Tagore among the Bengali middle-class Muslims was not well received by the military regime of Pakistan, argues Bengali vernacular intellectual Anisuzzaman (2008).
[25] Aijaz Ahmad (1992), Graham Huggan (2001) and Tabish Khair (2001) critique the global circulation of the Anglophone postcolonial South Asian novels. Priyamvada Gopal's *The Indian English Novel: Nation, History and Narration* (2009) is a contemporary iteration of these earlier works.

relationality between the more privileged status of the Anglophone and the invisibility of peripheral literary languages requires interrogation.[26] In order to diversify scholarly conversations on South Asian literature, I examine both the Bengali language literary tradition and the Anglophone culture to understand South Asian nationalisms and the many identities they obfuscate.[27]

Therefore, the literatures I analyze in *Two Partitions* complicate and challenge the rigidity of official narratives and offer a more complex vision of national identity formation; they delineate different voices drawn from comparative and transnational perspectives. For instance, the novels of Adwaita Mallabarman and Shaukat Osman depict Bengal's Partition of 1947 and its after-effect by considering a network of societal and political transformations, in opposition to uniform ideas of nationhood. As "contested narrations," Amitav Ghosh's *The Shadow Lines* and Dilruba Z Ara's *Blame* foreground plural identities including Hindu-Muslim cooperation in the face of adversities. Similarly, the Bengali novels, Akhteruzzaman Elias' *The Sepoy in the Attic* (1995) and Shaheen Akhtar's *The Search* (translation of *Talaash* 2004), capture East Pakistan's political transformation, the 1971 war and its lingering effect on the newly formed Bangladesh. Also, a comparative study of Zia Haider Rahman's *In the Light of What We Know* (2014) and Kamila Shamsie's *Kartography* (2002), contemporary Bangladeshi and Pakistani global novels respectively, suggests the continuity of the life-shaping experiences of the 1971 war on the citizens of Bangladesh and Pakistan. In *Two Partitions*, these literary representations

[26] Nalini Iyer and Amritjit Singh, the editors of a *Comparative Literature Studies* volume on South Asia, posit that incorporation of non-English South Asian literatures can decolonize an Anglo-centric understanding of South Asia. I argue that this task is more crucial in the case of examining the partitions of 1947 and 1971 from a Bangladeshi point-of-view.

[27] Ulka Anjaria's *Realism in the Twentieth-Century Indian Novel: Colonial Difference and Literary Form* (2012), Ananya Jahanara Kabir's *Partition's Post-amnesias: 1947, 1971 and Modern South Asia* (2013), and Debali Mookherjea-Leonard's *Literature, Gender and the Trauma of Partition: The Paradox of Independence* (2016) engage South Asian language literatures besides the Anglophone to present a more complicated understand of the literary "postcolonial."

subsequently capture the contingency of the political and socio-economic factors and the manifold identity formation elements that inform people's experiences of the historical shifts in 1947 and 1971.

While they articulate a spectrum of cultural politics, these literatures also represent three distinct literary categories: "Bengali vernacular," "Bangladeshi Anglophone" and "South Asian Global." These broad conceptual categories are useful to explore the multi-layered stories of 1947 and 1971. They also capture how the national culture of the Bengal region, and more specifically Bangladesh, evolved, while they offer a broader understanding of the partitions' impact on South Asia's literary landscape.

The term "Bengali vernacular" refers to the Bengali language literary tradition that began as a response to colonial modernity in British India, while the language was being evolved into its modern form under the influence of British missionaries as well as native educationalists including Raja Ram Mohan Roy (1772-1833) and Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar (1820-1891) (Kaviraj 2014). In the colonial times, works of novelists, such as, Peary Chand Mitra, Kaliprasanna Sinha, and Bankimchandra Chatterji pioneered modern Bengali literature.

Later, Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941) enriched the tradition by producing novels, poetry, and dramas of distinction, which explore the complex societal changes at a time when European-styled commerce and education transformed the orthodox culture of the upper-caste Hindu Bengali household. Considered canonical in the two Bengals across India and Bangladesh, these literatures have developed a settled character of a transnational kind. Moreover, they have evolved distinctively after the Partition of 1947. These literatures capture the plural experiences of 1947 by rendering Bengal's partition from different perspectives.

The vernacular novels written by the Bengali writers, who are also Indian nationals, respond to 1947 by referring to Hindu migration from East Bengal to India and lamenting the loss of homeland in their works. Some of these works include Ashapurna Devi's *Mittirbari* (1947) and Manik Bandopadhyay's *Swadhinatar Swad* (1951). The Bengali Muslim writers, on the other hand, examined the Muslim nationalism of Pakistan by interpreting their Bengali identity in conjunction with the postcolonial realities of post-1947 East Pakistan (Bose 2014). Authors of Bengali Muslim background accepted the creation of Pakistan, though some of these works lament the bitterness between Bengali's Hindu and Muslim communities (Zaman 2001). These include Abul Fazl's *Ranga Probhat* (1957), Shahidulla Kaiser's *Sangsaptak* (1965) and Abu Rushd's *Nongor* (1967). These sets of novels belong to the rich archive of Partition literatures, but many more fictions exist that cannot be subjected to easy categorization.

For example, scholars do not consider the literatures tracing the disintegration of inter-communal harmony and its effects on the subaltern in the villages of Bengal as narratives of the partition.[28] Adwaita Mallabarman's *A River Called Titash* and Shaukat Osman's *Janani* aestheticize the intricate intercommunal harmony and religious coexistence in East Bengal's rural society, which was adversely impacted by Partition. Included in my project as examples of "contested narrations," the novels also reject the nationalizing of religious communities by espousing a shared cultural space of belonging.

While 20th Century Bengali novels have dealt with the human tragedy of the 1947 Partition – by often taking a transnational form traversing the border between postcolonial India

[28] Debali Mookerjea-Leonard's *Literature, Gender, and the Trauma of Partition: The Paradox of Independence* (2017), Debjani Sengupta's *The Partition of Bengal: Fragile Borders and New Identities* (2015) and Niaz Zaman's *A Divided Legacy: the Partition in Selected Novels of India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh* (2000) suggest that the impact of the separation of Bengal in 1947 was slower compared to the explosion of violence in Punjab but this protracted partitioning of the eastern borders remain much less understood.

and Pakistan – a trend of resistance literature was shaped by the Bengali intelligentsia in Pakistan. Inspired by the 1952 Language Movement, this formative "Bengali" literary culture attempted to outgrow the marginalization of the Bengali language. In their emphatic depictions of East Pakistan's political transition – from a neglected Pakistani province to a battleground between the Bengali nationalists and the West Pakistani ruling elite – is captured the resurgent spirit of Bengali literature.

Different literary forms including poetry, prose, short stories, novels, and plays depict the human experiences of Bangladesh's emergence through East Pakistan and the war. Some of these works locate the continuity of class struggle in rural East Pakistan which began in the 1940s, the composition of the guerilla struggle and its influence on the urban populace, and gendered violence committed by the Pakistan army and their allies during 1971.

In post-1971 Bangladesh, major Bengali literary works have depicted the shared links between 1971 and Bengal's partition of 1947. Therefore, they complicate much of the earlier accounts of the post-1947 Bengali Muslim writers by offering a scathing perspective of the Partition. Since 1971 saw a further escalation of the Muslim-Hindu division and precipitated the conflict between the Bengali and non-Bengali Urdu speaking ethnicities of East Pakistan, writers have probed into the new realities of the first Partition of South Asia. In fact, experience of existing divisions has sharpened and has instigated a more trenchant sense of difference between the partitioned communities.

Mahmudul Haque's *Kalo Borof* (1995), translated by Mahmud Rahman as *Black Ice* (2012), Akhteruzzaman Elias' *Khoabnama* (1996), Hasan Azizul Haque's *Agunpakhi* (2006), and Shawkat Ali's trilogy *Dhakkhinayoner Din* (1986) reassess Bengal's partition by reflecting on ethnic and religious tensions that significantly evolved into a full-fledged war in 1971. In fact,

the partitions of 1947 and 1971 impinge on the literary legacy of the Bengali speaking communities around the world.

Being a Bangladeshi means one's authorial identity is defined by nation-ness, though other forms of identities have also shaped the "Bangladeshi" experience. Bangladeshis carry the legacy of multiple forms of identities. Before 1947 they were the subjects of British India; afterwards, they became citizens of postcolonial Pakistan in the aftermath of the first partition. Yet, in 1971, they became citizens of a liberated nation "Bangladesh" when South Asia witnessed a second partition, after a nine month's war, which was a culmination of an enduring political struggle undertaken by East Pakistan's Bengalis to voice their marginalization in Pakistan. This new-found identity and its attendant tensions mark the tradition of Bangladeshi English language writing.

Inchoate in comparison to the more illustrious Indian writing in English, as well as formative, if placed alongside the already promising Pakistani writing in English, the literary corpus is contextualized in *Two Partitions* as "Bangladeshi Anglophone," a new and more developing category. Some Bangladeshi Anglophone novelists inspect 1947 and 1971 by paying attention to the postcolonial fallouts and the politically charged divisions of South Asia. They challenge nationalisms and national borders by interrogating Bangladesh's emergence from a wider regional and global context. For example, Tahmima Anam's *The Golden Age* (2007) captures the struggles of the Hindu minority, who suffered persecution during the 1971 war. The novel depicts the plight of Mrs. Sengupta, whose family is killed in 1971. Syed Manzurul Islam's *The Song of Our Swampland* (2011) describes a boat, like the biblical ark of Noah, with human lives in all its diversity trying to survive the war of 1971. The novel's presentation of the circuitous journeys of human lives allegorizes 1971 as a repeat of the human tragedy of 1947. I

put these Anglophone novels in conversation with the Pakistani and the Indian Anglophone traditions in *Two Partitions*.

It should be noted, while I have categorized the Anglophone tradition of the Indian subcontinent into "Bangladeshi Anglophone" and "South Asian Global," both the categories include writers – for example, Amitav Ghosh and Zia Haider Rahman – who see the South Asian nations through a global lens. Living in the West, they offer a transnational perspective in their novels, while they identify a connection between South Asia's religious and ethnic fragmentations in the aftermath of the partitions and global migrancy. Again, some writers, including the Bangladeshi Anglophone writer, Dilruba Z. Ara, and the Pakistani novelist, Kamila Shamsie, simultaneously live in the West and in South Asia. While Ara sketches the political complexities such as the persecution of the Hindus in East Pakistan, Shamsie depicts a crisis-ridden post-1971 Karachi with simmering social tensions, where the Urdu speaking migrants feel alienated like the Bengalis did before 1971.

These global novels address the many newer dimensions of ideological conflicts and ethnic clashes in the South Asian milieu by considering them as legacies of the partitions of 1947 and 1971. For example, Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* (1982), a canonical postcolonial novel on the partitions of South Asia, illustrates how nations try to forcefully contain the enunciation of multiplicities by maintaining their territorial borders.[29] In addition, the "South Asian Global" novels engage the political shifts in the region by elucidating their transnational ramifications in the diaspora and in the globalized world.[30] Therefore, the global movement of

[29] Some of the other notable authors including Anita Desai, Bapsi Sidhwa, Rohinton Mistry and Amitav Ghosh reflect on the partitions and nation formation by challenging nationalist discourses.

[30] Mrinalini Chakravorty's *In Stereotype: South Asia in the Global Literary Imaginary* (2014) posits that stereotypes of South Asians are often deployed in globally circulated literatures to appeal to the readers. The South Asian Global novels I deploy to examine the partitions engage South Asian societies and politics from a nuanced point-of-view. They also remain attentive to issues like the migrants the West and human connectivity in the globalized world.

the South Asians, as immigrants or as diasporic collectives, are central to their narratives. My engagement of the "Bangladeshi Anglophone" and "South Asian Global" novels complicates the developing concept "Global Anglophone."[31]

**Chapter Breakdown**

To complicate the dominant nationalisms, each of the chapters highlight people's lived experiences that inform the many configurations of belonging during specific historic moments. My work is an attempt to understand these moments integral to Bangladesh's creation through literary analysis. In Chapter 1, I track the pioneering idea of a "United Bengal," a non-sectarian alternative vision of nationhood, propositioned by Huseyn Shaheed Suhrawardy and Sarat Bose, to counter the nationalisms propagated by the Bengal Congress and the Muslim League. In Chapter 2, I focus on the hostility against East Pakistan's Hindu minority, particularly during the 1965 India-Pakistan war and during the 1971 war, when the Pakistan army singled them out for persecution. Chapter 3 documents the various insurgencies of the late 1960s leading up to the war and highlights the connection between hyper-masculine nationalism and sexual violence. Cosmopolitan and diasporic novels are counter-narratives to nationalism and nationally defined identities, I argue in Chapter 4, which also highlights the post-1971 tensions between Bangladesh and Pakistan. Thus, I problematize the tendency to understand Bangladesh's historic emergence through the framework of the dominant nationalisms by adopting a literary approach that offers many more narratives and encapsulates multiple identities.

[31] The necessity to complicate the term Global Anglophone is invoked by Nasia Anam (2018), who argues that the metropolitan circulation of Global novels obscures the often-complex literary histories of non-Western, postcolonial world. I point out that the South Asian Anglophone novels should be simultaneously addressed with the vernacular to fully understand the historic moments integral to the postcolonial emergence of Bangladesh.

In Chapter 1, I analyze the subaltern life-worlds of rural and a "deltaic" East Bengal portrayed in Adwaita Mallabarman's *A River Called Titash* (*Titash Ekti Nodir Naam,* 1956) and Shaukat Osman's *Janani* (1961). The two Bengali novels in translation engage the subaltern classes in their narratives to depict the complex relation between the rural communities and the different nationalisms in East Bengal. By reading the projection of non-sectarian life-worlds in the novels, I argue that they are cultural embodiments of the political idea of a United Bengal. Opposed to the nationalisms in vogue during the Partition, they complicate the notion of "imagined communities" (Anderson 1983) and offer us "heterogeneous imaginations" (Chakrabarty 2000). By drawing from the works of Taj ul Islam Hashmi (1992), Joya Chatterji (1994) and the scholars of the Subaltern Studies Collective, I read these works alongside the literary archive of Bengal's 1947 Partition and critique the impact of sectarian national politics on the rural subaltern classes. I argue that the novels are premised on a non-sectarian notion of belonging, as they articulate an opposition to the partitioning of Hindu and Muslim cultures. They also echo the national culture imaginatively reinvented by the proponents of Bengali nationalism through their political struggles during the East Pakistan era (1947-1971).

The fallouts of the 1947 Partition would bear consequences for the Hindu minority of Pakistan. For generations, they had shared their lives with the Bengali-speaking Muslims but in East Pakistan they were "othered." Chapter 2 discusses their plight by engaging two Anglophone novels, Amitav Ghosh's *The Shadow Lines* (1988) and Dilruba Z. Ara's *Blame* (2015). The chapter connects the oppression of East Pakistan province's Hindus with the anti-India posture of Pakistani nationalism during the 1960s. Ghosh's novel, I argue, illustrates the dangers posed by nationalism. After Tham'ma had witnessed Tridib's murder in East Pakistan, where she travels to fetch her uncle from their "home" in old Dhaka, she begins to hate the Bengali Muslims.

Tham'ma's initiative to rescue the uncle stranded in East Pakistan coincides with the 1964 riots, and her uncle, who refuses to leave East Pakistan, becomes a silenced story in *The Shadow Lines*. Ara recasts the uncle's silence through a different set of Hindu characters including the siblings, Gita and Santo. Enmity towards the Hindus around the time of the 1965 war is captured in the derogatory attitude towards the Hindus in Laila's Muslim family. Gita and Santo are gradually accepted during 1971, when Hindus are disenfranchised again, but they also became part of Bangladesh's fabric by joining the war and making sacrifice.

In Chapter 3, I focus on the depiction of "Unoshotturer Gano Abhuthan" (the Mass Movement of 1968-1969) in Akhtaruzzaman Elias' *Chilekothar Sepai* (*The Sepoy in the Attic*, 1987) and the fictionalization of gendered violence that occurred during the1971 war in Shaheen Akhtar's *The Search* (Translation of *Taalash* 2004). If Elias' novel presents the various sites of political struggle in East Pakistan, they are set in the backdrop of a gendered Bengali nationalism. I use Partha Chatterjee's classic postcolonial notion of "passive revolution" to study the urban and rural political resistances to argue that the mass protests that eventually toppled the military regime present manifold class struggles, as they expose nationalism's hypermasculine side too. If the insurgency has become a political force against the repressive Pakistan state, it has also exposed its patriarchal underside. I draw on these masculine aspects to read the complicated terrain of gendered and sexual violence in Akhtar's *The Search* (2004).

Hyper-masculinist South Asian nationalisms sanction and perpetuate gendered violence, argued Yasmin Saikia (2011) and Nayanika Mookherjee (2015), which is also reflected in Pakistan army's utilization of sexual violence against the Hindu minority and ordinary Bengali women. If the Bengali insurgency in *The Sepoy in the Attic* (1987) precipitated the fall of Ayub Khan regime, in Akhtar's *The Search* (2004) a few of the heroic insurgents are also perpetrators

of rape against women. Nationalism has prompted them to retaliate against non-Bengali Muslim women.

If the national narratives articulate the "self"/ "other" binary, a comparative discussion of Bangladeshi and Pakistani Anglophone literatures offers us a framework to heal the wounds resulting from 1971. In Chapter 4, I discuss two Global Anglophone novels, Zia Haider Rahman's *In The Light of What We Know* (2014) and Kamila Shamsie's *Kartography* (2002), in which the central characters are shaped by 1971. In Rahman's novel, a narrator of Pakistani ethnicity traces Zafar's origin to the story of Bangladesh's creation, when his biological mother was raped by a Pakistani army. Fascinated with maps, Zafar participates in the rebuilding of post 9/11 Afghanistan. While his romance with Emily is failing, Zafar continues to probe how his life-story is connected to 1971, which is intermingled with the Pakistani narrator's fascination with the tale of Zafar's triumph and tragedy. On the other hand, Shamsie's *Kartography* depicts the world of Raheen, who realizes she is defined by the alteration of the nation's map in 1971. Growing up in Pakistan's uncertain political climate, Raheen wonders, "Why *did* I keep harping on maps? How had they become the symbol of everything that had gone so wrong, so inexplicably in my relationship with Karim?" (163). Raheen discovers that in 1971 her father became separated from Maheen, a Bengali, who is her beloved Karim's mother too. She also realizes her love for Karim is somehow contingent upon the incidents that happened in 1971. By engaging theories of cosmopolitanism, I argue that the two novels oppose nationally imposed identities by drawing a connection between the intricate network of South Asian kinship and diasporic belongings (Robbins 1998; Appiah 2006).

## Conclusion

*Two Partitions* attempts to address Bangladeshi literary culture's marginality in contemporary world literature, as much as it is informed by the tension between the globalist ambitions of Anglophone literature produced by South Asian writers and the vast corpus of vernacular Bengali literary narratives. My comparative engagement of Bengali literary narratives, Bangladeshi Anglophone, and South Asian Global novels has generated an in-depth study of Bangladesh's complex postcolonial emergence through the historical partitions of 1947 and 1971. By inscribing three literary cultures, the Bengali vernaculars, the Bangladeshi Anglophone, and the canonical and emergent South Asian global novels, I have been able to depict a protracted decolonial struggle and Bangladesh's creation through Bengal's 1947 Partition and the war of 1971, whose legacy is evident in the nation's turbulent political history since 1971 and its intra-South Asian relations with neighboring India and Pakistan.

Chapter 1: Counter-Imaginations of Partition: East Bengal and Peasant Identities in Adwaita Mallabarman's *A River Called Titash* (1956) and Shaukat Osman's *Janani* (1961)

## Introduction

Bengali novels depicting the rural countryside in the heels of the 1947 Partition has thus far been neglected by literary scholars interrogating Partition. As noteworthy contributions to this literary tradition, Adwaita Mallabarman's *A River Called Titash* (*Titash Ekti Nodir Naam* 1956) and Shaukat Osman's *Janani* (1961) represent the Hindu and Muslim peasant life-worlds of the deltaic rural East Bengal region.[32] As a monolithic national narrative favoring the Muslim identity of the region's peasants contended with an emergent Hindu nationalism increasingly intolerant of Muslims, tensions between the Hindus and Muslims flared up in the villages.[33] The intricate dimension of Hindu-Muslim bonding among the pre-partition peasantry was threatened due to the intrusion of division-inducing nationalist politics.

Mallabarman's *A River Called Titash* (1956) and Osman's *Janani* (1961) give cultural shape to the religious harmony in rural Bengal, even as it was being ruined by nationalist emphasis on communal religious difference during the transition from the colonial to the postcolonial.[34] These novels are "contested narrations" that depict complexities obscured by the

[32] My conceptualization of the peasant is borrowed from Dipesh Chakrabarty in *Provincializing Europe* (2000). He identifies the peasant in the following manner: "The 'peasant' acts here as a shorthand for all the seemingly nonmodern, rural, nonsecular relationships and life practices that constantly leave their imprint on the lives of even the elites in India and on their institutions of government" (11). The Bengali peasant classes proximate Chakrabarty's theorization of the category.

[33] Both the novels indicate that as the idea of a single religious community-based nationalism travelled to the countryside, communal tensions between the Hindus and Muslims flared up. The novelists' acute awareness of the destruction of communal harmony is evident in their presentation of harmonious relationship between the Hindu and Muslim subaltern classes. These literatures can be identified as what Debjani Sengupta (2016) has identified as "a site of enunciation for thousands of people living through and resisting communal polarization, migration, rehabilitation and settlement" (1).

[34] Rafiuddin Ahmed (2001) has argued, "It was the juxtaposition of Islamic religious beliefs and local cultural conceptions that shaped the social and religious perceptions of the Bengali Muslims of Bangladesh" (18). The emphasis of a localized understanding of culture is significant, which we also see in the case of the novels. However, as the national idea of community began to influence the rural populations, they began to participate in activities that were inimical to peoples of other religions. Asim Roy (1983) has made a similar argument to identify

more one-dimensional perspective of Hindu and Muslim nationalist discourses – i.e. official narration of the nation.[35] India and Pakistan, nation states born in 1947 through the process of partition, produced narratives of belonging premised on Muslim and Hindu difference. Bengal's "bhadralok" nationalists opposed "its cultural and intellectual inferiors, the despised Muslims of Bengal," therefore emphasized "a monolithic Bengali Hindu community" as the basis of a Hindu nation, India (Chatterji 27). On the other hand, Pakistan was "a country 'insufficiently imagined,'" and its founders twisted a much-debated idea of nationhood premised on the idea that South Asia's Muslims were a single community (Devji 7). Thus, a nation was cobbled into a compromised existence by reducing the multiplicity of South Asia's Muslims into a singular notion of "Pakistan."[36]

This compromise contributed to the terms and the violent process of partitioning following the departure of the British. Partition also led to the truncating of Bengal and Punjab, as the high Muslim density part of the two provinces joined Pakistan: "The main centers of Muslim population, the Punjab and Bengal, ended up being sliced into two" (Jalal 1985). The impact on the two provinces would be adverse, with considerable violence in Punjab, and Bengal experiencing a major demographic shift. When the Muslim-majority eastern regions of Bengal

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the Pakistan movement as significantly dividing the Hindus and Muslims of rural Bengal. My argument is that the association of bourgeoisie nationalism and the subaltern classes was not always one dimensional, though a more dominant notion of community, to which the region's Muslims put their faith in, triumphed. Despite the religious notion of community was instrumental to the formation of the nation, other existing concepts of the nation, including cultural coexistence of communities survived the sectarian politics of politics. The idea has also shaped the literary imaginations of the time, including *A River Called Titash* (1956) and *Janani* (1961).

[35] The novels articulate a cultural vision by engaging the subalterns in their narratives to counter the partitioning of East Bengal's Hindus and Muslims by that became politically marginalized during 1947 but was revived in East Pakistan when the Bengalis agitated against the Pakistan state.

[36] Semanti Ghosh (2017) has argued that several interpretations of Pakistan existed in Bengal, including the concept of "Purba Pakistan" championed by the intellectuals and the literati who believed in the emancipation of the peasants. This idea contradicted the interests of the landowning class, who saw in the idea of Pakistan an opportunity to preserve their feudal interests. Hashmi (1992) demonstrates that the landowner class were victorious during 1947 as they were able to rally the different peasant classes including the jotedars, the prajas and the raots in their favor. The tragedy of hegemonic nationalisms is the subject of the novels studied in the chapter.

became part of postcolonial Pakistan, Hindu Bengalis migrated to the bordering towns now part of India, while a significant number of Muslims would travel to East Pakistan lured by the ideals of the new Muslim nation.[37]

"Yet the most striking fact about Pakistan is how it failed to satisfy the interests of the very Muslims who are supposed to have demanded its creation," quips the historian Ayesha Jalal, suggesting that Muslim nationalism failed the multiplicities that were made to concede their regional differences in 1947 to become part of the modern Muslim state of Pakistan (Jalal *Sole Spokesman* 2). In fact, Bengal's partition in 1947 was the result of a gradual rift between the Hindu and Muslim communities, escalating into communal conflicts throughout the 1940s when the region's many political parties were negotiating the emergence of the nations. Eventually, communal tensions imploded on 16 August 1946, in the form of "Great Calcutta Killings," thereafter, dictating the course of Partition.[38]

The bitter conflicts between the two communities of Bengal would significantly shape the two dominant notions of imagined national communities and contribute to Bengal province's splitting in 1947. As greater Bengal evolved into East Pakistan – the eastern wing of Pakistan and the West Bengal state in India, the shared cultural experiences of East Bengal's Hindus and Muslims were strained.

Bengal's Hindus and Muslims were shaped by acrimonious national political identities reflected in literature of the time commonly identified as Partition literatures. Also, shared cultural expressions and cohabiting Hindu-Muslim traditions in rural Bengal inspired fiction

[37] The Bengali Muslim migration to East Bengal has been explored by Debali Mookherjea-Leonard (2017) and Niaz Zaman (2001)

[38] Joya Chatterji (1994) argues the British administrative partitioning of Bengal in 1905 had significantly deepened the already existing animosity between the middle-class Hindus and Muslims of Bengal. While the border marked the partition of East Bengal and West Bengal in 1947, communal tension has prevailed despite the restraint on hostility in 1971. Perhaps, the 1905 partition, later withheld in 1911, created a more encompassing chasm prevailing to this day.

writers in the 1930s and onward, as did the trauma of 1947, Ananya Jahanara Kabir (2013) states. Humayun Kabir's novella *Men and Rivers* (1945) and Manik Bandhopadhyay's *Padma Nadir Majhi* (1936) depict villagers with syncretic lives, localized folk tradition and spiritual lived experience threatened by the politics of nationalism. They are nostalgic depictions of rural life in the Bengal delta: "From bourgeoisie families removed from the peasant culture they fictionalized, both were drawn, nevertheless, to that culture's intimacy with the Bengal delta" (176). With their imagination seized by the national moment, the novelists exoticize the subaltern lives by celebrating "the topography and culture of the Ganges-Brahmaputra delta" in their literary narratives (173).

Therefore, *Men and the Rivers,* Ananya Jahanara Kabir claims, does not invoke the communalization of Hindu and Muslim villagers. Her conjecture that "the novel's focus on the peasant as subject to the caprices of emotion and nature makes it a condensation of losses and displacements that anticipate those of Partition" romanticizes the fraternal bonding of the peasants without complicating the impact of 1947 Partition on the rural communities in Bengal (183). Her formulation results from her assertive reading of *Men and the Rivers*, as if to complement her forefather Humayun Kabir.

Ananya Kabir's perspective follows Benedict Anderson's classic interpretation of the notion "community" and its relation to postcolonial nationalism in *Imagined Communities* (1983). According to Anderson's formula, nations are imagined as an entity that binds communities into solid fraternities: "It is imagined as a *community*, because, regardless of the actual inequality and exploitation that may prevail in each, the nation is always conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship" (7). The community, as outlined in Anderson's thesis, is adapted

by Ananya Kabir to formulate a sweeping assessment of Kabir's novel as a symbol of Hindu-Muslim peasant relation before the communities were partitioned in East Bengal.

While it goes without saying that the 1947 Partition caused a lasting antipathy between the two faith-based communities, with its profound impact on the subaltern classes, the literary depiction of Hindu-Muslim communalization in East Bengal's villages is not monolithic. In their novels, Jasim Uddin, Kazi Nazrul Islam and Manik Bandopadhyay draw from a tradition of rural *mise en scene* depicting the subaltern life-worlds and its complexities during the historic formation of the nation.[39]

These literary works enunciate a cultural aesthetics drawing from an ensemble of everyday rural life including the composite social formation as well as the fractious moments when social cohesion broke down and traditional syncretism became culturally irrelevant. Written between the 1930s and the 1960s, these Bengali literary narratives including Jasim Uddin's *Sojan Badiar Ghat* (*Gipsy Wharf* 1934), Syed Waliullah's *Tree Without Roots* (1949), and Manik Bandopadhyay's *Padma Nadir Majhi* (*Padma River Boatmen* 1936) aestheticize communities living in the proximity of nature and the riverine deltaic East Bengal.

Influenced by a folk syncretic tradition and a subaltern experience shaped by "a perennially moving frontier between land and water" where "despite regular setbacks, humans have been extraordinarily successful in using the resources of this risky deltaic environment," these human lives of the Bengal delta intersecting a unique geography and nature are subjects of these works of fiction (van Schendel 7). I argue that these literary texts can be identified as a

[39] Similar to the politicians in Bengal, novelists, poets and filmmakers were inspired the idea of "nation." The nation existed in many forms for both Hindus and Muslims according to the scholars I engage in this chapter (Hashmi 1992; Chatterji 1994; Bose 2014; Ghosh 2017). The nation was also conceived in the regional syncretic form, despite the Hindu Muslim tension, in the following literary representations: Jasim Uddin's *Gipsy Wharf* (1934), Manik Bandopadhyay's *Padma River Boatmen* (1936), Humayun Kabir's *Men and Rivers* (1954), and Abu Ishaq's *Surja Dighal Bari* (1955).

vernacular tradition depicting the growing antipathy between Hindus and Muslims influenced by modern nationalist politics. Moreover, they also signify the imbrication of Hindu and Muslim identities in the eastern borders of Bengal, where the subaltern classes were shaped by the linkages of peoples, places, and the environment. The discourses of elite sectarian nationalist politics disrupt the organic non-sectarian communal world of the rural villagers in the region.[40]

In Adwaita Mallabarman's *A River Called Titash* (*Titash Ekti Nodir Naam* 1956) and Shaukat Osman's *Janani* (1961), divisive sectarian nationalisms create communal tensions between Hindus and Muslims in rural Bengal. Though existing in the margins, the peasants with their tradition-bound sense of belonging became preoccupied by the discord superimposed by the nationalists - the coexistence of the subaltern communities was therefore threatened by the Hindu and Muslim nationalist visions.

According to Semanti Ghosh (2017), articulations of nationalisms were many in Bengal, including the concept of national community that drew from the culturally enmeshed lives of Hindus and Muslims in East Bengal. The enunciation of culturally cohesive "imagined communities" of Hindus and Muslims in Mallabarman's *Titash Ekti Nodir Naam* (1956) and Osman's *Janani* (1961) conveys an alternative to the political platform posited on the civilizational difference of the Hindus and Muslims. It could be said, these novels are "mapped in history," their plots articulate in their narratives the interconnectedness of humans and nature and inter-communal coexistence from the perspective of peasants (Ghosh *Different Nationalisms* 9). I focus on the cultural politics of the novels by analyzing their articulation of the intricate existence of Hindu and Muslim peasants, who are simultaneously nourished by folk culture and

[40] Following Ananya Kabir (2013), Kaiser Haq (2016) posits that the peasants of the eastern parts of Bengal participated in two major political movements; the first movement was masterminded by the religious orthodoxy against the British colonizers and the other movement was an agitation against the Hindu landlords. The latter morphed into the Pakistan Movement in Bengal.

the natural geography of East Bengal but are communalized by bourgeois nationalism at the onset of the 1947 Partition.

To establish the novels as "contested narrations," I will first refer to the literary archive of Bengal's "Partition." Then, I will put into conversation the Subaltern Studies historians, and their conceptualization of the performative peasant politics and its relation with the history of nationalist politics in Bengal, with the works of Taj ul Islam Hashmi (1992) and Joya Chatterji (1994). The literary narratives, I argue, present the subaltern classes in the form of "heterogeneous imaginations" – as theorized by Dipesh Chakrabarty – articulating an alternative political history of rural peasants. The syncretic peasant community of Hindus and Muslims pluralize the history of national politics, while they simultaneously become subjected to the nationalist rhetoric of Bengal's elite politics during 1947.

**The 1947 Partition in Bengali literature**

Scholars drawing from the archive of literature on Bengal's partition have acknowledged that limitations exist when it comes to identify what should be considered as "Partition" literature. Positing that there is little agreement on "a fundamental question: What constitutes Partition literature," Mookherjea-Leonard says, there has been "a refusal on the part of literary critics to acknowledge certain works from the Bengal region as Partition literature" (4). The archive generally includes works that are immediate responses to 1947.

Mookerjea-Leonard engages with these works responding to the immediacy of the event. However, she contends that "the dynamics of the Bengal Partition" is such that it is difficult to establish "a decisive character owing to the political, social, and communal situation prevailing in the region, the porousness of the border on the eastern side, and resultant patterns of migration" (7). The lack of "a decisive character" when it comes to understanding "the dynamics

of the Bengal Partition" is also attributed to the catastrophic post-1947 communal riots that precipitated Hindu migrations to India: "Rather, in 1950, and again in 1964, communal violence flared up in East Bengal, Pakistan and spilled over to West Bengal, India; both occasions led to large-scale migrations of Bengali Hindus from East Pakistan to India" (7). This uniqueness of Bengali Hindu travails makes "writings from [West] Bengal focus on the struggles and privations of the displaced" from East Bengal (5). Mookerjea-Leonard says that these literary works highlight "the continuous population flows into West Bengal, refugees surviving on the platforms of railway stations, life in squatters colonies, the intense competition for economic opportunities, women's victimization both sexual and psychological, middle-class Bengali Hindu women's emergence as wage laborers, and the memories of loss," as symptomatic of Bengal's division (7). The writers from West Bengal have primarily highlighted these experiences of Partition, which emphasize the Hindu middle-class migration from East Pakistan to India during and after 1947. Some of the works such as Sabitri Roy's *Swaralipi* (1952), Jyotirmoyee Devi's *Epar Ganga Opar Ganga* (1967), and Pratibha Basu's *Samudra Hridoy* (1970) describe the misery of East Bengal's Hindu population.

Mookerjea-Leonard also refers to the literary works of Bangladeshi writers that depict the1947 Partition, such as, Taslima Nasreen's *Phera* (2005) and Hasan Azizul Huq's *Agunpakhi* (2007). Mookherjea-Leonard suggests that these works reconsider the Bengali experiences of 1947 from a position that is cognizant of the creation of Bangladesh as a secular nation in 1971 and its consequent evolving into an Islamic state with major socio-political repercussions. I suggest that Mookherjea-Leonard offers an Indian perspective as she disregards the Partition fictions from East Pakistan.

East Pakistan's Bengali literature, written in the immediate aftermath of the partitioning of Bengal, delineate a Bengali Muslim perspective of Pakistan, Niaz Zaman points out in *A Divided Legacy: The Partition in Selected Novels of India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh* (2001). According to Zaman (2001), Bengali literature informing the Bengali Hindu migration to India, their struggles as migrants and their transient postcolonial identity offers a perspective that is contradictory to the Muslim writers of Bengal. Theirs are a positive response to the creation of Pakistan.

These Bengali writers of East Pakistan, eliciting a distinctive perspective from those writers of West Bengal, are Abu Rushd, Shahidulla Kaiser, Sardar Jainuddin, and Abul Fazl. According to Zaman, "Despite individual differences, it would not be wrong to suggest that East Bengali novels depict this search for a new identity even as they depict a struggle which has not ended" (15). They write about "a new identity," besides describing "a struggle" that is ongoing. Zaman might be suggesting that the Partition fictions from the Bengali side of Pakistan might also be anticipating the Bengali struggle against the new hegemony imposed by the West Pakistani rulers on them. Both Mookherjea-Leonard (2017) and Zaman (2000) draw from works that are addressing 1947 more directly.

Recently, scholars have begun to engage with Bengali literature that are more intricate explorations of the nationalist movements and the Partition in the "Bengal delta." Ananya Jahanara Kabir's *Partition's Post-Amnesia* (2013) traces the connections between the partitions of 1947 and 1971 through "the visual arts, cinema, and photography, and music, capturing wherever possible the lived contexts of their conditions of production and consumption: museums, galleries, art studios, music festivals" (30). Literatures on Bengal's 1947 partition and the multiple historical shifts through which Bangladesh emerged are analyzed in her work

through the idea of "post-amnesia." In the process, she attempts expand and historicize the aesthetic archive on the tragic fragmentation of British India in 1947.

Literary scholars engaging the effects of Partition on the refugees migrating to India from East Bengal and the causes of Hindu-Muslim enmity in postcolonial India largely ignore literatures of Muslim writers and poets. They were inspired by an Islamic conceptualization of Bengal, as they imagined the "Pakistan" concept from a distinct literary point-of-view. Neilesh Bose (2014) addresses the works of the Muslim literati in late colonial Bengal. He argues that they were drawing from Bengal's folk Islamic tradition to elaborate on the concept of "Pakistan" – their notion of a Pak-Bangla culture was part of "the multiple imaginings of the idea of Pakistan in the 1940s" (xxiv). Central to these literary creations was this concept of a Muslim cultural space, "a Pakistani Bengali Muslim would inhabit a newly defined Pak-Bangla culture, as opposed to a Bengali Muslim, forever imprisoned in the unforgiving Hindu-controlled world of Bengali culture" (189). This Islamic culture had a distinctive Muslim orientation, illustrated in the poetry and intellectual works of Golam Mostafa, Abul Mansur Ahmed, Syed Ali Ahsan, Farrukh Ahmed and Benazir Ahmed. They attempted to construct a national imaginary for the Muslims in Bengal.

Bose claims that the proponents of Pak-Bangla culture wanted to establish a distinct culture drawing from the pre-colonial Islamic intervention in Bengali literature. Their literary explorations reinvented Bengal's rural tradition by identifying the Islamic elements that they believed will justify Pakistan's existence:

> Many Bengali Muslim writers from 1940 to 1947 creatively integrated concepts of Pakistan in poetry, such as Farrukh Ahmed's poem 'Sat Sagorer Majhi' ('The Boatman of the Seven Seas'), with its emphasis on the riverine environment of Bengal and the old

> Bengali theme of salvation through boatmen, continuing an older Bengali tradition begun in earlier generation, as opposed to simply contending with outside forces ("Purba Pakistan Zindabad" 3-4).

The creative energy of the Muslim poets giving an aesthetic shape to the idea of Pakistan, as in Farrukh Ahmed's aesthetic portrayal of a national community, uses the local boatman as a metaphor for Muslim literary culture. Drawing from the reservoir of rural and mostly deltaic socio-cultural milieu, Ahmed's cultural proximation of "Purba Pakistan" or "East Pakistan" is Bengali Muslim and Pakistan-centered at the same time. Set in the historical backdrop of the 1947 Partition, Ahmed's literary work draws from the deltaic geography, environmental surrounding, and Muslim experiences to fit the Islamic features of Bengal. The Bengali Muslim vision of Pakistan illuminates a literary flourish that draws succor from Islamic practices in Bengal as well as from the politics of Muslim nationalism that would eventually contribute to the 1947 Partition.

Simultaneously, a different postcolonial Bengal was being negotiated in politics that explored the coexistence of different religious communities in the Bengal countryside. In literature, poets and writers delineated Muslim peasant communities and their Hindu co-religionists – the ethos of syncretism and religious coexistence was the lifestyle of East Bengal's peasants, as depicted in Mallabarman's *A River Called Titash* and Osman's *Janani*.[41] With heightened religious communalism at the heels of Partition, sectarianism fragmented the rural societies.

Both the Bengali Muslim poets, who Islamized East Bengal and imagined its milieu as metaphors for the nation, and, the Bengali-language literary narratives that highlighted the

[41] The Bengali auteur Ritwik Ghatak has adapted Mallabarman's novel into a film titled "A River Called Titash," (1973) which is part of his film projects giving expression to the significance of Partition in Bengal.

transformation of the rural Bengal's Hindus and Muslims into communalized subjects during 1947, exist outside of the traditional archive of "Partition literature." Scholars tend to identify specific literary narratives as "Partition" literature that focus on the immediate and longue durée consequences of Bengal's Partition on those who migrated from East Bengal to India after 1947 (Sengupta 2016; Mookerjea-Leonard 2017). Narratives that complicate the foundational notion of Bengal's 1947 Partition and that do not fit within the deterministic and dominant discourses of Bengal's truncated rebirth, as the two separate wings of the postcolonial nations India and Pakistan, are generally neglected. Therefore, Bengali literatures drawing from rural Bengal's syncretic culture of coexistence, which would be threatened by the communal narratives of nation formation, do not receive the attention they deserve.

Influenced by a regional notion of community that challenged the nationalisms based on Hindu-Muslim difference, these literatures propagated Hindu-Muslim unity as an alternative resolution to the problem of national community. The historian Semanti Ghosh (2017) argues that the competing Hindu and Muslim national bourgeoisie wanted to form a nation on the basis of religious difference, but their political agenda did not go unchallenged. Many different conceptualizations of the nation wrestled with one another in Bengal's politics. This included the political project based on rural religious identity patterns that did not distinguish Hindus and Muslims as different national entities.

Leading up to the decades before the Partition, when the decolonial struggle intensified in Bengal, political developments offered various pathways articulating their methods to resolve the problem of religious majority and minority: "The political and ideological experiences of Swadeshi, Khilafat, Bengal Pact, praja movements, and provincial ministries had provided various levels of impetus to this regional solution to communal difference" (326). While the

various political ideas suggested their solutions to the problem of religious communities in the nation, Bengali politicians like Sarat Chandra Bose and Husein Shaheed Suhrawardy made efforts to reconcile "communal difference" by conceiving the project of an independent United Bengal.

Ghosh discusses in detail the initiators of the undivided Bengal nation Sarat Chandra Bose and Hussein Shaheed Suhrawardy. Opposed to separation between the region's Hindu and the Muslim communities, which was fanned by sections of the Bengal Congress, Muslim League and Hindu Mahasabha, Bose and Suhrawardy propositioned communal harmony. Thus, as purveyors of anti-colonial politics, they addressed disunity in the Bengal region.[42] Their opposition to separatism – an initiative trenchantly incited by the regional Bengal Congress, sectarian Hindu parties, and the Muslim League leadership – persisted till the very last moment of Bengal's partition.

As a counter-narrative to communalism, the United Bengal project offers a form of pluralism in the national imaginary, "which should neither erase nor essentialize Hindu Muslim differences, but base itself on the spirit of regional cultural traditions," suggested a document in the Muslim journal *Millat* (Ghosh 360). With Hindu-Muslim separatism becoming ever prominent, and as divisiveness became the language of politics, the Bose-Suhrawardy alliance came to symbolize "the quotidian inter-community exchanges, both in the countryside and in the

[42] Different conceptualizations of the nation were addressing the Hindu-Muslim difference, according to Ghosh (2017). They include Tagore's "social experiments with a few villages if eastern and western Bengal" to visualize "'people'" as central to the "imagined" national community (121), as well as Chittaranjan Das' Bengal Pact of 1923. It proposed "separate electorates" (142-143) based on "population ration," thus, giving the Muslims of Bengal a clear vantage point. While the project had "a magical effect on the Bengali Muslims" (144), Ghosh mentions "the bitter Hindu reactions directed against the Pact" (144). Remarkably, Bengal's Muslims, rather than the Hindu bhadraloks, were more eager to find a regional solution to the nation-state imbroglio, asserts Ghosh from her position, which Joya Chatterji (1994) also endorses.

cities," earlier harnessed as a political solution to religious difference by the Muslim leader Fazlul Haq (327).

The momentum for an independent nation based on non-sectarian principles and "inter-community cooperation" was eventually grounded, as it failed to receive support from both the Congress leaders and the Muslim League (262). Consequently, Bengal would be partitioned along Hindu and Muslim lines eliciting the deep roots of vehemently communalist and reactionary ideas in Bengal's regional politics [43]. Even if the political articulation of religious difference precipitated the separation of Bengal's Hindus and Muslims, Semanti Ghosh has suggested, "trends of intercommunity sharing and coexistence continued to make their way" in daily life (327).

Moreover, if the communal politics of the sectarian nationalists prevailed during the nationalist movement in 1947, in the cities and in the countryside of an already divided post-1947 Bengal, a long tradition of the intermingling of the two religious communities helped to resist the violent splitting of population that took place in Punjab. East Bengal's Hindus and Muslims continued to interact as their cultural reality prevented them from executing sectarianism: "Bengal's life indeed continued to revolve around the quotidian inter-community exchanges, both in the countryside and in the cities, and showed sustained attempts to resist violence, open up new channels of communication or fight the forces of segregation" (327). The narrative of Hindu-Muslim difference, which caused the Partition, failed to consolidate itself, as interaction between the Hindus and the Muslims continued to prevail. In fact, the narrative

[43] Ghosh has argued that "the complex enmeshing of the regional interests with larger Indian concerns placed the provincial leadership in an inherently limited space in the field of politics, where manoeuvring and negotiating of multiple identities proved more strenuous, and finally, a failure" (346).

vested in the project of keeping Bengal intact as a sovereign unit significantly influenced the formation of Bangladesh in 1971.

Yet, the nationalist movements led by the Muslim League and the Bengal Congress, promising a Muslim majority "imagined communities" and a Hindu majority nation state respectively, triumphed in the Bengal region. It was because Bengal's demographic contributed to a political compromise between the elite nationalists and the subaltern classes. East Bengal's Muslim peasants acquiesced to the majoritarian political agenda of the Muslim League leaders, who promised them freedom from Hindu *zamindars* and the middle-class Hindus. On the other hand, the Hindu *bhadraloks* were able to convince the subaltern classes and the Hindu bourgeoisie that they could solve the problem of living under Muslim majority rule.

Therefore, the communal characteristics of the political message of the middle-class Muslims and Hindu *bhadralok* had a profound impact on the subaltern classes including the peasants. Despite their engagement with communal nationalisms, they were not fully overwhelmed by the narrative of communal difference. Political participation of the peasants in the nationalist discourses offered room for negotiations between the two sides, the bourgeoisie nationalists and the peasants, according to the Subaltern historians.

If they have focused on the peasants' agency, Taj ul Islam Hashmi (1992) and Joya Chatterji (1994) highlight the asymmetrical interaction between the masses and the nationalists during the national movement leading to the former's capitulation. These theorizations suggest that the interplay between the peasantry, communalization, and nationalism was complex, even if a political concept of cultural coexistence of Bengal's Hindu and Muslim communities gained a foothold in the Bengali national consciousness.

**Nationalism and the Peasants in the Subaltern Historiography**

Bengali literature presents rural communities undergoing a process of transformation, as hegemonic nationalist politics propagated the logic of religious difference during the partitioning of Bengal in 1947. Through their engagement with nationalist discourses, peasant identities experienced communalism, which was responsible for the destruction of syncretic lives. Historians of the Subaltern Studies Collective have explored the relation between nationalism and the subaltern classes in Bengal. These historians suggest that nationalist politics was transformed when it interacted with what Ranajit Guha calls "the subaltern domain/s of politics" (*Dominance* 136;151). They have also argued that the political discourse became more diffused when the subaltern masses encountered bourgeoisie politics and began to imagine the nation in their own terms.

The Subaltern Studies Collective plays a pivotal role in the conceptualization of the peasant's political agency, which had not been highlighted by colonial and nationalist historiographies. We will be drawing from these historians to highlight the significance of the peasants in Bengal's history. Moreover, to complicate the literary representation of the peasant/ subaltern classes at the time of Partition, we will address how scholarships define the moment when nationalist ideology and the subaltern interpretation of the nation converged.

While the nationalist movement significantly influenced the "communalization" of the peasants during Bengal's partition, there existed various trends of representational politics. Certain trends including those Semanti Ghosh (2017) identifies as proponents of a regional solution to Bengal's postcolonial circumstance encouraged peasant participation in politics from a non-communal position. As their influence on the subaltern classes dwindled, communalism became more mainstream during the partition of Bengal. However, the idea of a nation based on mutual recognition of Hindu and Muslim identities was deliberated, which influenced the novels

– imagining nature-bound places and traditionally-rooted rural communities – under consideration in this chapter. Inspired by the rural social set-up, a wide range of politicians from Fazlul Huq to Sarat Bose tried to shape a more regional national Bengali identity. The peasant's culture was thus emphasized by the proponents of a region-nation.

The Subaltern historians recover this agency of the subaltern in anti-colonial politics and in the nationalist movement by departing from colonial and nationalist historiography. In the introductory chapter "On Some Aspects of the Historiography of Colonial India" of *Subaltern Studies I: Writings on South Asian History and Society* (1982), Ranajit Guha, a major historian of the project, is very critical of the nationalist elite's exploitation of the subaltern contribution to the process of nation building:

> The involvement of the Indian people in vast numbers, sometimes in hundreds of thousands or even millions, in nationalist activities and ideas is thus represented as a diversion from a supposedly 'real' political process, that is, the grinding away of the wheels of the state apparatus and of elite institutions geared to it, or it is simply credited, as an act of ideological appropriation, to the influence and initiative of the elite themselves (3).

Guha here is pointing out nationalist historiography's refusal to acknowledge the contribution made by the "vast numbers" of Indians to the nationalist cause. Their contribution is sidelined by calling it "a diversion from a supposedly 'real' political process" or, is often appropriated within the terminologies of dominant interpretations of Indian nationalism. Guha's perspective is that colonialism's influence in South Asia and "nationalism" as its counter-discourse must be understood from the account of the many voices. Guha has influenced other works including Partha Chatterjee's *Nation and its Fragments* (1985), which traces the multiple sites of struggle

against colonialism and the nationalist appropriation of people's contribution to nation formation.

The peasant struggles against colonialism and the nation is identified by Chatterjee as significantly transforming the elite domain of politics and its organizational nature. Drawing from Guha's works, he identifies "an insurgent peasant consciousness" (*Nation and its Fragments* 172) in the political movements in South Asia where peasants were involved as a political apparatus entangled with bourgeois political expressions. The peasants and other participants in the national struggle were transformed during the interaction, which brought together two domains of politics. However, "the unity itself fragmented and fraught with tension" as the peasants' interaction with the politics of the nation also produced contradicting conditions since "spells of militant anticolonial action by peasants were often followed by bitter sectarian strife, sometimes in the course of a single movement, and at other times by spells of apparently inexplicable quiescence" (160). The idea that the peasants' struggles against the various authorities were politically fragmented and sometimes produced internal discord is exemplified in Chatterjee's theorizing of "communalization" and its relation to national politics.

The essay "Agrarian Relations and Communalism, 1926-1935" documents and analyzes sectarian identities of East Bengal's peasants, whose participation in the nationalist movement was communally motivated. By focusing on specific uprisings in "the districts of eastern and northern Bengal" (9) between 1926 and1935, Chatterjee traces the links between national politics and the peasant political consciousness. According to our encounter with the fundamental idea of Subaltern historiography, the peasant political consciousness influenced the bourgeois sphere of politics. Similarly, the essay's central claim hinges on the idea that national politics is shaped by its proximity to rural communities:

> Organized political groups seeking support among peasant communities are invariably led to turn and fashion their programmes so as to make them acceptable to the peasantry. While concepts and slogans of the world of organized politics undergo an ideological transformation when they reach the peasant masses and acquire entirely new meanings, so are the language, styles, symbols and processes of organized politics influenced by its linkages with the world of peasant-communal politics (36).

Chatterjee claims that the spontaneity of popular peasant politics has a transformative effect on the organized politics of nationalist movement. The structure of nationalist politics is ideologically ("an ideological transformation") influenced by "the peasant masses" who can dictate the "concepts and slogans." Moreover, the linking of the political spheres of the nationalists and the peasants contributes to nationalism's linguistic, stylistic, symbolic and procedural evolution.

In this regard, Chatterjee identifies peasant politics as "communal" since evidence suggests that peasants in East Bengal felt an association with the middle-classes and identified with their co-religionists since "Muslim rent-receivers, where they did exist, were considered part of the peasant community whereas Hindu zamindars and talukdars were not" (11). The peasants' "communal" attitude was inspired by the visibility of fellow Muslims, who they affiliated with in a political atmosphere where Hindus dominated "the predominantly Muslim tenantry" (11). here discusses 1947 from the lens of peasant agency presenting "communal" politics as symptomatic of East Bengal's Muslim peasants. Chatterjee's argument resonates the Subaltern Studies Project's understanding of "communalism" as a positive indicator of peasant participation in the bourgeoisie-led nationalism.

**Influence of the National Bourgeois on the Subaltern Classes**

The communalization process informing the relation between nationalism and the subaltern classes also indicates bourgeois nationalism's cultural influence on the subaltern classes. As nationalist politics influenced the rural communities, the process of communalization began as a cultural scheme translating the politics of difference to the Hindu and Muslim constituencies. Taj ul Islam Hashmi (1992) presents the various dimensions that contributed to the communalization of Muslims in the countryside in *Pakistan as a Peasant Utopia: The Communalization of Class Politics in East Bengal, 1920-1947*.[44] If Hashmi (1992) has identified how sectarian politics communalized Bengal's rural peasants and persuaded them to accept a separate Muslim political identity, Joya Chatterji's *Bengal Divided: Hindu Communalism and Partition, 1932-1947* (1994) conceptualizes the "bhadralok" politics that is responsible for the communalization of the Hindu peasantry.[45]

Since the growing Muslim middle-class in Bengal began to gain political favor from the colonial government, the Hindu nationalists devised a tactic to oppose them, Joya Chatterji (1994) has argued (191). Economic competition characterized their political activities, as they attempted to create a community of Hindus. As the "bhadralok" attempted to regain their economic privilege, they decided to "forge a greater Hindu political community, uniting the

[44] Hashmi's (1992) project locates the various historical moments shaping the process of Muslim peasant's communalization in Bengal. As the animosity of between the peasants and their historical exploiters, the Hindu *zamindars* and *mahajans* (from the *bhadralok* class) became acute, it was successfully exploited by the new political force in the form of the Muslim middle-class that led to the success of the Pakistan Movement in East Bengal.

[45] Chatterji (1994) establishes the "bhadralok" as a key player in Bengal's politics during the Partition. She defines the class in the following manner: "The vernacular term 'bhadralok' is useful not only because it expresses this sense of exclusiveness and the social relations that produced it, but also because it carries with it overtones of the colonial origins of this class and its overwhelmingly Hindu composition. Yet neither 'bhadralok' nor 'babu' describe straightforward communal or caste categories. These terms reflected, instead, the social realities of colonial Bengal, the peculiar configuration that excluded, for a variety of historical reasons, the vast majority of Bengali Muslims and low-caste Hindus from the benefits of land ownership and the particular privileges it provided" (5-6). The contingency of the "bhadralok" class is established by tracing their emergence during the colonial era and the socio-economic transformation Bengal underwent due to the earlier economic policies of the East India Company. As a result, the *bhadralok* class came to visibility at the expense of the feudal Muslim classes that were adversely affected by colonial policies.

disparate castes and tribes of the putative 'Hindu family' into a single harmonious whole" (191). This organizational strategy was more evident in the western regions of Bengal where "a growing Muslim influence had begun to erode established patterns of influence" (191).

The nationalism of the Hindu "bhadralok" also turned cultural, to counter Muslim ascendancy. For them, "'culture'" became "a single unifying symbol of bhadralok identity" (155). The nationalists created a narrative of Hindu community and began to see Muslims as outsiders: "The intention of Hindu communal discourse was to deny the possibility of Muslim participation in the process of national liberation: an argument that would later be extended to assert that Muslims could never be true national citizens" (179-180). For example, the late works of noted Bengali litterateur Saratchandra Chattopadhyay, framed the Muslims as the cultural enemy of the Hindus, Chatterji states (180).

Chatterji adds that the cultural construction of Hindu identity "could not easily be adapted to the purposes of mass mobilization of other less privileged members of this would-be band of brothers" (189). However, movements were launched to create a singular community of followers: "Several new Hindu organizations now emerged, all aiming to unify Hindu society" (195). We should also cite Benedict Anderson (1983) here. He has noted "it is the magic of nationalism to turn chance into destiny," to argue that cultural logic was at the heart of anti-colonial nationalism (12).

Similarly, there was a cultural perspective to the nationalist efforts that used propaganda techniques suited to the "bhadralok" conceptualization of caste: ". . . movements to draw lower castes into the 'Hindu community' were intended to work within the acceptable framework of what might loosely be described as 'sanskritisation.'" (198). Chatterji gives the example of Kshattriya Sabha and Jitu Santal to argue that the impact of these movements was successful.

While "they did not reject the caste hierarchy but sought only to improve the position of their own caste within it," they were also serving the nationalist cause by "absorbing them into the more overtly communal political battles" (199). The bhadralok Hindu nationalists were thus able to translate their communalization agenda to the marginalized castes. It was also a response to the political ascendancy of the Muslims, who were threatening the Hindu dominance in Bengal.

Designed to influence the rural Hindu-Muslim demographic, the cultural logic of the Hindu nationalist movement presents the Muslim as a threat to the Hindu masses of Bengal, enunciating their political program's communally driven agenda. This narrative of communal difference, fused as a cultural logic of the nationalist political idea, transformed the countryside during the partitioning of Bengal in 1947, as did the growing Pakistan Movement urging the Muslim majority peasants of the eastern regions of Bengal to fight for Pakistan.

Taj ul Islam Hashmi (1992) tracks the steady "communalization" of the Muslim peasants, and this influence of communalization on Bengal's peasants is turned into a literary masterpiece *Khoabnama* (1996) by Akhteruzzaman Elias. Communalization was used by the Muslim bourgeois as a tactic in their political movements to gain sectarian favor – it was one of the dominant political ideals contending for influence by differentiating the Hindu and Muslim communities in Bengal.[46]

While Hashmi identifies the existence of several political parties, including those representing the Bengal's Muslim peasants and the lower caste Hindus foreseeing Hindu-Muslim cooperation, Hashmi's focus of attention is the "ashraf-ulama-jotedar triumvirate," which he identifies as significant in the perpetuation of the "Pakistan" idea in the villages of East Bengal

[46] Referring to Chitta Ranjan Das's political benevolence, Hashmi says that there was a widespread belief that he could have solved the communal conflict in Bengal (92). Again, the Proja Party and the Communist Party were also active but failed to exert any influence as the peasants were drawn to their co-religionists because the idea of Hindu-Muslim unity did not appear convincing to them.

(268).[47] They acted as catalysts, as the national struggle was presented to the local peasants, packaged as equally significant to all the Muslims. These "outsiders," Hashmi argues, were accepted as leaders because of their religious and cultural background (266).[48]

Eventually, the communal cause of the bourgeoisie-peasant nexus triumphed when "Jinnah and Pakistan became the catch-words everywhere in the region among Muslim peasants" (210). Thus, the hegemonic idea of Pakistan presented by Jinnah was welcomed by the Muslims in Bengal for narrow gains such as economic upliftment that would contribute to their attempts to outshine the Hindu middle-class.

According to Hashmi, there is a cultural dimension to this familiarization process, evident during other political movements, such as the Khilafat and the non-Cooperation Movement. Cultural performances played a major role in the mobilization of rural people during the national movement, Hashmi has pointed out: "Through their endeavours and nationalist songs the concepts of *desh* or one's own motherland and patriotism reached the rural masses by the early 1930s" (155). To familiarize the masses with the idea of "motherland" and "patriotism," political programs used cultural propaganda to disseminate the anti-British nationalist idea. Similar to the anti-colonial nationalist idea, the nationalisms based on religious communities focused on any existing antipathy between the Hindus and Muslims to highlight the cultural difference between the two religious groups. The anti-Hindu middle-class sentiments and the communal vision of

[47] We have to keep in mind that the bourgeoisie classes Hashmi tracks viewed Pakistan as an opportunity for socio-economic development, as opposed to the literati's cultural-aesthetic conceptualization of the nation discussed by Bose (2014).

[48] Since the Muslim middle-class had a rural background, the peasants did not consider them as strangers: "Many members of the *ulama* and *bhadralok* had peasant backgrounds and close links with the native villagers. Though many of them lived in the neighboring towns or Calcutta, they were regarded by the peasants as their kith and kin" (Hashmi 266). Peasants' familiarity with their social superiors can be found in literature too. While the two novels I discuss does not reflect on this social condition existing between the peasants and the Muslim middle-class, Syed Waliullah's *Cry River Cry* (1968) and Akhteruzzaman Elias' *Khoabnama* (1996) exemplify the intricate social ties Hashmi is talking about.

the world coalesced, as the Muslim middle-class concept of a nation began to interact with the peasant idea of community.

"Consequently the [Muslim] League was transformed into a mass organization by 'channeling into a religious stream' the anti-*zamindar* struggle of the peasantry and the reactionary aspect of bourgeois nationalism of the Bengali Muslim bourgeoisie," Hashmi has added (267). In Bengal, the success of the Muslim League also depended on subduing rival political interests including that of Fazlul Huq. Eventually, the differences were limited by the two-nation theory, as "the *ashraf* and Muslim *jotedars*" fully assimilated "the lower echelons of the peasantry" in their political agenda (255). Thus, Hashmi contends that the Muslim elites politically influenced the Muslim peasants, as the Hindus of marginal denominations were coopted by Hindu nationalism, according to Joya Chatterji.

If the ideological strengthening of the difference between Hindu and Muslim religious communities informed the historic transition from colonialism to postcolonialism and precipitated the impending partition of Bengal, the Hindus and Muslims were concurrently implicated in an ever-expanding political universe. Contextualized as "heteroglossic" in Dipesh Chakrabarty's essay "A Small History of *Subaltern Studies*" these many political spaces lacked uniformity: "The history of colonial modernity in India created a domain of the political that was heteroglossic in its idioms and irreducibly plural in its structure interlocking within itself strands of different types of relationships that did not make up a logical whole" (13). The interaction of the political domains encapsulating the peasants and the bourgeoisie was informed by the plural histories of the castes of India and their national interlocutors and the South Asian religious communities and their anti-colonial agitations. In other words, if hegemonic nationalist propaganda threatened the partitioning of the shared life of the different religious communities in

the Bengali villages, they had to contend with other political narratives during this historic transition of power.

The narratives that problematized communalization's effect on the peasants received literary attention too. As the outcome of meeting between the two domains of politics – bourgeois and subaltern – in colonial India tilted in the favor of communal difference, the notion of unity was nationally fragmented. Critical of communal nationalism's ideological framework, as it was presented by the bourgeoisie politicians to the peasants as an emancipatory vision, Mallabarman's *A River Called Titash* and Osman's *Janani* contextualize the cultural dilemma of peasant participation in the quest for a nation. I situate these works within the framework of the many imaginative dimensions of the bourgeois-peasant contact presented in Dipesh Chakrabarty's chapter "Nation and Imagination" from *Provincializing Europe* (2000).

**Subaltern Classes and "Heterogeneous Imaginations"**

I have so far offered the Subaltern Historian Collective's perspective on the peasant involvement in the hegemonic politics of the nation. They argue that the peasants while identifying a familiar kinship with their upper-class co-religionists had participated in politics by interpreting the anti-colonial movements in their own terms. I have also discussed the viewpoints of Hashmi (1992) and Chatterji (1994), which identify "communalization" as having devastating consequences on Bengal's Hindus and Muslims contesting for the nation. If the Muslim peasants, as "full participant in the political life of the nation," were influenced by the bourgeoisie nationalist imagination of the nation, they had interpreted the idea of "Pakistan" as a pathway to Muslim ascendancy in Bengal's eastern districts (Chakrabarty *Provincializing* 9). The Hindu middle-class resorted to reactionary politics in their quest for a Hindu nation translating their project as a form of cultural and political revival to the low castes non-Brahmins

of Bengal (Chatterji 1994). With the conflicting ideas of two distinct religious "communities" becoming more powerful among their respective co-religionists, Bengal's partition became inevitable.

Yet, many political visions emphasized on the cultural and socio-economic proximity of Hindus and Muslims to contest the religion-based idea of the nations in Bengal (Ghosh 2017). They were shaped in different forms of cultural texts that aestheticize the rural "community" in opposition to the sectarian exploitation of rural Hindu and Muslim identities. I argue that Mallabarman's *Titash Ekti Nodir Naam* and Osman's *Janani* belong to the same cultural and ideological tendency. Their engagement with the realities of the Bengali countryside that was being shaped by identities superimposed by nationalism can be interpreted as "heterogeneous imaginations" as elaborated in Chakrabarty's essay "Nation and Imagination" (*Provincializing Europe* 2000). The essay suggests that the political question of the subaltern was given literary shape during the era of decolonization, when the two competing nationalisms began to claim communities on their behalf. These literary works depict the inherent pluralism of the subaltern classes by creating spaces for what Semanti Ghosh has argued as "the floodgates of contesting claims for sovereignty" in Bengal (8).

The plural imaginative visions can be conceptualized by engaging with what Chakrabarty calls "the heterogeneous practices of seeing we often bring under the jurisdiction of this one European word, 'imagination,'" as he delineates the limits and potentials of the word "imagination" (149). A distinctive rural imagery in prose and poetry in Bengali literature is identified in his analysis of the genres that categorize "the diversity of human life worlds" in the image of "the modernity of literate upper-caste Hindu Bengalis" (18; 19). Using the example of

Tagore's prose and poetry, Chakrabarty explores the imaginative as an influence of nationalism on the literati in Bengal.

Tagore's prose work *Galpaguccha* depicts the villagers as dwellers of a corrupted and emaciated cultural space. In contrast, his poetry demonstrates a connectedness between the village dwellers and their natural geography, thus, serving as an instance of the Bengali sublime for the nation. Chakrabarty sees in Tagore the potentials to initiate a variety of representations of the ordinary lives in literature in the different assimilations of "imagination."

In fact, literature's ability to house narratives of difference necessitates translation of the margins as a form of historical engagement with reality: "History cannot represent, except through a process of translation and consequent loss of status and signification for the translated, the heterotemporality of the world" (95). Chakrabarty's argument postulates that literary depictions of reality, whether it is the grime of rural society in Tagore's prose or the depictions of the moribund city life by the Bengali modernists, are a form of restoration of the multiplicity. This act of restoring is also a loss, since accommodation involves the task of erasure, prompting "a consequent loss of status and signification for the translated."

This idea of explaining difference by addressing the possibilities of seeing is linked to South Asia's postcolonial transformation. Chakrabarty argues that Tagore used the traditional distinction between prose and poetry to articulate a diffused romantic vision while being attentive to the squalor of the city. The aesthetic strategy sought to transcend reality by sketching a literary transformation of the mundane: "Tagore's writings presented the poetic and its powers of transport as precisely a resource for living in the city, as a powerful means of transfiguring the real and historical Calcutta" (171). The strategy of Tagore's literary vision is to convey an otherwise absent meaning on historical reality.

Chakrabarty then shifts to a discussion of the "plural and heterogeneous ways of seeing" the nation when it was imagined by the literary proponents of the Indian version of secular nationalism. What would otherwise be considered "a crude nationalist essentialism," (175) in his interpretation is an affirmation of the idea that "the field of the political [where bourgeois nationalism meets the subaltern classes] is constitutively not singular" (149). Subaltern classes and their belief systems confronted the bourgeois idea of the nation in terms that could contain often conflicting and contradictory interests, which is identified as a "heteroglossic" arena of the South Asian "political."

Due to the indeterminacy of various forms of imagination involving bourgeois nationalism and subaltern politics, Chakrabarty posits different political languages exist. They bind the idea of the nation to the multiple narratives and facilitates their reception in the peasant communities. In other words, "imagination" in its non-European context is innovative for having the capacity to invent the nation. Imagination follows the same principle of inventing life in a description of reality, when the literati interpreted other lives in their own terms, which would otherwise be considered ordinary.

Referring to S. Wajed Ali's twin confrontations with the *Ramayana* renditions in a tea shop between a gap of several years and then comparing it to Tagore's aesthetics, Chakrabarty makes the following argument: "Literate members of the elite such as Tagore or Wajed Ali were not peasants. For them, nationalism was inseparable from their aesthetic experience of the phenomenon. But the aesthetic moment, which resists the realism of history, creates a certain irreducible heterogeneity in the constitution of the political" (177-178). Reading from an aesthetic point of view of nationalist imagination, the world of the peasants become

interpretations since the peasant's vision of the world cannot be fully captured by the logic of the nation. Realism of the peasant and their community undergoes fictional interpretation.

Another example Chakrabarty provides to articulate imagination filled bourgeois-peasant encounters during the nationalist movement is an anecdote of Nehru propagating the "Bharat Mata" concept to the ordinary Indian peasants. Upon Nehru's inquiring "who this Bharat Mata was 'whose victory they wanted,'" the peasants looked baffled: "The question flummoxed the peasants, who could not articulate a clear answer" (176-177). Prompted by his nationalist proclivities, Nehru further interrogates the peasants, to which "'a vigorous Jat'" uttered the word "*dharti*," to counter Nehru's question (177). The dissatisfied Indian nationalist leader then explained "*dharti*" to the peasants in the context of nationalism: "He proceeded to fill it up with material proper to nationalist thought" (177). Even if Nehru's intervention was an expression of bourgeois nationalism's usurping the peasants' viewpoint of the nation, Chakrabarty reads more into the encounter.

According to Chakrabarty, "the peasants' use of the expression 'Bharat Mata'" (177) registers the nation differently, therefore, misidentified by Nehru as unpatriotic, since the subaltern articulation was outside of nationalism's playbook. An imaginative elaboration of the peasants' consciousness located in the "practices sedimented into language itself and not necessarily [a hostage] to concepts either that the mind elaborates or that contain experiential truths," the peasant's answer to Nehru is also pointing to "the legitimacy of peasant or subaltern nationalism" (177). In the peasant-bourgeois encounter, we can thus identify "the irreducible pluralities that contend in the history of the word 'imagination'" (178). Similarly, if partition instigated a rupturing of communal harmony and disrupted co-existence of the Hindu and Muslim subaltern classes in the eastern zones of Bengal, the works of Mallabarman and Osman

are political narratives too. They articulate a deltaic milieu of the peasants foregrounding their imaginative dimensions. In the novels' presentation of the peasants as two communities imbricated in the syncretic rural tradition, we find articulations of what Chakrabarty calls "heterogeneous imaginations" (177).

**Community Against the Nation: Imagination of the Subaltern Classes in *A River Called Titash* and *Janani***

*A River Called Titash* (1956) and *Janani* (1961) use realist literary tropes to depict the subaltern classes in rural eastern Bengal. Ulka Anjaria in *Realism in the Twentieth-Century Indian Novel* (2012) has said that postcolonial scholars are skeptical towards the realist tradition, operating with the assumption that "realism reflects external realities with little mediation" (8). Realism can do little else but replicate the exclusions of the nation. Anjaria analyzes realist fictions and finds that there is no set pattern that informs the tradition. Therefore, she argues, "realism is sometimes complicit in dominant ideology, sometimes resistant, but mostly neither – or somewhere in between" (8). This argument is relevant to my overarching claim about the set of Bengali novels that focus on the closeness of different identities living in rural Bengal and highlight the tensions between Hindus and Muslims that contributed to the breakdown of inter-religious harmony. I will be reading these novels as critical of the nationalist idea that was premised on the exceptional status of the Muslims in South Asia.

Consequently, they signify an idea of belonging that can be considered as a counter-imagination of Pakistan's religious nationalism or "contested narrations" of 1947. I analyze the novels' depiction of subaltern imaginations as they capture the organic links of the people in the countryside through the "imagination" of the Hindu and Muslim "communities." The peasants'

world is described in the novels from their perspective; the moments they participate in are reflected in their "heterogeneous imaginations."

By creatively imagining their milieu, they overcome the limits imposed by the realities of rural life, triggering, in Dipesh Chakrabarty's terms, "the irreducible pluralities that contend in the history of the word 'imagination'" (178). The realist framework of the novels also engages with cultural imposition of the Hindu and Muslim nationalisms on the rural populations, as Mallabarman alludes to the Hindu-Muslim discord by focusing on the impact of the death of the river Titash on the peoples living close to it, while Osman symbolically opposes the 1947 Partition by presenting Chandra Kotal, the subaltern Hindu as the guardian of the Muslim boys Monadir and Amjad.

Adwaita Mallabarman's *A River Called Titash* (1956) depicts the Malo community living along the banks of the river Titash. Mallabarman distinguishes Titash from the more recognizable rivers of Bengal: "The river Titash does not hold the awesome terror of the Padma and the Meghna" (11). Separating Titash from Padma and Meghna also enables the narrator to give the river a local color: "Titash holds no such grand history in its bosom. It is simply a river" (11). This unadorned setting then becomes pivotal to the documentation of interlinked lives of Malo men and women, the fisherfolk and the peasantry, and the young and the old in *A River Called Titash*.

The Malo fisher folk community is nourished by the river and their cultural-economic co-existence with the Muslim neighbors. In fact, the community and their evolving relation with the river are linked to the Muslim peasants. Divided into four chapters, the novel depicts the moments of sorrow, joy, pleasure and pain in the fisher folk lives that are connected to the river.

Also, they share correspondence with the peasantry, who follow the folk version of Islam practiced in the Bengal delta.

The human lives, broadly divided between Hindus and Muslims of the subaltern classes, live in relative harmony with one another. Blessed by the river Titash, the tranquil lives of those living by it captures the readers' imagination when the novel begins: "But Titash is so gentle. Even on nights of rain and wind, with their men out in Titash, the women do not really feel afraid" (16). The depiction of human stories is blended with the riverine surroundings. While the reader immerses in the tales of Malos being sustained by Titash ("But Titash is always so full of water! So full of currents! So many fishing boats ply it all through the year! In no way is it ungenerous"), they also come to know about the tragedies that have overwhelmed the Malo lives, as the novel progresses: "Titash seems like an enemy; turned hostile and merciless" (15; 245). Titash has been a sustainer of human stories mixed with happiness and sorrows. But when it begins to die, as in the second part "Floaters" of the last chapter (Part IV), the human theatre by the side of river is transformed with the scattering of the Malos and the forceful intrusion of the peasantry in the newly formed lands on the vanished riverbed.

Mallabarman's passionate renderings of the individual stories link one human story to the other in a synchrony that reveals the joys and misfortunes within the Malo community. Their symbiotic relation to the Muslim peasantry and their eventual fragmentation coincides with the death of the river. As the Muslim peasants grab the spaces rising out of the riverbed of Titash, the already fragmented Malos fail to resist due to the rivalry within the community. Muslims become dominant, as Hindu-Muslim co-existence ends where fishermen used to live once, and we find the tragedy of 1947 being symbolically enacted by the river Titash.

Kalpana Bardan, the translator of the novel, does not count *A River Called Titash* as a "Partition novel" because the violence depicted by the novelist does not fit the framework of mayhem traditionally associated with 1947. The translation, published in 1993, distances the work from literatures evocative of the Partition: "He [Mallabarman] was writing it during the preceding decade of rising religious communal tension in the region's politics and finished it during one of this century's most devastating religious riots and massacres" (261). Adding that "the author ends the account before the shadow of the 1947 partition falls on the community," (261) the translator reads the overdetermined presentation of communal harmony somewhat apolitically.

In fact, the novelist's presentation of the politics that severely tested the coexistence of the Muslim peasants and Hindu fisher folk in the villages near Titash also attest to the internal conflicts of the Malos that were shaped by Hindu nationalism. In my reading of the novel, I highlight these factors to better understand how the presentation of inter-communal harmony ends with the dispersal of the Malo community. I argue that the novel is a "contested narration" by underscoring as symbolic the influence of jatra members in the destabilization of the Malo community and the acts of invasion lead by the Muslim peasants. However, the novel's construction of "heterogeneous imaginations" is idealistic, existing in opposition to the episodes of tension caused by the politics of identity formation during 1947.

Mallabarman has alluded to the conflicting cultural politics of the time by presenting the interior conflicts of the Hindu subaltern classes leading up to the Partition. It is a reflection of their deteriorating social status, as the faster pace of communalization meant their past bonding the Muslim peasants was no longer alive. As Titash disappeared, so did the amity between the two religious communities. Religious cross-relations are maintained idealistically while nature is

the nourisher. Hindus and Muslims lived side by side, but when nature withdraws support and the community is weakened, a wall between Hindu Malos and Muslim peasants is erected. The representation of coexistence in earlier parts of the novel support my claim that the human connections, infused with imagination, communicate a different reality.

A particular instance of human connection would be the link between Subla's Wife and Ananto and his mother. In Part I, we come to know about Kishore and Subla's boat journey to the edges of Titash. As they go to another village, Kishore gets married to a girl only to lose his wife to the bandits. He goes mad at the end of Part I but his story continues in Part II. We find the arrival of a woman with a young boy beside her in the village to which Kishore and Subla belonged. She feels helpless, though she and the infant boy are accepted by the villagers. It is in such a moment of helplessness that she discovers the kindness of Subla's wife, Basanti: "Through the blur of tears, Ananta's mother sees that the woman is about her own age and wears, as she does, a widow's plain white sari" (76-77). This act of seeing is simply acknowledging the empathy Ananto's mother receives from Subla's wife.

As the story progresses, we find that a more meaningful communication has been established between the two widows. Thus, "Ananta's mother senses the yet unseen presence of Subla's wife in her life the way a doe senses the source of musk about her" (80). An unexplainable sense of vision accompanies Subla's wife's perception of Ananta's mother too. Her admiring the beauty of the widowed mother makes her to imagine the husband that would be Ananta's biological father: "Those downcast lovely eyes were once opened fully to look at someone at the auspicious joining of eyes at the wedding" (81). The reality behind such vision becomes clearer when they engage in conversation in Ramkeshab's house during Kali puja, where they go to make food that will be offered to the deities.

Here we also see a narration of Malo's celebrating the Kali puja in splendor, a narration that is related to the novel's exposition of community. The readers get to know, "What Malos spend on the occasion of the Kali puja goes mostly for the performance of music and plays. But they spend on food for the celebration of the winter solstice on the last day of the month of Paush," while they become familiar with the Malo involvement with the folk tradition: "The singing procession through the entire village starts out from the Malo neighborhood before any other" (113). Malos' sensitivity to an organic living experience is further suggested in Subla's wife's convincing Ananta's mother that they should help Ramkeshab's wish to make holy offerings.

It is on such an occasion that we get to know about the tragedy of Subla and Kishore. As Subla's wife recounts the past, a clear picture of Subla's death emerges. That tragedy has never stayed away from the Malos is proven through his death. In fact, it is the betrayal of fellow men that cost Subla his wife; Basanti recollects: "The thought of the terrible death her husband died come back to her from time to time. She tries to imagine the scene: the employer's callous order and the helpless employee jumping into the jaws of death to obey it" (120). As much as Subla's wife, Basanti, brings back the tragedy of her life through re-imagining, she stirs the soul of Kishore too.

Psychologically troubled, his response to bringing back of the past through "'imagination'" is captured in the following manner: "The two women making sweet cakes in his kitchen and both deeply tied to his own life. Maybe their nearness fills his heart for a moment. Maybe not. What goes on inside a crazed mind is not for normal people to know" (120). As "these two women's presence stirs something in his mind," Ananta's mother becomes impassioned.

Her attempt to suppress her agony does not go unnoticed. In fact, the eyes of Basanti capture the intense pain that has gripped Ananto's mother at that moment: "For one moment a

suspicion peeps into her mind that this is the one the bandits took away on the new tributary!" (120). It appears that Basanti's recognition of the wife Kishore seemed to have lost before going mad is strangely accurate, though she has remained unrecognized to the rest of the community. To Basanti, she appears to be a ghost made visible by her story's untangling past tragedies to reveal the identity of the woman who have been a stranger to most of the villages:

> What the light of day could show as genuine and concrete appears transformed into mysterious unreality by the dead of night. Subla's wife loses her practical common sense. The depth of night blurs the distance between imagination and reality. She thinks, yes, it's her, she must be the one. But not in flesh and blood. Sitting here is her spirit (120).

We can interpret "mysterious unreality" as an initiation of heterogeneous imagination. The blurring of "the distance between imagination and reality" means Basanti can see what reality denied her so far. She empathized with the helplessness of the woman who has been an alien to the villagers previously. Her affection now turns into dread, as the imaginative vision stirred up by the eerie presence of Ananto's mother, who looks as if a "spirit," having been physically moved by the storytelling.

At this point, Basanti also comes to realize the reason behind the stranger's affection for Kishore. It is in one of the moments of festivity that another tragedy strikes to have Ananta's mother attacked by Kishore and then his action is met with violence from the villagers. Here again we see the author is employing the use of vision from two perspectives. One is what Kishore sees, in which Ananto's mother, his wife taken away by the bandits at the tributary, is turned into the menacing figure of the robber, and what the villagers see, which prompts them to violently reject the madman's attempting to redress the wrong committed against him in the past.

Mallabarman's depiction of violence contributing to Kishore's death is reflective of the novel's overlapping sorrows, joys, hopes and sufferings as connecting human lives. Another linkage explored in the novel is between the Muslim peasantry and the Hindu Malos, the example of which will strengthen our claim that the novel explores communal harmony before the drying up of the river.

At the beginning of the section "The Rainbow" when Kadir Mian and his son, Chhadir are struggling to save their produce from the surging storm, they sail the river Titash. Nature has taken a more ruthless turn at this point as the rainy season has begun: "The sky disintegrates and the downpour goes on without end. The waters of Titash rise and keep rising, unbounded. Cool air blows briskly, pushes the opaque waters into waves that rock the fishermen's boats and rock even more the flatboats carrying potatoes" (137). The potatoes Kadir Mian and Chhadir intend to sell are in at risk of capsizing; worst still, the two Muslim peasants' lives are at risk.

They are rescued though as soon as Malo fishermen Dhananjay and Banamali see them. The moment when the Muslim peasants are rescued by Hindu fishermen is captured in the following manner: "Then the hands of the five men, three in the fishing boat and two in the potato boat, work with the mechanical speed of a sewing machine needle. Soon the wide hold at the center of the fishing boat is filled with potatoes and the emptied hull of the potato carrier floats up" (138). The fishermen's action on behalf of the peasantry is compared to the functioning of the sewing machine to indicate a sense of communal bonding has inspired the rescue attempt performed by the Malos.

As they reach the safety of shore, they are found sitting together in a rare moment of leisurely existence: "In the tiny domed shed they sit huddled together, their wet bodies touching" (139). Such is the fraternity between the Malo fishermen and the Muslim peasants that Banamali

imagines Kadir Mian to be resembling Ramprasad, who he likens to the Hindu gods: "Ramprasad is like a descendant of one of those sages -maybe Valmiki -he heard described from the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*" (139). Banamali captures the similarity between Kadir Mian and Ramprasad by extending it to the Hindu gods, which is an example of heterogeneous imagination. It is also an instance of the co-existence of the Muslims and Hindus in rural Bengal.

Again, as Banamali stretches his imagination further he is able to invent similarity between Kadir Mian and a Muslim man native to his village. He remembers, "Listening to his account of the heartrending story of Karbala, Banamali was on the verge of tears" (139). The villager also told him about the prophet of Islam. Now that he has rescued a Muslim peasant from certain death, he is able to associate the sacred and the mundane to define peasant/fishermen coexistence:

> Indeed, Ramprasad of Jatrabari and Kadir Mian of Birampur too -each is that rare kind of person who gives you a helping hand if you stumble and holds your hand through a long briar-covered way; but then again, if in your sorrow you put your face on that calm chest underneath the beard, cling to him with both hands, and sob away, he doesn't scold you or sternly ask you to stop crying; he just strokes your back like a person who can't help any other way (139).

Banamali's imagination captures the kindness Ramprasad and Kadir Mian offers, as if they are bridges between the surreal and the real, embracing the communities living beside the Titash river.

That the correspondence between Hindus and Muslims is auspicious is again evident in the section "Double-Hued Butterfly" in Part IV. Chhadir, son of Kadir, has lost a boat, but his life has been saved by Banamali. His description of the Malo fisherman's generosity lightens up the peasant household: "With grateful eyes they all look once again at Banamali" (227). Chhadir's

son, Romu, is also moved: “Romu feels infinite reverence for him” (227). This act of compassion is then extended to the peasants and the fishermen dining together in the Muslim household: “The grace of hospitality wipes out all residue of the unpleasantness and unease from the quarrel and violence earlier that day in their boat” (228). The Muslims and the Hindus have extended “hospitality” to one another, though conflict will eventually torn them apart.

The novel discusses Hindu-Muslim discord by an internal conflict that causes the Malo community to split up. The discord in the Malo community is depicted in the form of a jatra group invading the cultural landscape of the fishermen: “When the jatra drama group enters their neighborhood, so does dissension” (231). In fact, the conflict that destroys the community is cultural in *A River Called Titash*. The outsiders capturing of the hearts of Malo women can be interpreted as a form of discord, similar to the dominant nationalism’s disrupting the lives of the different communities living in Bengal’s villages. As the jatra men overwhelm the culture of the local fishermen, we can find echoes of what Joya Chatterji (1994) has identified as Hindu nationalism’s attempt to present a uniform cultural narrative of community to bolster the Bengali Hindu identity.

As we have discussed earlier, Chatterji finds the attempt to create “a new culture of patriotism” in the movements that were untaken to unify the disparate communities in the villages. Mallabarman presents a contested form of the effort by narrating its adverse influence on the Malo ways of living encapsulated by their closeness to the Muslim peasants: “Perhaps the vicious axe of the jatra group severed the tree’s life-giving root underground” (234). The political conflict that contributed to the partition of Bengal is framed culturally to suggest that the community became divided in villages.

Interestingly, the women were the most convinced of the external influence of the jatra men: “To Malo women, these players of the roles of king, prince, commander-in-chief, and ‘conscience’ character appear to be amazing men with adorable ways” (240). The jatra “players” perform the “roles” as if they are men in power, drawing the women to become influenced by their charm. The narrator describes the situation of the community in the following manner: “Gradually they slide below the standards of ordinary human dignity, so much so that when an enemy perpetrates atrocious acts –sitting right there on the tip of the nose! –they are unable to face up and fight back” (241). At the end of the novel, this internal rift along gender lines weakens the community, with the narrator observing “the Malos have completely lost their ability to work together” (246). As the coexisting humanity disappears, so does the Malo community, as the place that had been their source of livelihood has embraced a new reality.

When the river dries up, by embracing the fate of many rivers in the Bengal delta, the peasants try to claim the newly risen lands for agriculture: “Soon bands of farmers will come armed with clubs and occupy it again” (246). Scarcity of land now leads to sectarian fights. One of the fights claims the life of Kadir Mian’s former friend Ramprasad, who according to Banamali, was the symbol of Hindu Muslim unity. With the Muslim peasants overpowering the Hindu fisher folks, the social equilibrium is destroyed: “Those who already have lots of land, those who are mightier, they also become the owners of the new land in the middle of Titash” (246). The novel thus recreates the tragedy of the breakdown in Hindu Muslim relations in the eastern regions of Bengal.

While Mallabarman in *A River Called Titash* symbolically depicts the communalization of the rural neighborhoods by the river Titash, Shaukat Osman’s *Janani* alludes to the gradual reshaping of Hindu Muslim unity in pastoral Bengal by depicting the time when Azhar Khan and

Chandra Kotal's friendship turned fragile. When the conflict between the zamindars instigated the Hindu and Muslim villagers to become divided, the hope of religious unity is kept alive by Dariabibi, the Muslim peasants' wife, who visits Shairami, the untouchable Hindu woman in her deathbed. Again, in the very last scene of the novel, the readers find Chandra Kotal becoming the guardian of the Muslim boys after Dariabibi commits suicide. *Janani* thus sketches in fragments the opposition to the formation of separate Hindus and Muslim national entities.

According to *Janani's* translator Jamal Osman, the novel captures a span of time between the imminent partitioning of British India and the creation of East Pakistan: "*Janani*, Shaukat Osman's first novel, was partially serialized in 1945-46 in a Calcutta literary magazine, and the book was published in Dhaka fifteen years later, in 1961, by which time Shaukat Osman had established himself as a major writer in East Pakistan" ("Introduction to *Janani*" vii). This enunciation of the novel's publishing history tells us that it is a response to the pre-1947 political divisions in Bengal. Dividing the two Hindu and Muslim communities in Bengal was opposed by Osman.

The novel's opposition to the nationalization of religion is demonstrated in the delineation of friendship between Azhar and Chandra Kotal. Their amity disrupts due to the influence of the Hindu and Muslim zamindars of the village. As followers of Bengal's two communal nationalisms, the rival zamindars instigate religious discord that also influences the subaltern lives. If resulting from external forces influencing them, the peasants eventually resolve the conflict. In Chandra Kotal's comment is captured the reality of sectarian nationalism, which he identifies as a construct of powerful men: "They're [zamindars] religious for the sake of money" (157). We also see Dariabibi rejecting the growing religious divide by embracing

Shairami, following Osman's non-sectarian attitude illustrated in the depictions of cross-religious subaltern relations in the novel.

To give an overview of Osman's *Janani,* set in the village Moheshdanga in rural Bengal, the subaltern classes are at the center of the narrative. Dariabibi and her family – consisting of Azhar Khan –her husband, her sons –Amjad and Monadir, Azhar's aunt Ashekjan and her daughter, Naima – struggle in an adversarial economic situation. Living with co-religionist peasants and low caste Hindus like Chandra Kotal and his family, folk Islam is an integral part of their daily tradition. Both the Hindus and the Muslims draw succor from this tradition that emphasized on the reverence of saints over strict religious piety.

In chapter three, the "dead dervish, Shah Kerman Khorasani" is identified as a source of unity to the villagers: "For minor ailments, his holy tomb, the Mazar, was the only refuge for the villagers" (26). Moreover, the saint also brought together different religious communities: "Here was a living saint, to whose tomb both Hindus and Muslims offered sacrifice" (26). Both the religious communities share a tradition of reverence towards the same saint, which illustrates that the people were bound by a tradition of coexistence in these rural parts of Bengal.

To survive poverty, landlessness and destitution, the peasants of the society forge friendships that signify religious harmony. The friendship between the pious Muslim peasant Azhar Khan and the low caste Hindu laborer Chandra Kotal goes beyond their respective religious communities. Azhar Khan is a strict follower of orthodox religious tradition. He actively participates in the dispute between the competing Muslim sects in the village known as the Hanafis and the La Majhabis: "Who could now say Azhar was a helpless man, he –such a proper Muslim, that he could not bear any insult to his religion" (147). On the other hand,

Chandra Kotal is a folk musician who runs "a comic theatre group and had commissions from faraway villages during the *puja* and other festivals" (15).

His income is precarious, similar to Azhar's, but it sustains him and his family: "In the rainy season Chandra didn't have to worry about farming; he earned enough from the fish he caught" (16). The low caste fisherman has deep reverence for Azhar Khan: "Chandra respected Azhar Khan for his honesty. Besides, the old Khan family was known to everybody in the village. Chandra valued that too" (16). This respectful attitude towards Azhar Khan draws Chandra towards him despite their religious difference.

In the earlier chapters (5 and 6) of the novel, the amity between Chandra Kotal and Azhar is depicted. In Chapter 5, we see Chandra Kotal visiting Azhar's home with lobsters. When Azhar comes home, he mentions they should do business together. Upon Azhar's inquiry, Chandra Kotal says that his sister has returned with her three children after the death of her husband. They discuss their hardship in the village, which is falling behind the towns.

In retrospect, Azhar attempts to help his friend receive a loan but fails; consequently, "the thought that he could not help Chandra pricked him somewhere in his conscience" (53). The Muslim landless laborer's empathy towards the Hindu seasonal laborer is evident here. As Chandra contemplates learning "a little masonry job" from Azhar so that he can go to distant towns to find work, he remains silent: "No reply came from Azhar" (53). We can interpret this moment as Azhar's awareness of the uncertainty of job as a land-laborer; by remaining silent he refuses to dampen his friend's enthusiasm.

However, communal discord would soon threaten the camaraderie between Azhar Khan and Chandra Kotal. The zamindars try to influence the poor villagers and "in the village, Hindu-Muslim communal riots were about to break out" (132). They use religion for communal

purposes to convenience their interests, which is a common tactic used in Bengal to divide Hindu and Muslim villagers according to Hashmi (1992). Hashmi's postulating that the proponents of nationalism communalized the village communities of Bengal is relevant to our analysis of the exploitative zamindars of Moheshdanga.

The political discord between the zamindars turns Azhar Khan and Chandra Kotal against one another. We can interpret this break down of the friendship from the perspective offer by Hashmi (1994).[49] The polarization in national politics is presented in *Janani* as a problem of land ownership between the zamindars. If the relation between the Hindu and Muslim communities in the village deteriorated during the political evolution of Bengal in the 1940s, it is suggested in the novel too:

> A fifty-*bigha* fenland had been a bone of contention between Rohini Choudhury and Hatem Khan over the last few years. Until recently the fenland was in Choudhury's control. Despite Hatem Khan's rights to the property in title, he had not been able to get anywhere near it. A few Muslim fishermen, called *atraaf*, the poor, by respectable Muslims, had taken over the lease of the fenland. The income from the fen was not inconsiderable. Hatem Khan had persuaded some *atraaf* Muslims to stop paying rent. Rohini Choudhury, who knew exactly what was going on, now got together some low-caste Hindu peasants and provoked them to start a communal riot in the village (132).

[49] According to Hashmi, "the Muslim *ashraf* and [Hindu] *bhadralok* leaders did not hesitate to arouse communal passion among the Muslim and Namasudra masses. Some of them played a dual role. They tried to come to an understanding with Hindu aristocracy and *bhadralok* and at the same time tried to win over the enfranchised section of the peasantry whose support they needed to run the elections held on the basis of separate electorates" (97). This argument suggests how the privileged classes played a significant role in the communalization of both Hindu and Muslim rural communities. In fact, the influence Hindu landowners had over their low caste Hindu tenants has gained greater critical focus in Chatterji (1994).

This excerpt from the novel gives us a clear perspective on the gradual process of communalization. Rohini Choudhury, the old Hindu zamindar was in possession of a land that belonged to his Muslim rival Hatem Khan. It could be surmised that Hatem Khan took advantage of the changing political horizon in Bengal, where Muslim League came to power just before 1947. Now transformed into "a fanatical Muslim," the Muslim zamindar of the village tried to influence the peasants by arguing that "the infidel Hindu *zamindars* would finish off the Muslims" (132; 133). Consequently, he was able to provoke the atraaf (subaltern) Muslims to go against the Hindu zamindar.

In retaliation, Rohini Choudhury used "some low-caste Hindu peasants" against the Muslims. Rohini Choudhury incited the lower-caste Hindus contributing to Chandra Kotal's militant indoctrination: "Chandra was now going round saying, 'If Muslims utter a word, blow them away.'" (133). Such scenario became more commonplace in Bengal, as the different social classes of a community converged. The religious divide contributes to violence in the village. The novel thus suggests that the dominant classes contributed to the peasant's communalization.

While religious tension described in the novel articulates the problem of nationalism's influence in the rural parts of Bengal, Shaukat Osman's narrative delineates the realism of poverty too. Dariabibi, the central character of the novel, feels the pangs of poverty. Her observations about poverty recur in the novel. In chapter three, we find her entering Ashekjan's room at midnight to observe how she is doing: "There was the sound of a sob. Was old Ashekjan crying? Dariabibi looked in her direction. It was as if the female image of poverty had taken refuge in a corner of the room. Humans were Allah's greatest creation. What had happened to them! Dariabibi felt ill at ease. In the fire of poverty the wealth of life had turned into ashes"

(31). Dariabibi's imaginative vision is captured in her realization that richness of life is destroyed by poverty is evoked in the pain of Ashekjan.

I argue that Dariabibi's appreciation of life is an attestation of her imaginative dimension that overcomes the reality of poverty. It also outdoes the barrier existing between the untouchable Shairami and the wife of a Muslim peasant. Her visiting the ailing non-Muslim subaltern woman is a testimony to the novel's enunciation of "heterogeneous imaginations."

Even if the community's segregation rules imposed on her wishes to empathize with the Hindu subalterns, Dariabibi imaginatively invents a possibility to overcome the boundary imposed on her: "Purdah was not strictly observed in a peasant home. Dariabibi could easily visit her neighbors. But if her visit to a different area, particularly that of the untouchables, got known in the Muslim area, they would have not honour left" (109-110). she crosses the communal divide when goes to visit Shairami, while she also concocts a different of cross-religious belonging, otherwise denied to her by the patriarchal community.

Moreover, she names her newborn daughter "Shari" which is narrated in the following way: "Let Shairami's memory live in the child's pet name. It was, as it were, the feeble effort of a peasant mother in one corner of this land confronting religion and caste as they raised their reptile heads against humanity" (132). Dariabibi's is a tribute to the earlier effort Shairami made to cross the boundaries of religion when she did "an offering at the Shiva's temple for [the ailing] Amjad" (110). If her participation in the Hindu ritual is an instance of the novel's imagining the common bond of humanity, otherwise denied by the communal divide, it is also an instance of the "heterogeneous imaginations" of the friendship between the women of the two religious communities.

If *Janani* presents rural plurality and its being threatened by narratives favoring segregation of communities in the nation, the novel has focused on the struggles of Dariabibi in the face of poverty from a realist framework. When Azhar dies, we find Yakoob, a close relation of Azhar's, taking advantage of her fight for survival. Yakoob uses the opportunity to make improper sexual advances towards her and eventually Dariabibi submits herself to him in exchange of money for her son, Monadir. At the end of the novel, the readers discover that she is carrying the child of Yakoob, though she did not let the world know, in case it brings dishonor to her children. Eventually, Dariabibi gives up in her fight to feed her family as she refuses to accept that Yakoob has taken control of her efforts to keep her children safe and their destiny secured. By committing suicide, Dariabibi escapes from the torment of being dishonored by a close relation.

The readers come to find that Chandra has become the guardian of the children now that Azhar and Dariabibi are no longer there. Chandra's presence in their life suggests that despite setbacks communal harmony is still alive in Moheshdanga. The attempt to create separate Hindu and Muslim identities, previously captured through the tensions between Azhar and Chandra, to bolster nationalisms representing the two communities looks like an impossibility in the last scene of *Janani*.

Amidst tragedy, the bonding between Chandra Kotal and the two boys become symbol of Hindu and Muslim unity: "Three silhouettes stood by Dariabibi's grave. They could be recognized as Monadir, Amjad and Chandra" (212). As "the three of them walked down the known-unknown highway," the hope of communal reconciliation survives when we finish the novel. The Partition of 1947 would have a lasting impact on the communities of different faiths,

but *Janani* as an example of "contested narration" is suggesting that Moheshdanga might be able to withstand the division.

**Conclusion**

My reading of Mallabarman's *A River Called Titash* demonstrates that the ascendancy of the Muslim peasants and the disappearance of the Malo community in the areas adjacent to the Titash river in East Bengal is the result of invasive communal politics gripping the region. This tragedy befalling the Malo fisher folk in the form of a jatra group weakening the community coincides with the death of the river and internal tensions within the Malo community. As the hegemonic nationalisms in Bengal began to enforce cultural segregation, the cultural links between the peasants and the fisher folk, depicted in the novel as "heterogeneous imaginations," and is identified as the source of Hindu Muslim unity, are shattered. While I demonstrate that divisive nationalisms emerge as powerful counter-narratives to the rural tradition sustained by inter-communal belonging in Mallabarman's *A River Called Titash*, my reading of Shaukat Osman's *Janani* suggests that the rivalry between the communal zamindars contributes to the escalation of religious tensions between the rural Hindus and Muslims. With the looming of Bengal's partition, the circulation of the narrative premised on Hindu-Muslim division appears harmful for the friendship between Azhar Khan and Chandra Kotal. Moreover, it shapes the destiny of the Hindu and Muslim communities in Moheshdanga. With her children facing abandonment after Dariabibi's suicide, it is Chandra Kotal among the other villagers who give refuge to her family. Defying the narrative of Hindu and Muslim separation, the subaltern classes resist disunity in the hinterlands of Bengal.

## Chapter 2: "Looking-glass border" Novels: Reading East Pakistan's Hindu minority in Amitav Ghosh's *The Shadow Lines* (1988) and the Unified Bengali Identity During the 1971 War in Dilruba Z Ara's *Blame* (2015)

### Introduction

In this chapter, I deal with the treatment of the Hindu minority in East Pakistan by focusing on two Anglophone novels, Amitav Ghosh's *The Shadow Lines* (1988) and Dilruba Z Ara's *Blame* (2015). A major postcolonial novel, *The Shadow Lines*, is about the narrator's grandmother, Tha'mma, who experiences the 1964 riots in East Pakistan while visiting there after a long gap following Bengal's partition in 1947. During the riot, Tridib, a relation of the narrator, is killed, and the violent episode contributes to the grandmother's increasingly inimical attitude towards East Pakistan in the latter part of the novel. She also attempts to justify the war India fought with Pakistan in 1965. She no longer considers East Pakistan as her home she had left behind, thereby, displacing her previously held perspective of the place with a nationalist fervor towards her adopted country India. That Hindus were treated with indifference in East Pakistan is also addressed in Ara's *Blame*. She depicts an uneasy atmosphere for the Hindus, which forms the backdrop of the protagonist Laila's adoration for the Hindu boy Santo. She also suggests in her novel that East Pakistan's Bengali Muslims, who were previously antagonistic towards the Hindus changed their perception in 1971. They began to accept them being fully aware that the Hindus were the primary targets of the army onslaught during the war.

By bringing the two novels together, the chapter highlights the minority problem at the heart of Muslim nationalism in South Asia, while it also exposes a major fault line of Pakistan's creation, illustrated in its failure to accommodate the minority in Pakistan. I also trace the "othering" of the Bengalis and the Hindus in Pakistan, as well as the nation's conflation of the distinction between an ethnic identity and a religious identity with the emergent Bengali

nationalism contesting the nation's failure to address the precipitous decline of the Hindu minority in the aftermath of Bengal's 1947 partition. More importantly, East Bengal's Hindus shared an overlapping of identities encapsulating those who decided to remain in East Pakistan and those who left to join their co-religionists in the majority Indian state of West Bengal.

Because of their minority identity, the Hindus also become the targets of discrimination and persecution. Their crisis was also shaped by the Bengali demands of cultural, economic, and political parity that had transformed East Pakistan politically – Hindus were branded as the instigators behind these demands. As I have noted, the formerly East Bengal's Hindus after the 1947 partition were now divided by the border between India and Pakistan. If tensions flared up in East Pakistan, as it did during the 1964 riots and the India-Pakistan war in 1965, they were simultaneously echoed in West Bengal, India. In fact, we witness many such entanglements that are shaped by events occurring due to the hostility between the two nations that were created through the Partition.

Therefore, the two sides of the divided formerly Bengal province from 1947 to 1971 became echoes of one another – sometimes one reacted to the political escalation on the other side of the border, on other occasions significant re-engagement with the other side took place. Despite the division of Bengal in 1947, the two Bengals forged an unseen resolution to assess the situation on each other's turfs. Amitav Ghosh identifies this phenomenon as "the looking glass border" in *The Shadow Lines*.

The crisis of 1971 resulting from the Bengali nationalist struggle for self-determination in Pakistan elicited a similar interest in West Bengal, as has been implied in *The Shadow Lines*. In fact, 1971 precipitated an international refugee crisis as a large number of people from East Pakistan, in particular, Hindus fled the conflict to the bordering regions of India. Dilruba Z Ara

presents this crisis from a different angle by presenting the case of those Hindus who did not seek refuge to India but were accepted within the fold of a traditional Muslim family from Chittagong. openly hostile to the Hindus until the war broke out, her family accepts the Hindu minority, the protagonist Laila witnesses in *Blame*.

Both the novels approach the issue of East Pakistan's Hindus by capturing the shifts of identities during and in the aftermath of 1947 Partition. The Hindu minority question in East Pakistan is not far from struggle of the Hindu refugees and Muslim minorities in West Bengal, Ghosh tells us by presenting the problem of Hindus living in East Pakistan as an extension of the tragic aftermath of Bengal's partition. The violent Dhaka riots that caused Tridib's death, while changed the grandmother's perception of East Pakistan, is articulated by juxtaposing the impact of a similar riot in Calcutta induced by a far-off event in Kashmir. In Ara's novel, the vulnerability of the Hindus – evident throughout the Pakistan era since 1947, which escalated during the 1971 war – is posited in the background of the India-Pakistan war in 1965.

In fact, the minority problem worsened in the 1960s due to Pakistan's exclusivist nationalist agenda, our interrogation of Ara's novel suggests. With the rising influence of the Bengali nationalist identity challenging the nation, it attempted to further antagonize the Hindus. They were presented as the "other," who did not fit the mold of Muslim nationalism. In contradiction, integral to the emergent Bengali nationalism was the syncretic tradition of Hindu-Muslim coexistence. In East Pakistan, this alternative vision of belonging, premised on the recognition of shared Hindu and Muslim identities, encountered resistance as it exposed the major fault-line of the then dominant nationalism seeking legitimacy in an Islamic past. In fact, the 1960s Pakistan became "the breeding ground of the [Muslim] politics in which non-Muslims were constituted as second-class citizens," which prompted well-off Muslim Bengalis to be

openly antagonistic towards Bengali Hindus as is depicted in Ara's novel *Blame* (Guhathakurta 289). Pakistan favored the idea of Muslim nationality and refused to accept the Hindus as Pakistani. Consequently, Bengali Hindus became prime targets, when the West Pakistani regime decided to crush the insurgency in 1971.

While tensions with the Hindus did not cease to exist – and often precipitated by the enmity between India and Pakistan, as is depicted in *Blame* – East Pakistan's Bengalis developed a notion of intercommunal belonging. This notion was immensely shaped by the political changes spanning between twenty-four years from 1947 to 1971 and brought the two major religious communities of East Pakistan together during the 1971 war.[50] In East Pakistan, a cultural recognition of the proximity of the two Bengals began to oppose the trendy and popular Muslim nationalist sentiment that was legitimized by the 1947 Partition.[51] Moreover, it also had a distinct urban characteristic, as Ara's novel suggests.

We see Santo's Tagore songs being well received only by the university students and intellectuals, if not by the majority of East Pakistan's Bengali Muslims. In *Blame*, a more empathetic acceptance of the minority's plight is also evident during the refugee crisis in 1971. This is illustrated in Laila's family accepting the minority during their own state of refugee-hood, when an escalation of violence in Chittagong forces them to go to a neighboring village.

[50] Bangladeshi historian A. F. Salahuddin Ahmed's work *Bengali Nationalism and the Emergence of Bangladesh: An Introductory Outline* (1994) outlines the dissipation of once influential Muslim identity based Pakistani nationalism and the rise of a non-sectarian ethno-linguistic Bengali nationalism in the following sentences: "Pakistan was the product of Muslim religious nationalism. Soon after its creation, however, its inherent contradiction became apparent. The Islamic religious sentiment which was the basis of Pakistan nationalism could not hold the nation together for long" (90).

[51] Sheikh Mujibur Rahman's historically famous speech "This Time the Struggle is For Our Independence!" thus imagines a more organic Hindu-Muslim unity against the Pakistani authoritarian regimes who were dillydallying to hand over the state power to Rahman even after he won quite substantially: "I know how to organize a movement. But be careful. Keep in mind that the enemy has infiltrated our ranks to engage in the work of provocateurs. Whether Bengali or non-Bengali, Hindu or Muslim, all are our brothers and it is our responsibility to ensure their safety" (*The Bangladesh Reader* 219).

Perhaps, the novel's placing Gita and Santo in the process of Bangladesh's emergence in 1971 is its strongest statement against the persecution of Hindu identity, which became more acute in the middle of the war when the thousands of refugees crossing the border to India were primarily Hindus.

Thus, both *The Shadow Lines* (1988) and *Blame* (2015) can be called "looking-glass border" novels, as they illustrate Bengalis reflecting on one another as residents of West Bengal in India and a Bengali perspective of an East Pakistani/Bangladeshi variant respectively. While the former foregrounds the consequences of the 1947 Partition on East Pakistan's Hindu minority by inquiring if the creation of Pakistan was an injustice to the region's Hindus who opted to stay instead of migrating, it is also able to track prejudice against Muslims in India and the severe breakdown in Hindu Muslim relations during times of conflict including the war between India and Pakistan when Tha'mma declares East Pakistan as an enemy zone. The latter novel captures the spirit of Hindu Muslim coexistence in the backdrop of the anti-Pakistan movement, while depicting the 1971 war as embodying the sacrifice of the Hindus who had become a target of the military campaign. Both the works suggest that 1947 and 1971 created and re-created the two-sided reflections that have shaped the respective protagonists, Tha'mma and Laila, of the two novels.

Their identities contain the different fractures and shifts in South Asia, including the India-Pakistan war in 1965, the Kashmir conflict and the Bangladesh War in 1971. We see that these factors bring new dimensions to the crisis of East Pakistan's Hindu minority including the refugee crisis in West Bengal in *The Shadow Lines* or the internal displacement of hundreds in 1971 in *Blame*. An already partitioned Bengal in 1947 becomes reflections of one another in *The Shadow Lines* as the communal crisis impacting the Hindus of East Pakistan (formerly East

Bengal) influences the treatment of Muslims in West Bengal. In *Blame,* Bengalis protesting the Pakistani authority reinvent identity – divided since 1947 along the religious lines – in the form of Bengali nationalist movement. The novels as looking-glass beyond-the-border literatures thus complement one another by addressing minority identity. If Ghosh's novel insinuates that the two Bengals are closer than ever after 1947, Ara's novel draws a vivid picture of East Pakistan, where the stifling of Hindu identity contributed to a collective resistance against the Pakistani definition of nationhood.

The chapter's reading of the minority crisis follows a comparative approach that has been developed by Gayatri Spivak in *An Aesthetic Education in the Era of Globalization* (2012). My method, if framed in the language of Spivak, will be "a kind of homeopathic gesture: scratching at the epistemic fracture by awkwardly assuming a language to be an 'epistemic system' and staging a collision between Kipling and Tagore, Didi and Binodini, 'Mary Oraon,' and 'Karim'" (*Aesthetic Education* 52). To read comparatively the depiction of the after-effect of the 1947 Partition on East Pakistan's Hindus in *The Shadow Lines* and *Blame,* we need to read the "fractures" signifying the process of minority creation, illustrated in the gradual trickling down of Hindu refugees from East Pakistan to India, as well as the presence of Muslim refugees in both sides of the border. In fact, we are considering these multiple and somewhat connected stories of partition possessing "a language [powerful] to be an 'epistemic system'" tracking dispossession from 1947 to the second partition of 1971 when the nation's actions internally and externally displaced many people including the minorities. We can locate the "contested narrations" present in the margins of the nations in the oppressed minority as well as in the other human struggles. My analysis therefore will operate by "staging a collision" between Tha'mma

and Laila; if looked through their eyes we are offered a multifaceted dimension of the struggles undertaken to oppose hegemony.

**The "Enemy" Within? Construction of the Hindu Minority in Post-1947 Pakistan and the De-Hinduization campaign of the Pakistan Military in 1971**

How would the minorities be treated in Pakistan – a nation that was created to preserve the interest of South Asia's Muslims having significant non-Muslim minorities within?[52] Muhammad Ali Jinnah's comments would suggest that the minorities were a priority to safeguarding Pakistan's international image. In a 30th October 1947 Pakistan Radio broadcast titled "Protection of Minorities: A Sacred Undertaking," Jinnah vowed to overcome atrocities against the minorities in the immediate aftermath of 1947: "Those who are responsible for this holocaust must be dealt with an iron hand and put down ruthlessly" (*Quaid-I Azam* 34). Jinnah's speech clearly condemns sectarian violence. He also urges the officials of the postcolonial nation to take quick action to respond to misdemeanors against the minority community: "It is now up to the leaders and those responsible and in charge of the Governments to make their supreme effort to make amends for this indelible stigma" (34). Partition-time violence against other communities can be mitigated through swift actions, Jinnah hoped.

Despite his unequivocal condemnation of the majority resorting to violence against the minority, Jinnah's position towards the minority was at times lukewarm. At a press conference in New Delhi dated 14 July 1947, Jinnah suggests that he wanted Pakistan's minorities to become faithful citizens of the state: "As long as the minorities are loyal to the State and owe true allegiance and as long as I have any power, they need have no apprehension of any kind" (*Jinnah: Speeches and Statements 1947-1948* 13). To him, minorities in Pakistan can live

[52] According to Joya Chatterji (2007), "Over 5 million Muslims were left in West Bengal and about 11 million Hindus found themselves stranded in the Western wing of Pakistan [as Partition commenced]" (57).

without fear if they become “loyal to the State” and embody “true allegiance” to the nation. He also warns them of consequences if any of them is “disloyal and plays the role of sabotaging the state” (13). “That minority, of course, becomes intolerable in any State,” he adds to warn the minority of disloyalty (13).

Remarkably, Pakistan’s struggle with the minority would turn into obsession with its Hindu population in East Pakistan. Since 1947 onwards, the Hindus of East Pakistan have been steadily migrating to India but many chose to stay on. Those who did not migrate presented a difficult situation for the state formed on the basis of two-nation theory that distinguished between Muslims and non-Muslims citizen-subjects: “The core of Pakistan as a nation was defined by religion alone; the wings of the new state had two very different cultures otherwise” (Oldenburg 711). Defined by religion, a one-dimensional model was imposed by relegating what “Pakistan” meant to the Bengalis: “That model saw the state of Pakistan as inseparable from the Muslim nation of the Indian subcontinent, a nation locked in combat with the Hindus” (Oldenburg 712). The modelling of the nation as “the Muslim nation of the Indian subcontinent” systematically “othered” the Hindus as outsiders and unwarranted in Pakistan.

Several accounts testify that the well-being of East Pakistan’s Hindus was compromised by those in power. Their fixation with India’s treatment of Muslim minorities had consequences for the Hindus. Due to state coercion, many Hindus reluctantly migrated to India, further blighting the prospect of communal coexistence. If suggestions were made to consider their plight, as Huseyn Shaheed Suhrawardy did to restore the Hindu minority’s confidence in Pakistan, they were not welcomed by the political cabal distrustful of such gestures.

In his letter – dated 11 June 1948 – to Liaquat Ali Khan, Suhrawardy responds to an accusation of disloyalty brought against him by Khawaja Nazimuddin by illustrating the purpose

of his political project aimed at restoring minority faith in Pakistan. Suhrawardy stipulates in the letter, "The Government of East Bengal was taking no steps to stop the Hindus from going out other than the issue of weak statements that there was no reason for the exodus" (449). According to Suhrawardy, the Hindus did not need to migrate, if "the Government of East Bengal" undertook procedures that addressed the reality behind their "exodus."

To counter the state's neglect towards the minority, Suhrawardy had launched the project titled "Communal Harmony Movement in East Bengal." In a self-congratulatory manner, he measures the success of his initiative in his letter to Liaquat Ali Khan:

> My propaganda in East Bengal reassured the Hindus. I pointed out that there was really nothing seriously wrong in East Bengal; that Government have given them security and the majority population were well inclined towards them. I pointed out to them that if they wanted communal harmony, and the goodwill of the Muslims, they must accept the division of India and the partition of Bengal; and proceed to mould their policy on that basis, and that they must be loyal to Pakistan" (449).

Not very different from Jinnah's, Suhrawardy's proposition ideally promotes Pakistan's well-being. It also identifies loyalty to Pakistani nationhood as a form of guarantor that pledges protection of East Pakistan's Hindus with its consideration for "the pursuit of communal harmony," as well as the "promotion of goodwill to be a holy duty." Suhrawardy also said, "Pakistan was formed to save not only the Muslims of the majority areas but also of the minority areas," thus, implying that the well-being of the Muslims of India would guarantee protection of the Hindus in East Pakistan (452).

In response to Suhrawardy's letter, Liaquat Ali Khan writes to him that he finds his allegation baseless. That Khawaja Nazimuddin is reluctant about the Hindus is dismissed by

Khan: “His Government has been doing everything possible to give protection to and safeguard the legitimate rights of the Hindu minority in East Bengal” (454). The letter ends with blaming Indians for not protecting its Muslim minorities: “If the Muslims in the Indian Union received the same treatment as the Hindus are receiving in East Bengal there would be no cause for complaint” (454). Khan’s rejecting one of the pioneers of the Pakistan struggle in Bengal suggests the distrust mainstream Muslim nationalist politicians had towards their compatriots seeking to redress the problems of different regions including East Pakistan.

Perhaps the most moving instance of Pakistan’s apathy towards East Pakistan’s minorities can be found in Jogendranath Mandal’s resignation letter to Liaquat Ali Khan in 1950.[53] Mandal was made a minister in postcolonial Pakistan.[54] He was an advocate of Namasudra rights and had opted for Pakistan by going against the upper-caste Hindu dominated Bengal Congress. Mandal resigned from Liaquat Ali Khan’s government on 8 October 1950 citing his inability to withstand systematic oppression of Hindus in East Pakistan. His resignation coincided with the 1950 riots in East Pakistan that led to more Hindu exodus to India. In his letter, Mandal gives his reason for supporting Pakistan. While cognizant of the plight of East Bengal’s Hindus during the Partition, he opted for Pakistan thinking that Scheduled Castes and ordinary Bengali Muslims will have a better prospect in the new country: “The terrible suffering of Hindus overwhelmed me with grief, but still I continued the policy of co-operation with the

[53] In the context of our discussion of the minority crisis in Pakistan, I have cited from Jogendranath Mandal’s resignation letter from the Pakistan assembly. The letter is included as “Appendix 1” in Tathagata Roy’s *My People, Uprooted: A Saga of the Hindus of Eastern Bengal*, and can be accessed through the following link: bengalvoice. blogspot. com/ 2008/05/appendix-1-jogendra-nath-mandals.html.

[54] From Dwaipayan Sen’s monograph *The Decline of the Caste Question: Jogendranath Mandal and the Defeat of Dalit Politics in Bengal* (2018), we learn the following about Mandal’s political career in Pakistan: “Jogendranath Mandal left Calcutta for Karachi to join the Government of Pakistan on 5 August 1947. He returned just over three years later, after resigning from his ministerial position and declining his Pakistani citizenship, to face both resounding vindication and scathing criticism on both sides of the recently demarcated border” (183).

Muslim League" (bengalvoice. blogspot. com/ 2008/05/appendix-1-jogendra-nath-mandals.html).

However, his hopes were dashed, the letter said, as the East Bengal government adopted a policy that was neglectful of the minority. The situation had worsened in the early months of 1950 when riots broke out in Dhaka and Barisal, Mandal points out, for which he blames the government. The reasons behind the state's response included an attempt to punish minority Parliamentarians walking out to protest the refusal to allow "two adjournment motions on Kalshira and Nachole affairs." It was also responding to the political rivalry between Suhrawardy and Nazimuddin and acting out in "apprehension of launching of a movement for re-union of East and West Bengal by both Hindu and Muslim leaders" which "made the East Bengal Ministry and the Muslim League nervous." Consequently, they attempted to placate tensions between Bengali and non-Bengali Muslims by fuming tensions between Hindus and Muslims and assuaging "the impending economic breakdown by some sort of Jihad against Hindus."

Mandal mentions in the letter that the riots had overwhelmed him: "The news of the killing of hundreds of innocent Hindus in trains, on railway lines between Dacca and Narayanganj, and Dacca and Chittagong gave me the rudest shock." He also mentions violence against Hindus in Barisal. While "the large scale exodus of Hindus from Bengal commenced in the latter part of March," India and Pakistan signed the Delhi Agreement.

Mandal argues that despite the signing of a treaty to placate the fears of the minority, he saw no meaningful government intentions in saving the minorities: "The Agreement is treated as a mere scrap of paper alike by the East Bengal Government and the Muslim League." Besides, a sectarian strain within the nationalist circles was conspiring against the Hindu minority:

> Now this being in brief the overall picture of Pakistan so far as the Hindus are concerned, I shall not be unjustified in stating that Hindus of Pakistan have to all intents and purposes been rendered 'Stateless' in their own houses. They have no other fault than that they profess the Hindu religion. Declarations are being repeatedly made by Muslim League leaders that Pakistan is and shall be an Islamic state. Islam is being offered as the sovereign remedy for all earthly evils (bengalvoice. blogspot. com/ 2008/05/appendix-1-jogendra-nath-mandals.html).

Mandal's argument contributes to an understanding of how the Hindu minorities were ill-treated; it also suggests how the political atmosphere favored a nationalist version of Islam that identified the Hindus were antagonistic to the idea of Pakistan. Similar to Mandal, Dhirendranath Datta, another major Hindu politician who opted for Pakistan in 1947, is famously known for his advocacy for the Bengali language in the Pakistan Parliament. In response, Datta was severely admonished by Liaquat Ali Khan. Datta and his son were killed by the Pakistan army in 1971.[55]

In fact, the language question intensified the political quest for self-determination around the same time when Bengali agitations overtook the eastern wing of Pakistan. In 1958, military dictatorship was imposed. Ayub Khan, the first military ruler of Pakistan from 1958 to 1969, in his autobiography *Friends Not Masters: A Political Autobiography*, identifies Bengalis as lesser Pakistanis since "they have been and still are under considerable Hindu cultural and linguistic influence" (187). "Hindu cultural and linguistic influence" is responsible for the weaker

[55] It was Jinnah's speech in 1947 that inspired Dhirendranath Datta to opt for Pakistan instead of India. In his posthumously published autobiography *Memoirs of Shaheed Dhirendranath Datta*, we find his admiration for Jinnah's promises: "On August 12, 1947, the Pakistan Constituent Assembly met in Karachi. In his opening remarks, Quaid I Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah made a historical declaration, 'In Pakistan's politics Hindus and Muslims will cease to be Hindus and Muslims.' He promised the minority in Pakistan that they will enjoy equal rights as that of the majority" (92, trans. mine). However, he soon found out that the majority viewpoint is dominating Pakistan's politics. After the death of Jinnah, the majority viewpoint became more antagonistic towards the Hindu minority (Tripathi 39).

association Bengalis had with West Pakistan's political hegemony, Ayub Khan had repeatedly argued. The unstable political situation led to an increase in rivalry with India. The politicians of West Pakistan began to blame Bengali politicians of East Pakistan – the center's relation with the province having been strained for many other reasons – of being Indian agents.[56]

At the same time, a riot broke out in 1964 in Pakistan and then the country went to war with India in 1965.[57] The two events, captured in the novels *The Shadow Lines* (1988) and *Blame* (2015), played a key role in Pakistan's construction of an ideological enemy that is a danger to the nation. In fact, this conceptualization continued to evolve with the terms "Hindus" and "Bengalis" sometimes being used to discredit the growing cultural and linguistic consciousness in East Pakistan. When the war broke out, the Hindus were targeted, as they were identified as instigating the Bengali nationalists to express their anti-Pakistan sentiment.[58]

Published in September 1971, Bhutto's *The Great Tragedy,* seeking to clarify Pakistan People's Party's (PPP) stand on the East Pakistan-West Pakistan imbroglio, illustrates a derogatory attitude towards East Pakistan's Hindu population. Insinuation of Hindu conspiracy as one of the major causes that led to the breakdown of the relation between East Pakistan and

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[56] Sheikh Mujibur Rahman was implicated in the Agartala Conspiracy Case. "In this case Mujib and others were accused of a conspiracy to separate East Pakistan from Pakistan with the help of the Indian government, a plan worked out during a secret meeting with Indian officials in the border town of Agartala (India)," (pg. 122) writes van Schendel (2009). He also notes that Mujib, in contradiction to the expectations of the Ayub Khan military government, emerged as "Bongobondhu (Bangabandhu), or Friend of Bengal" to enforce the dismissal of the case (122).

[57] According to Yasmin Saikia, identification of the "Hindu" as "Pakistan's enemy" became "fractured narratives" of the "military and political sites" during the 1965 war: "The establishment of the two-wing state and the toning down of the Muslim political rhetoric within the nation facilitated the creation of a new enemy. The construction of *Hindu* as Pakistan's enemy developed in the military and political sites as fractured narratives" (37).

[58] The impact of the 1965 war on East Pakistan's Hindus is traced in the Bengali vernacular autobiography of Jatin Sarker, titled *Pakistaner Jonmo-Mrittyu Darshon* (*Witnessing Pakistan's Birth and Death* 2005). He describes the anti-Hindu atmosphere of Pakistan in the following way: "If one turned on the radio, one can hear the nationalist rhetoric aimed at the 'infidels.' Pakistan's war with India was a 'Jihad' fought to wipe out the 'infidels,' which meant a war between Hindus and Muslims. Those who were identifying Hindus as 'Indian agents' advocated for the imprisonment of Hindus. Thus, at this time Hindus of East Pakistan were incarcerated in prison camps" (290, trans. mine). The 1965 war experiences of Gita and Santo in Dilruba Z Ara's *Blame* is similar to the anti-minority sentiment Sarker talks about.

West Pakistan is made, while the wartime suffering of the Hindu population of East Pakistan is completely ignored.

Instead, Bhutto places blame on the Hindus accusing them of exploiting the region, as did Pakistan's big businesses: "The common man in East Pakistan wanted an end to the ruthless exploitation which he suffered, first under the Hindus before 1947 and then by the Hindus who remained behind and the West Pakistani capitalists" (16). The minority is blamed for the East Pakistan crisis. More so, Hindus are identified as working against Pakistan: "The entire Hindu vote . . . and the vote of much of the younger generation in the urban centres went to the Awami League in the expectation that Six Points would lead to a separate state of Bengal" (17). Then, he argues that India has favorable attitude towards East Pakistan because of its Hindu population. In fact, Bhutto's anguish "over ten million strong Hindu population of East Bengal" can be understood as a political attempt to "undermine the influence of the Hindu community in the eastern wing" (Jalal *The Struggle* 52). Moreover, Bhutto uses the words "Hindu" and "India" interchangeably to connote the forces putting up stiff opposition to the army in East Pakistan. As previously noted, with the increase of hostility between India and Pakistan similar associations became common in Pakistan's politics.[59]

A more sinister anti-Hindu pogrom unfolded in 1971, when the ever-souring political rivalry between the Awami League, who won the 1970 elections, and the West Pakistani military command and Zulfikar Ali Butto led Pakitan People's Party (PPP), who refused to hand over power to the Bengali majority, turned into a violent war. In Anthony Mascarenhas' journalist expose "Genocide," published in The Sunday Times on 13 June 1971, and, received a worldwide

[59] This political strategy is elucidated by Saikia in the following way: "Within the realm of national politics by the mid-1960s, the term *Hindu* was invoked to mobilize Pakistan's struggle against the enemy nation –India –and after 1965 the categories *India* and *Hindu* were interchangeably used" (37).

attention, a certain Major Rathore announces that the army had a policy of hounding out the Hindus: “Must I remind you . . . how they have tried to destroy Pakistan? Now under the cover of the fighting we have an excellent opportunity of finishing them off” (Mascarenhas *Genocide* 12). In fact, the expose mentions General Tikka Khan and other Pakistani officers who were proposing annihilation of the Hindus. The report’s chilling description of the army operation only confirms to the anti-Hindu agenda of the state:

> When the army units fanned out in Dacca on the evening of March 25, in pre-emptive strikes against the mutiny planned for the small hours of the next morning, many of them carried lists of people to be liquidated. These included the Hindus and the large numbers of Muslims; students, Awami Leaguers, professors, journalists and those who had been prominent in Sheikh Mujib’s movement. The charge, now publicly made, that the army was subjected to mortar attack from the Jagannath Hall, where the Hindu university students lived, hardly justifies the obliteration of two Hindu colonies, built around the temples on Ramna racecourse, and a third in Shakrepati, in the heart of the old city. Nor does it explain why the sizeable Hindu populations of Dacca and the neighbouring industrial town of Narayanganj should have vanished so completely during the round-the-curfew on March 26 and 27 (Mascarenhas “Genocide”).

The description of the report points out that two groups were primarily targeted: a) the Hindu minority and the activists of the Bengali nationalist party Awami League. While the army claimed that they targeted the minority-dwelling Jagannath Hall at the University of Dhaka as a form of retaliation, Mascarenhas adds, “the obliteration of two Hindu colonies, built around the temples on Ramna racecourse, and, a third in Shakrepati, in the heart of the old city” was entirely

unjustified. The blitzkrieg policy of the army also targeted other major Hindu areas in Dhaka and Narayanganj.

As have been noted in Mascarenhas' report, ethnic cleansing of Hindus was a primary target of "Operation Searchlight" which brought to the notice of the world the onslaught Pakistani army unleashed against Bengalis and Hindus in East Pakistan. "If there is one piece of journalism that swayed western opinion about the atrocities in East Pakistan, it was this," posits Salil Tripathi (2016) to highlight the significance of Mascarenhas' work (107). That the Hindus were targeted in 1971 is primarily due to the perception that they were not only allies of the Bengali nationalists but were also instigators of the idea of a Bengali nation.

In fact, as was imagined by the Pakistani authorities, Bengalis and Hindus were anti-State peoples in East Pakistan, and their association highlighted a Hindu agenda: "The Pakistanis believed that the Bengalis, being Bengali (weak and unmartial, and cowardly), would quit the rebellion the moment they were chastised. The Pakistanis also thought that the Hindus were responsible for the revolt, and that it would cease when the Hindu 'problem' was solved" (Oldenburg 728). Reflected in the "othering" of Hindus during the war was a West Pakistan disdain for whatever did not fit to a linear Muslim identity construction. For example, the Bengali ethnicity was targeted as an inconvenience to Pakistan's unity by associating it with Hindu-ness. Hindus in 1971 were considered the architects of the Bengali nationalist movement and if their contribution could be stymied Pakistan would not fall apart.

Nationalist accusation against the minority is captured in the voice of Parveen in Tahmima Anam's novel *A Golden Age*. In response to Rehana's inquiry, why she and her husband, Faiz, had suddenly come to East Pakistan, Parveen says they are on a mission to annihilate Pakistan's enemies:

'. . . just as well we're getting rid of them.'

Rehana was drawn back to the conversation. 'Rid of who?'

'Haven't you been listening, Rehana? I'm talking about the dirty elements of our great nation. The Hindus, the Communists, the separatists! That is why your brother and I are here –it's a great duty, a privilege.' (106)

Parveen and her husband Faiz intended to finish off "The Hindus, the Communists, the separatists!" in East Pakistan as they are deemed as "the dirty elements of our great nation [Pakistan]." In the short film *Noroshundor* (The Barbershop, 2009), directed by Tareque Masud and Catherine Masud, we meet a terrified Hindu couple living in Old Dhaka in the very first scene. They are confronted by an Islamist militia and members of the Pakistan army to give information about their son, who the militia identifies as "a Mukti and also an atheist and a communist and overall, an enemy of Pakistan." These cultural representations suggest the oppressive state of the Hindus during 1971 and as this chapter will be demonstrating through the two novels, the Hindus of East Pakistan have been mistreated as a minority since 1947 with their misery compounding during the riots in 1950 and 1964 but a more sinister anti-Hindu pogrom informed the Pakistani military action in East Pakistan which would become Bangladesh after the 9 months conflict.

**East Pakistan's Hindu Minority and Refugee-hood in *The Shadow Lines***

Ghosh's *The Shadow Lines* reflects a similar tone to that of literatures (both Bengali and Anglophone) by Indian writers on Bengal's partition, which is "subdued, melancholic, and usually less dramatic when compared to the brutalities presented in the writings on the Punjab Partition" (Mookerjea-Leonard 5). Moreover, the novel is dictated by a tradition of "fiction on the Bengal Partition [that] is preoccupied with . . . less dramatically narratable *longue duree*

processes" as it focuses on "the reconfigurations of identity that took place in, around, and because of the Partition in terms of community belonging and individual consciousness, particularly as these are inflected by categories of gender" (Mookerjea-Leonard 8; 16). Jethamoshai's destitution in East Pakistan and the migratory patterns of his sons, as well as the Muslim refugees from India, Saifuddin and Khalil, reflect the transformation of "community belonging," while Tham'ma's "individual consciousness" regarding Dhaka also shifts in the course of the novel. It takes a nationalist turn after she witnesses Tridib's death in riot. Her experience is gendered because it is mediated by past family events that have had an impact on her.

However, the flashpoint appears when Ghosh captures Tridib's death in the 1964 riots in Dhaka where he was with the narrator's grandmother (Tha'mma) visiting East Pakistan to see her uncle and to bring him back to India. She finds the uncle refusing to leave East Pakistan for "India/Shindia," while the narrative also engages the refugees of both sides of the borders, Muslims in East Pakistan who fled India during Partition and Hindus in West Bengal who left their home in East Bengal.

Tha'mma's experience of minority oppression in the novel is largely informed by Tridib's death as much as by the uncle's (Jethomoshai) rendition of divided nationalities obsolete as he refuses to leave East Pakistan. While her perception of East Pakistan is formed by her witnessing the crisis of the region's Hindu minority, eventually contributing to her "othering" of the place when the 1965 war breaks out, the readers are given a more detailed picture of the insecure minorities in South Asia including Muslims in Calcutta. We can realize uncertainty is a fact of life for East Pakistan's Hindus, while Muslim lives in India are also touched by Hindu

oppression in Pakistan. Both East Pakistan's Muslim refugees and West Bengal's Hindu refugees are victims of Partition.

*The Shadow Lines* (1988) begins with the narrator describing Tha'mma's perception of Tridib, who was a PhD student of archeology. As a schoolteacher, the grandmother had high opinion of those pursuing higher education. However, she did not think Tridib to be capable of leading the life of a scholar: "It would have been a travesty to think of an irresponsible head like Tridib's mounted in those august corridors" (7). Grandmother's opinion, the narrator says, was connected to her low regard for those who were hanging out in Gole Park: "She had a deep horror of the young men who spent their time at the street-corner addas and tea-stalls around there" (7). Finding Tridib among them made her think lowly of him.

The narrator then adds the significance of Gole Park in his life in the past, which is "shut off by too many years spent away," (7) to connect it to the reality of a West Bengal divided by class. Since he lived close to Gole Park, schoolboys from affluent families would taunt him as if "I lived in some far-flung refugee camp on the border" (8). This sense of being unsettled at the mentioning of refugees would occur in another instance of the novel, when the grandmother would refuse to associate herself with her poor relations.

This moment would recur during the trip to meet the relation Tha'mma comes to know about from one of her acquaintances in the park. The elderly refugees of East Bengal came to the park and lived as neighbors of the narrator's family:

> It turned out that many of the elderly people who went to the park had come across the border from the east too, during or just before Partition. Most of them had settled, just as my grandmother had done, in our part of Calcutta, which was then still undeveloped. So

it was not really much of a coincidence that my grandmother often ran into people she had known or heard of, in Dhaka, when she went on her walks by the lake (125).

The novel's delineation of the Hindu minority in Pakistan is connected to its exploration of the refugee problem in West Bengal, India. Tha'mma would meet the people she knew from her Dhaka days in the park, who the narrator says, had settled "in our part of Calcutta, which was then still undeveloped" (125). The grandmother connects with them but refuses to accept that she had similarities with them.

Tha'mma's argument is framed by the narrator in the following way, "We're not refugees, snapped my grandmother on cue. We came long before Partition" (129). The grandmother attempts to distinguish between the refugees who came before and around Partition and her own arrival in West Bengal because of family circumstances. She has attained independence by working as a schoolteacher. However, the refugees struggle in their lives, she suggests distinguishing her reality from them. Tha'mma's evocation of difference between her and the refugees in Ghosh's novel is suggestive of the political sensitivity around the question of post-Partition refugeehood.

I have been arguing in this chapter that Ghosh's approach to the minority problem in Pakistan is associated with the addressing of the gradual expansion of refugees in West Bengal. Scholars have suggested that East Pakistan's Hindu minorities went to West Bengal twice in big numbers. Joya Chatterji (2007) provides us with the following information regarding Hindus migrating from East Bengal during political crisis in South Asia: "Large numbers of Hindus, perhaps 2 million in all, fled to West Bengal in the turbulent wake of the Noakhali and Tippera riots in 1946 and the Khulna riots in 1950. Another million left East Bengal when violence between the communities erupted in 1964 after the theft of holy Muslim relics from the

Hazratbal shrine in Kashmir" (111). While the riots of 1946 and 1950 contributed to Hindu migration, we also notice the impact of Kashmir crisis on the minority in East Pakistan.

In fact, the India-Pakistan political squabble including the wars of 1965 and 1971 also forced the minority to migrate. Chatterji argues, "Migration from east to west also tended to increase wherever relations between India and Pakistan worsened. When the two countries were at odds, whether over India's takeover of the princely state of Hyderabad, or over Kashmir, tensions on the bigger stage drove the Hindus out of East Bengal into India" (111). Thus, post-Partition oppression of the minority had a localized form, as much as it often took an intra-South Asian characteristic evident during events all impacted the whole region including the theft in the Hazratbal mosque that enraged Muslims all over South Asia.

It should be noted, the theft in the Kashmir mosque took place just before the grandmother visits East Pakistan, of which Tha'mma seems to be unaware of during the time of the visit, and the theft's repercussion on cities like Khulna in East Pakistan is explored gradually by the narrator through researching old newspapers. Thus, he learns the incidence that took away Tridib's life is a result of nationalism-induced cross-border clashes and its attendant symptom mass religious sentiment contributing to rioting.

Ghosh's delineation of East Pakistan's Hindu minority crisis is connected to the presence of dispossessed non-Bengali Muslims in East Pakistan. The narrator also points to the anti-Muslim environment in Calcutta and connects it the grandmother's experience of the riot in Dhaka. Thus, the question of Hindu minority remains linked to the suffering of minorities in West Bengal as well. In fact, the grandmother's experience of the Dhaka visit is not very satisfactory from the beginning.

She finds it difficult to cope with the changes she sees in Dhaka as much as she is disappointed that her uncle refuses to move to India. Perhaps the biggest shock she receives is from the violence that kills Tridib. The narrator's experiencing the violence in Calcutta suggests that the novel is attempting to situate the unrest in the two Bengals as an after-effect of partition.

The Hindu minority's plight is comparatively understood in terms of violence that Muslims in the Indian side might have experienced during the 1964 riots. Thus, when Tha'mma donates to the war fund, we can only understand it as a statement against nationalism. While Tha'mma's act is a deleterious effect of nationalism on an individual in post-1947 India, it also serves as an instance of the tragic consequence of the fallouts of the emergence of the nations on an individual. In fact, what Tha'mma experiences in Dhaka and her rejection of East Pakistan as enemy territory should be understood in the context of the novel's engagement of the refugees in West Bengal as well as East Pakistan.

The trip which the narrator's grandmother takes to meet her uncle's family – who have migrated to India – gives us a detailed picture of the struggling refugees. The description of the migrant living places is suggestive of the continuing influence of Partition: "It was a long, matchbox-like building, not large, although it was evident from the barrack-like partitions that divided its corridors that dozens of families inhabited it" (129). Despite leaving the eastern towns and villages of Bengal in fear that they will become homeless, they lived a life of near homelessness.

The narrator and his family including the grandmother experienced the squalor that is the daily experience of West Bengal's refugees: "The ground fell away sharply from the edges of the building and then levelled out into a patchwork of stagnant pools, dotted with islands of low, raised ground. Clinging to these islands were little clumps of shanties, their beaten tin roofs

glistening rustily in the midday sun. The pools were black, covered with a sludge so thick that it had defeated even the ubiquitous carpets of water hyacinth" (131). The "little clumps of shanties," and "the pools" looking sordid as they were "covered with a sludge" made little impression on Tha'mma but more on the narrator who is reminded of his mother's injunction at the sight of the squalor: "It was true, of course, that I could not see that landscape or anything like it from my own window, but its presence was palpable everywhere in our house; I had grown up with it" (131). The narrator's young self was also aware of the indisposition of refugee life.

For the narrator, poverty and its relation to refugeehood was a fact of life, as was drilled to him by his mother since "it was that landscape that lent the note of hysteria to my mother's voice when she drilled me for my examinations" to remind him that he would be "marooned in that landscape" if he failed. On the other hand, the squalor makes little impression on Tha'mma, who focuses her attention on anything she can learn about Dhaka. Therefore, she is more surprised when she is told about the Muslim refugees occupying the same house where she grew up in Dhaka: "You mean our house has been occupied by refugees?" (132). The readers can feel the irony of Tha'mma's reaction to the refugee problem in East Pakistan.

While her own relatives are refugees from the 1947 Partition, metaphorically living in her backyard in Calcutta, she discounts them as refugees. She receives her relative's response about the house being "occupied by Muslim refugees from India – mainly people who had gone across from Bihar and U.P" with a sense of apprehension (132). What distinguishes the refugees in East Pakistan from the refugees in India is their "otherness," the problem of alien refugees had to be resolved.

A possible solution to the crisis would be to rescue Jethamoshai from his misery, Tha'mma opines to vindicate her decision to visit the relatives. Afterward, she says that Jethamoshai risks abandonment: "Poor old man . . . her voice trembling. Imagine what it must be like to die in another country, abandoned and alone in your old age" (132). Her reaction to the uncle's plight reflects her empathetic nature. It is also the moment when she decides to go to Dhaka to bring her uncle back to India.

That Bengal's 1947 Partition divided up the Hindus and Muslims of the region but also precipitated Muslim migrations from the neighboring states of Bihar and UP to East Pakistan is evident from the narration of Tha'mma's cousin's wife. Her perspective suggests the uncle had no choice but to accept the refugees: "The house was empty after Partition, everyone had left but my father-in-law, and he didn't even try to keep the refugees out" (132). We can sense that the refugees flooded in the house whereas the uncle was helpless to evict them. More importantly, the new state's anti-Hindu biases are evident from her comment that the family will be denied justice in the court as a minority: "As soon as he got to Dhaka my husband realised that he wouldn't be able to reclaim that house –no Pakistani court was going to evict those refugees" (132). That the Hindus faced hostility in East Pakistan after 1947 refrains Jethamoshai's son from taking their case to the court.

Indeed, Tha'mma would see the hostility herself when she visits East Pakistan to fetch her uncle. The novel explores the wider context of antipathy towards the Hindus as it depicts how the 1964 riots in East Pakistan and West Bengal were reactions to the theft from one of the Muslim holy sites in Kashmir. Ghosh's attaching a transnational circumstance to the violence that kills Tridib is a testimony to the South Asian political scenario where the internal enemy

within the nation is sorted out by following external events. The lasting antagonism created due to the division of the Indian subcontinent along the religious lines is thus captured in the novel.

In fact, the religious antagonism that would cost Tridib's life has a national imprint too. The Muslim refugees – Saifuddin, a Bihari migrant, and Khalil, a Muslim crossing over to Pakistan from West Bengal – find accommodation in the 1/31 Jindabahar Lane house because of Hindu migration to India. They are not inhospitable to the visiting party as the narrator imagines with Saifuddin "the mechanic, leads her (Tha'mma) gently to a bench and persuades her to sit down" (204). His warmth touches Tha'mma's subconscious and perhaps momentarily she suspends her skepticism about the Muslims who she heard from her relation back in India is now taking care of her Jethamoshai (Uncle). Before antagonism takes over, Tha'mma glances at the human face that seems to have been overwhelmed by divided religious identity: "She looks at his grease-blackened face then, and wonders from which part of the house this new relative whose face she can't remember has appeared" (204). Saifuddin's gesture makes the grandmother wonder if he is their "new relative" beyond the more familiar faces of her life.

Later, Tha'mma tries to explain to her uncle that she has come to take him to India, as East Pakistan has ceased to be "home" for the Hindus: "It's not safe for you here . . . I know these people look after you well, but it's not the same thing. You don't understand" (210). The brief gesture of imposing familiarity over nationally constructed identities dissipates.

What Tha'mma perceives as Jethamoshai's failure to "understand" the reality is counter-intuitive, if evaluated side by side with her remarks to Robi about the past ("Do you know . . . there was a time when that old man was so orthodox that he wouldn't let a Muslim shadow pass within ten feet of his food?" pg. 205), as if there is more to the common understanding of antagonism. Undeterred by his changing status of that of a minority, his response suggests that

he refuses to believe that the future of East Pakistan's Hindus lies in India: "That's what I told my sons when they took the trains. I said: I don't believe in this India-Shindia" (211). Jethamoshai seems to have embraced the cruel present being a minority in a Muslim majority country by overcoming his past prejudice against the Muslims.

That cruelty of religiously divided national identities finds articulation in the refugee lives too. The refugees living in the Tha'mma's family house in Dhaka offer contradictory responses to the possibility of Jethamoshai going to India with his visiting family members. While Saifuddin wants the uncle to be taken away, Khalil says the uncle must stay. However, he is interrupted by his wife who says that Jethamoshai has become a burden for them: "How long can we go on like this? Where will the money come from?" (211). Khalil's wife identifies the uncle as a financial burden for the refugee family. Her mentioning of financial hardship signifies the marginal position of both the refugees and the Hindu minority in East Pakistan. While finance remains a worry for the refugees, it fails to dent Khalil's humanity, who refuses to let go of Tha'mma's uncle easily.

In *The Shadow Lines*, Jethamoshai, the representative Hindu minority is able to share space with the Muslim refugee from India, despite Pakistan's emphasis that Hindus and Muslims have separate destinies. Due to Khalil's attachment to the uncle it was decided that he (Jethamoshai) will go live with the visiting Indian citizens only for a few days. This decision is taken at a momentous time as the family return trip from Old Dhaka a short while after turns disastrous. They are caught in the riot in which Tridib is killed.

A similar riot-like experience in Calcutta is then recalled the narrator. By searching through old newspapers, he pieces together what had happened during his return from school in 1964. He mentions how he gets on a near empty school bus only to find out that a rumor has

been spread “that the whole of Calcutta’s water supply was poisoned” (195). Upon inquiring who poisoned the water system, the young narrator received a vague reply from another boy that “they” did it.

The “they” would remain a mystery for a while: “I remember we did not ask him any questions – not who ‘they’ were, nor why ‘they’ had poisoned their own water” (196). The identity of the “they” was then revealed by the boy once they get closer to a particular neighborhood: “Because that’s where Montu gets on the bus, he said. He’ll know; he’s a Muslim” (196). The idea that “a Muslim” like Montu or Mansoor would know what “they” have done is signifying the attitude towards the Muslim minority in the Indian side.

Moreover, as the bus carrying the narrator got closer to a place where mobs were gathered, the young narrator was relieved “that Tha’mma and May aren’t here,” (198) as he sensed danger. He and the other boys in the bus are drawn to a rickshaw that puzzled their young minds: “There was no reason for us to stare: we saw rickshaws standing at untidy angles in the streets every time we went out. And yet we could not help staring at it: there was something about the angle at which it had been placed that was eloquent of an intent we could not fathom: had it been put there to keep Muslims in or Hindus out?” (199). Puzzled by the rickshaw’s angle, the schoolboys wonder whether the Hindu mobs have marked the space to “keep Muslims in” or it is a safeguard action of the minority trying to keep the “Hindus out” in case they retaliate.

The narrator’s retelling of his experience from his young days is significant. It suggests his keen awareness of the anti-minority hostility in both sides of the border. He cannot disassociate the “othering” of the Muslims in India from the marginalization of the Hindu minority in East Pakistan.

Creating minorities, be it the Hindus in Pakistan or the Muslims in India, gradually strengthens the process of nationalization of societies in South Asia, enunciates *The Shadow Lines*. Tha'mma's experience of being an outsider in Pakistan is then projected onto the process of nationalization she undergoes during the 1965 war, Ghosh's narrator posits. Belonging to two different generations, life-experience prompts the grandmother to react viscerally against what she began to consider enemy territory, while the narrator's viewpoint develops from his negotiating with Tridib's death and then projecting his observation of Tha'mma in a narrative that emerges from his "struggle with silence" (213).

His imagination of the grandmother's experience of Dhaka is formed by contrasting the pre-Partition past and the conflict zone exposed by the 1947 Partition. She must have had an easy access to different regions before the idea of nations divided up the geographies. Dhaka was home but when she arrives in the city to seek out her Jethamoshai in 1964, Tha'mma's experience was alienating. In fact, according to the narrator, the Dhaka that she comes to is different from what she had in her mind:

> I can guess at the outlines of the image that lived in her mind, but I have no inkling at all of the sounds and smells she remembered. Perhaps they were no different from those in any of the thousands of railway stations in the subcontinent. Perhaps, on the other hand, they consisted of some unique alchemical mixture of the sounds of the dialect and the smell of vast, mile-wide rivers, which alone had the power to bring upon her that comfortable lassitude which we call a sense of homecoming. (189-190)

The narrator's conjectural engagement with his Tha'mma's visit evokes the "sounds and smells" that lingered during her post-Partition travel, even if she might not have remembered much about her travels from her past in East Bengal. Yet, she may have still retained something special, for

example, “the sounds of the dialect and the smell of vast, mile-wide rivers” that had evoked “a sense of homecoming” in her. Tha’mma, the narrator thinks, may have begun to feel at home.

Therefore, *The Shadow Lines* delineates the hardship endured by the Hindus, who became a minority in East Pakistan after 1947, by depicting the loss of home in East Bengal. The novel’s evocation of what Tha’mma might have remembered when she first stepped foot in Dhaka after a long gap and what she had to undergo later when Tridib is killed in a mob riot is imbued with a melancholic tone.

Critical to my argument here is the novel’s deployment of literary tropes that indicate it belongs to the same tradition of West Bengali novels identified as depicting “the predicament of the human subject, the sudden upending of their world , a subject often side-stepped by the journalists and intellectuals of the time” (17) by Mookerjea-Leonard (2017) and what Sengupta (2016) calls fiction’s arresting “the diffusion, through a great degree of self-consciousness, of the *longue duree* of continuous migrations and counter-migrations that give refugeehood a different complexity in Bengal” (3). Consequently, Tha’mma nationalization is detailed by capturing her un-homing that began to set in after a while in Dhaka.

She fails to connect with Dhaka, though she had arrived with anticipation: “And so my grandmother, looking, perhaps, for sweet-shops and lanes, could not help exclaiming when she saw the Shaheb’s house in Dhanmundi: But this is for foreigners; where’s Dhaka?” (191). Just as there is disconnect between her expectations of Dhaka and what Dhaka turned out to be, Tha’mma was be further disappointed to find her uncle in a bad condition. She would eventually turn hostile towards her birthplace after her experience of the 1964 riots.

The narrator captures Tha’mma’s realization that her home no longer exists as it used to in the past. Her final moments in the house before they left to be caught in the impending chaos

in the streets delineates her agony. As “they turned to take a last look at the house: at the balconies and terraces, rising in steps out of the ground; at the garden where they had once spent their evenings making up stories about their uncle’s part of the house,” Tha’mma and her sister were reminiscing a past that for them was the quintessential image of home (212). Although kinship discord defines their imagination of the house, captured by their time “at the garden where they had once spent their evenings making up stories about their uncle’s part of the house,” it is not an oppressive memory in 1964. Rather, it was a solace in that present when they realized their parental house will forever be lost to them.

Although not made explicit in the novel, it was because of their Hindu identity, now rendered a minority position in the Pakistan nation, that they could no longer retain the property. The feeling of un-homing was compounded by their becoming fearful of Saifuddin’s intentions with regards to their uncle’s future. With the uncle stranded in a nation favoring the Muslims, Tha’mma could no longer reconcile the past when Dhaka was home and the present when Dhaka has become an alien territory.

Eventually, the sense of homelessness and the tragic experience of Tridib’s death in East Pakistan would force Tha’mma to seek shelter in the nationalist narrative of India during the 1965 war. Both the factors contribute to her nationalization. A piece of jewelry that she had carefully guarded as a memory from the past is at the center of her transformation. While the necklace gave her a sense of identity, it would also be symbolic of the lost familiar identity of the Hindus of East Bengal because of Partition. To the grandmother, the object was precious, as it contained the memory of the un-partitioned times when her husband gave it to her.

Her forfeiting the precious object happens at an inopportune time during the 1965 war, when the deteriorating relation between India and Pakistan once again threatened the lives of

Hindus in East Pakistan: “And then, one day in the year 1965, more than one and half years after her trip to Dhaka, she gave it away” (231). The narrator’s description of the grandmother’s obsession with the India-Pakistan war captures her transformation from a person longing for her birthplace to a nationalist who now considers East Bengal as the foreboding “other” territory. Since she experienced the dilapidated family house in Dhaka where her uncle lives with Muslim migrants as well as Tridib’s death during an unforeseen moment of violence, “Dhaka” or “Bengal” no longer appealed to her.

She had discovered the foreignness of East Pakistan. While she had a premonition the place was not “home” before she took the trip (“It won’t be like home anymore”), the narrator’s mother’s assurance that “the cham-chams and all the other sweets will be the same,” “and so will all the fish,” and “there’ll be all those lovely Dhakai saris to buy,” which encouraged her to take the trip (146). While in Dhaka her experiences would be the reverse of the high expectations being set. Failing to connect with the Dhaka of her past, Tha’mma becomes frustrated. Her frustrations turn into misery due to her failure to rescue Jethamoshai and she feels immense pain after violence kills Tridib.

The Bengal she knew now becomes the source of anger compounded by the frustration and misery of her Dhaka experience. Therefore, she reacts strongly when she is asked about the jewelry: “I gave it *away*, she screamed. I gave it to the fund for the war. I had to, don’t you see? For your sake; for your freedom. We have to kill them before they kill us; we have to wipe them out” (232). The grandmother’s anger while being personalized in nature also has a collective dimension as it is a response to her being rendered dispossessed. It also encapsulates her helplessness in Dhaka in her failure to rescue the Hindu minority represented by Jethamoshai (the uncle). Moreover, Tridib’s death solidifies her premonition of rising insecurity of the Hindus

in Pakistan, which had prompted Tha'mma to go to Dhaka to rescue her uncle. Yet, through the narrator's description we are keenly aware of the parallel Muslim insecurities in West Bengal captured through the school bus incident to which the narrator's younger self was a witness to.

The context of the Hindu crisis in East Pakistan is thus articulated in Ghosh's novel by the narrator's projecting his family's connection to the region. While the grandmother had fond memories of the place of birth, their palliative role gave away to the concept of difference Tha'mma develops after witnessing the riot that kills Tridib. In fact, the 1964 riot turns Tha'mma against the part of Bengal where she was born. While the narrator engages with the 1964 riots as another ominous event in the history of the two nations India and Pakistan, the event is highlighted to delineate how Tha'mma changes her opinion regarding East Pakistan which was once her home but soon became an enemy territory in the aftermath of 1947.

In contrast, Ara's novel situates the minority problem within the borders of Pakistan by taking the example of East Pakistan's Hindus who become the "other" in a politically volatile nation. The Hindu problem is traced through Laila whose growing attachment with Santo reflects the non-sectarian ethos of the Bengali struggle against a dictator-run nation. There is a growing understanding between the Hindus and the Muslims when the war begins in 1971, as Ara reflects on the de-Pakistanization process that is significantly expressed through Laila's ties to Santo.

**Embracing the "Other" in Dilruba Z Ara's *Blame*: Laila-Santo Relation as a Reflection of the Idealism of 1971**

In *Blame*, Dilruba Z Ara describes the Hindu crisis in East Pakistan by capturing the anti-Hindu sentiment of the 1960s to contrast it with the changes that the central character Laila witnesses in the Hindu Muslim relations after travelling to Dhaka from Chittagong. Pakistan's national rhetoric is challenged by the Bengali demands for more freedom, which gradually took

the form of a cultural and linguistic nationalism. This change would be greatly felt when the war breaks out with the previously shunned Hindus becoming close to Laila's family who become internal refugees in war-time East Pakistan. Moreover, Santo and Gita's close association with the Bengali insurgency would signify the opposition to two nation theory in the novel.

The minority that was subjected to discrimination in Pakistan gradually becomes part of the Bengali family, whose exclusionary fabric is forced to reconcile with the twin identities – Bengali and Muslim – of the Bengal delta. However, for some of the characters in *Blame*, such a transformation remains tension-ridden, as their preference for the Muslim identity makes them allies of the Pakistan army. The novel suggests as the identity of the people shifts from being East Pakistanis to Bangladeshis, discriminatory attitude towards the Hindus is turned into acceptance, if not a full reconciliation. The closeness Santo and Laila feels towards one another is also part of this transformative story, which is not without tragedy depicted in the novel through Gita's captivity in a Pakistani camp after Jamil betrays her trust to rescue Laila. The depiction of 1971 in *Blame* avoids telling stories of heroism and triumph by offering accounts of a time when East Pakistan's Bengalis are reinventing themselves amidst confusion and a deceptively complex warfare during which some family members chose opposing sides. Laila's self-discovery happens as a university student in Dhaka when she gets to know Santo better. Consequently, she transforms herself into a warrior acting responsibly to rehabilitate Gita. Laila's act symbolizes the Bengali struggle against the imposed nationalism of Pakistan as she embraces Gita as a human to denounce the Pakistan army's extreme violence against Gita perpetuated simply because she was a Hindu.

Sensitivity towards the Hindus dominate the early chapters of the novel when we see Laila is dismayed by Aunt Mili's injunction that she should not be friends with Santo. The

reason she provides to support her disapproval illustrates the anti-Hindu attitude prevailing in the society: “Their family only lives here because your Dada had taken pity on their grandparents during the Partition. You must not forget that” (7). Santo’s family, Aunt Mili insinuates, is beholden to the mercy of Laila’s family. However, the omniscient narrator’s addendum to Aunt Mili’s attitude towards Santo’s family provides the real reason behind the Hindu family staying back to Pakistan: “Santo’s grandparents were low-caste Hindus who used to work for Laila’s grandmother. After the Partition in ’46 they chose to stay in East Pakistan” (7). The family stayed back in Pakistan out of choice, as we have previously noted to underscore the case of Scheduled Caste Hindus who opted for Pakistan for political reasons. Thus, Aunt Mili’s antagonism towards the Hindus is also rooted in the prevailing social tensions regarding the minority.

That Aunt Mili’s anti-Hindu sentiment is a product of the contemporary time is illustrated when we analyze the moment of Gita’s brings to the Kazi household the cage Santo made for Laila’s parrot. While overawed by the religious atmosphere of the Muslim household, she also thinks about the past when the separation between Muslims and Hindus was not as tangible as the present. In fact, she is reminded of a personal tragedy in Aunt Mili’s life: “Aunt Mili had remained single because her family had forbidden her to marry her Hindu beloved. She had been obliged to honour her family’s values; her lover had moved to Calcutta, married another, and the connection between them had been permanently severed” (25). The failure of the romance articulates the effect of Partition on Aunt Mili. Her separation with her Hindu lover, presumably a caste Hindu who migrated in numbers, as opposed to the Namasudras, is due to the family pressure, but it is also suggestive of the partitioning of the Hindu and Muslim relations in the eastern regions.

That the society depicted in *Blame* is inimical towards the Hindus is illustrated in Gita's fears that she will be reminded of her religious identity: "Aunt Mili might be about to remind her that she was Hindu, dressed as a Hindu and as such she had no right to be there" (25). Her fears, however, proves otherwise: "But instead, she said 'Hello, Gita! You have grown taller since last year" (25). It should be noted, Gita's premonition of being slandered has very concrete reasons.

We come to know that tension between India and Pakistan has created an atmosphere of mistrust towards the Hindus: "Gita and Santo walked across the communal yard. Even last summer they had access to the children's pond, but since the tension between Pakistan and India had erupted, things had changed quickly between Hindus and Muslims everywhere. Now it seemed that even the water in the ponds had become sacred, like Pakistan, untouchable by the impure Hindus" (13). The Hindus living in Chittagong, including the siblings who were visiting from Dhaka, became victims of "the tension between Pakistan and India" that had worsened the communal situation.

In fact, the presence of the cage made by Santo would cause Jadu – Laila's brother – to react violently. Jadu, after returning from the mosque with Kamil and Jamil, begins to interrogate Laila about the cage and its association with Santo. His malevolence is demonstrated in his treatment of the parrot: "He pulled the feather harder. The bird screeched louder, trying to wriggle free. But his grip was strong" (27). Adamant that "We don't want any Hindus among us," (27) he attempts to glean confession from Laila that Santo contributed to the making of the cage. It is Aunt Mili who saves Laila from further humiliation by scolding Jadu away. In the youthful Jadu we can see the effect of masculinist nationalism. Before his haranguing Laila with the cage, Jadu's impassioned participation in the cockfight involving two cockerels named "Pakistan" and "Hindustan" suggests his increasing anti-Hindu attitude.

Ara's projection of the cockfight as an extension of the India-Pakistan rivalry is remarkable, as it also provided young Muslims to grow antipathy towards Hindus of their age.[60] When the cockfight begins, we can notice the entire crowd is impassioned by this simulated warfare:

> The contest had begun. Jadu and Jamil swung on their feet, hurled the birds at each other, hauled them apart whenever necessary, goading them into a cocky fury. Each moment the birds grew fiercer, stabbing each other with their beaks, their beady eyes gleaming, their necks stretching almost to bursting point. The children in the audience stirred in their places, some even jumping up and down. No one knew who among them had decided to name the stronger bird "Pakistan" and the weaker one "Hindustan" (India) (16).

We see the birds were intimidated into "a cocky fury" as they "grew fiercer, stabbing each other with their beaks, their beady eyes gleaming, their necks stretching almost to bursting point." The children's excitement suggests a nationalist fervor that involved Pakistan and India representing the two birds. Moreover, the naming of the birds suggests that the crowd in East Pakistan was clearly biased against "Hindustan."

The crowd was very involved in the sports because it gave them an opportunity to enact the India-Pakistan rivalry and more importantly to punish "Hindustan," the representative bird of the enemy nation. The novel captures the sinister pleasure of the people present on the occasion: "The tablas rose to a frenzy, the birds crashing and slamming against each other. Jamil and Jadu,

[60] Taslima Nasreen's *Homecoming* (*Phera*) depicts the increasing intolerance against the Hindu minority by tracing Kalyani's return to Bangladesh from West Bengal after having left her native Mymensingh during the 1960s Pakistan. When visiting her childhood friend Sharifa's house, she asks her son Dipan about a game the children were playing. Dipan describes the game in the following way, "The ants were moving in a line up the wall, they were crushing the red ones, letting the black ones go free. When I asked why they were doing that, they said it was because the black ones were Muslims, the red the Hindus" (75). The game with "ants" as described by the young boy is suggestive of the infiltration of communal sentiment in the young minds. The cock-fight described in *Blame* echoes the communalization of young minds in East Pakistan.

carried away with the mood of the crowd, spurred the cocks and, if Hindustan tried to flee, they saw to it that it was caught and thrown back into the ring" (16-17). It was the enemy bird that became the target as if the cockfight was a set-up to deliberately humiliate the rival nation's symbol. While the game seemed to have been designed to oppose India, Laila felt the Hindu minorities were a target too.

In Laila's vision is captured the frenzy of nationalist fervor: "Everyone would now forget the cockfight in order to say their evening prayers. Who cared about some birds being killed? A dead bird or two didn't matter much. Especially if the bird was a Hindu bird" (17). The war-time nationalism is so intense, as is captured through Laila, that the death of a bird goes unnoticed, and more so, because the bird was identified to be a symbol of the enemy.

Laila longs for a past when religious differences within the society was not as over-exposed. Now in 1965, religious differences became an impediment to communication:

> The memory of previous summers returned to her, when she and Gita had sat side by side watching the cockfight, when she had enjoyed a total friendship with her. When Gita's family were always welcomed by her family. When she could go swimming with Gita. When she could invite Gita for afternoon snacks. When everyone was simply Pakistani, living side by side like one happy family. (18)

From the above account, we come to know that the cockfight was not divisive in the past as of now, since Laila and Gita enjoyed the event together. Moreover, the concept "Pakistani" was not as divisive as of the 1960s East Pakistan delineated in the novel. The divisive atmosphere of 1965 in *Blame* impinges on Gita and Santo's family.

Ara's narrative is not explicit about the 1950 and 1964 riots, as it is more focused on the anti-Hindu atmosphere of 1965. As anticipations were high about a war with India and the

nationalist sentiment was spreading, “Santo and Gita too felt the immediacy of the war as soon as they returned to Dacca from Chittagong” (36). Dhaka’s atmosphere presented a more integrated Pakistan getting ready for the war: “Miniature Pakistani flags were being sold on the streets and patriotic Urdu songs blared out from countless radios” (36). The festive environment became counter-productive for the Hindus.

Gopal, the father of the siblings Laila had known, became worried having come across “increasingly scary stories” (37). The events that scares Gopal are reminiscent of incidents that happened during the 1950 and 1964 riots: “One day a Hindu teacher who had forgotten to wipe away the vermillion mark from the parting in her hair was stabbed in front of Dacca Medical College; another day, one of Gopal’s friends was forcefully circumcised in Old Dacca” (37). The stabbing of a Hindu teacher with “the vermillion mark . . . in her hair,” and the forceful circumcising of a Hindu man become reminders of past violence against Hindus.

Indeed, the anti-Hindu activities makes the family very insecure though there were no explicit rioting as had been the case in 1950 and in 1964. More and more they felt they were not wanted in East Pakistan as they thought to be on the side of the enemy: “Although Gopal and Sikha continued to reassure Gita and Santo that there was nothing to worry about, each time there was a knock on the door they pricked up their ears, went pale, and prayed many silent prayers before opening it. It was as though they were being spied on” (37). The parents’ unease with the nationalist fervor is clearly manifested in their fears whenever “there was a knock on the door” and their “silent prayers” while answering the door. There was no explicit threat against them; yet they felt insecure, which might be indicative of their dreadful experiences during the two riots in East Pakistan.

Eventually, they would take shelter in the house of Amjad Haq: "His flat was small but in it he happily housed not only Gopal's family but also another Hindu family in distress. Inside that flat, the religious boundary between them and their host seemed never to have existed; instead they became increasingly aware of the bondage deriving from their shared mother tongue, Bengali, and cultural heritage" (38). Haq's sheltering the Hindu family is a significant moment in the novel as it is suggestive of the Bengali efforts to resist the anti-Hindu climate of the time. "Bengali" and "cultural heritage" became the source of support for the Hindus effected by a climate of growing nationalism. In fact, 1965 in *Blame* is depicted as a time when Hindus felt threatened as a minority, but we also see the gradual change in the society that is in contradiction to the nationalist climate of Pakistan. Thus, the siblings of the Kazi household who played "mock wars" (38) with Jamil and Kamil representing the two rival nations would also experience a time when "the two brothers would be united under a completely new banner and take up real guns against real soldiers" (39). Transitioning to that time will be analyzed from Laila's perspective. If *The Shadow Lines* reveals the pain of a Hindu middle-class woman witnessing the turbulence of postcolonial nationhood, Ara's protagonist Laila observes the active participation of the Hindu minority in fostering Bengali nationalism against an imposed Islamic vision of Pakistan which "othered" the region's minorities.

**Laila's Acquaintance with Bengali Nationalism During Her Sojourn in Dhaka**

It is in Dhaka that Laila experiences a life completely different from what she had been a witness to before moving to the city from Chittagong. Laila's introduction to the new vision is captured from an omniscient perspective: "Laila heard agitated voices and caught glimpses of glistening eyes, which such terms as 'religious fanatics,' 'six points,' 'Language Movement,' 'Agartala Conspiracy,' 'Sheikh Mujib,' 'second-rate citizens,' 'oppression' and 'freedom of

speech' sped past her ears continuously" (87). A transformation was underway, which Sumita also mentions ("Bengali soul and Bengali nationality have become two very popular terms these days" pg. 92) to inform her of the changes in Dhaka.

One day when accompanied her friends to a cultural gathering, she discovers Santo is present too. She is introduced to Santo with enthusiasm: "That's Santo. Our singer" (94). Santo makes an immediate impression on Laila: "There was something wonderful about seeing Santo's singing face at the periphery of the gathering, but Laila felt relief that she didn't have to meet his eyes. Santo looked out of the ordinary, elevated, in his role as a singer" (95). Besides Santo, Laila also meets Amjad Haq, who we have previously noted had sheltered Gita and Santo's family. The gathering enabled Laila to experience the changing tone in the public regarding their national identity. It also helped her to pick some of the key ideas people mentioned to express their dissatisfaction with Pakistan.

The ideas were different from what she had been accustomed to in the family: "It stuck her again how very different everything here was from home" (98). The young people Laila was mingling with was inspired by a much bigger concept of identity than the regional ones they all inherited from their background: "Even the Bengali word 'desh' was used differently here. Here it stood for the whole country, not just one's native village. Men and women talked unreservedly about matters that had nothing to do with births, marriages and deaths, but instead how to change the fortunes of a whole country; a society; how to rebel against one's circumstances and upbringing for a cause" (98). The youth were thinking of changing "the fortunes of a whole country" or "a society" and Laila felt they were preparing to enact rebellion against their existing condition.

These young people were transformed because they refused to accept the existing political situation. Laila could sense their dissatisfaction with West Pakistan's neglect of East Pakistan politically and economically (98). East Pakistanis were angry not only because "the East was deprived of the profit" (98) and "foreign aid was used to build up the West" (98) but also because the Bengali political figure-head Sheikh Mujib was incarcerated. Amidst this socio-political transformation, we find Laila and Santo were drawing closer to one another.

Laila had already been introduced to Santo as the singer by the members of the politically conscious group. Thereafter, when Santo exchanges pleasantries with her, she finds a more determined voice against the anti-Hindu sentiment in Pakistan. However, he is also fearful that the political climate of Pakistan would be detrimental to the region's Hindus: "But with this propaganda that Sheikh Mujib is pro-Indian, Ayub Khan has once again made us East Pakistani Hindus very vulnerable" (101). Laila identifies Santo's being disturbed by the West Pakistani attitude towards the Bengali oppositional politics, but she also finds confidence in his latter utterance. Santo declares, "we Bengalis are sticking together, no matter what our religions are," which suggests a change in East Pakistan in contrast to the anti-Hindu environment Laila had witnessed a few years back. The two-nation theory's reliance on the Muslim identity began to be challenged due to the confluence of the generation that witnessed the birth of Pakistan and the youthful generation that became politically conscious having experienced discrimination as East Pakistanis, argues the Bangladeshi vernacular intellectual Jatin Sarker (280). A new consciousness was born that was opposed to the vilification of the minority in Pakistan. Santo's optimism signifies his conviction in this change.

Despite Santo optimism, Laila becomes concerned at his suggestion that the West Pakistani leadership might redeploy its anti-Hindu narrative like it did before during the 1965

war: “A series of memories flashed through Laila’s mind: the cockfight that turned serious – Pakistan Zindabad! Hindustan Murdabad! How she had to plan clandestine meetings with Santo and Gita, so as not to annoy her family; how Jamil had reacted the evening he had found out that Rahima was a gift from Santo” (101). The widespread problem of anti-Hindu attitude in Pakistan can still pose a threat as opposition to the West Pakistani authoritarianism mounts in East Pakistan. Laila fears the foreboding minority-bashing climate of 1965, when the crowd chanted “Pakistan Zindabad! Hindustan Murdabad!” and Jamil acted out viciously when “he had found out that Rahima was a gift from Santo,” can return.

Yet, her Dhaka years brought Laila closer to Santo and she is also introduced to the political idea of Bengali resistance. Santo espoused the same ideas when Laila heard him discussing the political situation with others: “They were discussing how East Pakistan had always been neglected by the politically dominant West Pakistani elite; how the East had been left to the mercy of India while Pakistan was busy defending the western borders during the ’65 war” (98). These discussions inspired Laila as she also listened to the demand for a united political from against oppression (99). Eventually, her presence caught Santo’s attention: “He was looking down at her, and she had to tilt her head back to look up at him” (100).

Indeed, Santo’s appearance mesmerized her: “Though she was a tall girl herself, he was far taller, and broad too, with black hair that hung down to his shoulders – like the poet Nazrul Islam,” signifying Laila’s finding in Santo the qualities of Nazrul Islam, who is a symbol of Bengali cultural unity. She can feel closeness with Santo through the song he had sung, “It’s you I saw in distance . . .,” (127) a popular Bengali song which was a symbol of shared Bengali cultural identity. Therefore, during her stay in Dhaka she becomes acquainted with East

Pakistan's political situation and is also able to renew her passion for Santo who has become involved with Bengali resistance politics.

The Birth of Bangladesh and the Contribution of Gita and Santo in the 1971 War

As the conflict in East Pakistan intensifies, we find Santo returning to Chittagong from Dhaka making Laila happy ("Laila looked into Santo's eyes; a strange light from within them was pulling her" pg. 172) and Gita relieved ("But when he placed his bag on the threshold and stretched out his arms, Gita let out a small scream, and dashed towards the door," pg. 171). Having experienced the worsening political situation in Dhaka ("'One could describe the circumstances in Dhaka as apocalyptic,' Santo said, almost in a whisper" pg. 172), Santo now felt he was exposed to the return of anti-minority attitude in the nation.

Santo's feeling of helplessness corresponds with the sudden change of attitude in Laila's family regarding the Hindus. As the conflict intensified, many Bengali Muslims began to distrust the idea of Pakistan. Some were still aligned with the nationalist idea of Muslim unity considering a possible Indian intervention in East Pakistan. The presence of pro-Pakistan allies significantly complicated the conflict. They also targeted Hindus by actively opposing the insurgency as well as by collaborating with the army.

Since her father, Harun Kazi, and, uncle, Khaled Kazi, were Pakistan sympathizers, they presented a significant challenge to Santo and Gita's family. Therefore, Santo agonizes over his fate as a minority in Pakistan just before the war begins. His fears, captured in the novel, are about extremely delicate situation of the Hindus in East Pakistan:

> He was no longer certain why he had taken the risk of returning to Chandgaon under these circumstances; if he had aroused the suspicions of any patrolling soldier on his way here, they would have first tortured him for being a Hindu, and then for being a young

> Bengali boy. Suddenly, it felt as though he too had taken a flight backwards, almost to 1965. Memories that wouldn't leave him. He ran his hand through his hair, and looked at Gita (173).

Santo realizes that he is now doubly "othered" for being a Hindu as well as a Bengali. His realization prompts him to take "a flight backwards, almost to 1965." He recollects the humiliating past, which stayed with him as a reminder of the fall-out of the present crisis: "Memories that wouldn't leave him." He also realizes something even more sinister is going to happen as he "looked at Gita." The 1971 conflict would draw both the siblings to the insurgency with Gita becoming a victim of war-time sexual violence and Santo getting captured and then put to death as a freedom fighter.

However, the novel's depiction of the war's impact on the Hindus is also casted in relation to Laila's family accepting Gita and Santo's family. the presence of family members sympathetic towards Pakistan remains a concern to the Hindu family's well-being. But the Muslim family comes to accept Gita and Santo and their parents after the death of Blind Grandmother. Wondering how her "Kazi" family had reconciled with their prejudice against the Hindu minority, which she had been privy to during the 1965 conflict between India and Pakistan, she eventually finds an answer. She realizes that a death in the family combined with "the clash between the East Pakistani Muslims and West Pakistani Muslims" (163-164) contributed to the softening ("lubricated") of "the rusted minds of her parents to be hospitable to anyone," (164) thus, creating a safer environment for the Hindu family.

Yet, when the conflict is about to break out, we learn from Kamal – who is busy making a flag representing the new nation – that some family members are faithful to Pakistan: "Both Harun and Khaled uncles are supporters of the present regime, and we can't share our plans with

them" (170). But as soon as they come to know that "The Pakistani Military has taken over Dhaka," (176) and Chittagong might be the next target soon, they begin to change.

The two elderly family members had firm conviction in the two-nation theory; thus, representing those East Pakistani Bengalis whose understanding of the war was mediated by a concern for Pakistan's unity: "Zealous supporters of Pakistan as they had been, neither of them ever really believed that secession would be the solution to the problems between East and West Pakistan; until now they had been very certain that India was behind all this because she wanted one section of her borders free from Pakistan" (176). Far from being convinced by the vision offered by Bengali nationalism, they were espousing Pakistan's anti-India rhetoric. Many others who found themselves getting caught between Bengali struggle for freedom and Pakistan's intent to crush the insurgency had sided with the army's onslaught. Rather than siding with the Bengalis, they collaborated with the Pakistanis as "razakars." Harun Kazi and Khaled Kazi do not become razakars. In fact, they are rapidly transformed into pro-Bengali sympathizers in the novel: "The very first feeling of becoming de-Pakistanised" (176). While Harun and Khaled become "de-Pakistanised," the readers sense of concern regarding Ara's depiction of Pakistani collaborators become acute.

In Salil Tripathi's *The Colonel Who Would Not Repent: The Bangladesh War and Its Unquiet Legacy* (2016), a multidimensional account of 1971, we find anecdotal examples of razakars that contradict with their conventional depiction as monsters or villains. He mentions a certain male relation of the illustrious female activist Raunaq Mahal who saved her "large ancestral home" (136) from being torched by the Pakistan army after he identifies his son as a "razakar." Another description deals with "Ramkrishna Pal of Chittagong" – a minority – whose Muslim razakar friend had been benevolent to him (137). The examples according to Tripathi

suggests the intricacy of war-time collaboration: “It is one of the peculiarities of the Bangladesh war that close kinship trumped political ideologies” (137). By drawing on the exceptional circumstance of “close kinship” standing up to “political ideologies,” Ara’s novel explores discrimination against the minority during the war.

Jamil, Alam Khan’s son, retains an ambiguous relation with the Bengali nationalist struggle in *Blame*. While in love with Laila, he fails to receive her attention. Touted in the family as Laila’s betrothed, Jamil’s refuses to back down despite failing to gain her favor. Moreover, he disputes Laila’s decision to join the war. “He repeated: ‘War is not for women’” (234). He also adds that she will be an outcast in the family: “‘It’s insane! Your parents would never allow it, Laila,’ he said after a long silence” (234). Subsequently, Jamil uses her as a foil for Laila’s escape from the Pakistani army camp.

Perhaps he thought Gita’s participation in the 1971 war prompted Laila to join. His acquaintance with pro-Pakistani razakars suggests some Bengalis had an ambiguous relation to the insurgency. The Pakistan army’s anti-Hindu and anti-Bengali pogrom had been facilitated by local allies, who were active participants in the war, but, also had a divided allegiance. As in *Blame,* Jamil is depicted as having gained the confidence of both the insurgents and the razakars, highlighting his intricate positioning in the conflict.

His victimization of Gita presents the mostly delicate subject of the novel’s exploration, which is the case of those women victimized by sexual violence in the war. Some Hindus were targeted and her (Gita) instance is one of them but Jamil’s decision to exchange Gita for Laila is not a simplistic one. He acts not from compulsion but from a position that is one of self-interest. He also capitulates to the same anti-Hindu bias as that of the razakar Mullah Yousef. He warns Jamil so that he does not follow those who were against Pakistan’s unity: “You see, you have to

prove your loyalty to Pakistan if you want to safeguard not only Laila's, but also your family's existence" (284). While he never explicitly advocates pro-Pakistan feelings, we can locate a communal mindset in Jamil from the excuse he gives to Laila about Gita's capture: "They wanted her in exchange for you. And she is Hindu . . ." (289). A Hindu is expendable, according to Jamil. despite his involvement in the insurgency that wanted to upend Pakistan's religious nationalism, he takes a decision that is self-serving and is illustrative of his anti-Hindu mindset.

Tradition-bound patriarchal values also dictate Jamil's decision to exchange Gita for Laila. He remains confined by the patriarchal societal demands throughout the novel. In fact, he fails to see that Laila joined the war against the wishes of her conservative Muslim family. Buoyed by the progressive kernel of the Bengali struggle, she makes an independent decision to join the insurgency. Being in proximity to the Bengali nationalist cause in Dhaka, she is influenced by the liberating possibilities of a freedom struggle. But her decision is opposed by her brother Jadu when he comes to know about it.

He feels, her decision to join the guerilla struggle goes against the values of Muslim family nobility: "His sister Laila, Laila of the Kazis, who should be dedicated to her family values, like all other Kazi girls before her. But Laila had become a freedom fighter – a freedom fighter just like himself. He would no longer be Jadu Kazi, if he accepted that" (245). Her brother's strong opposition to Laila's becoming a "freedom-fighter" is suggestive of Jadu's traditional patriarchal values of East Pakistan's Bengali Muslim family.

Moreover, Jadu agrees to Jamil's proposal of getting married to Laila as soon as they exchange her by pawning Gita. he decides to marry Laila as soon as she is released because "as long as Laila and he were not married, he could never assert his right over her before Jadu" (275). While the novel also suggests Jamil is attracted to her, he decides to marry her because of

the traditional circumstances, which would have been consequential for her. For example, her family would refuse to accept her. Laila is also coerced when the marriage contract is signed: "Jamil signed a paper, and as Laila couldn't hold the pen, they dipped her thumb in an inkpot and pressed it on the document. Laila had now become Jamil's wife" (291).

Laila's lukewarm reaction to Jamil's decision becomes evident when "Laila pushed Jamil's hand away from her head and covered her face with the pillow" as if she is disgusted by him (296). The act of exchanging her for Gita prompts her to self-doubt: "She was thinking how strange she was not grateful for being alive, and regard Jamil as a hero as everyone was doing?" (296). Confounded, she tries to find answer by introspecting Jamil: "She wondered if Jamil was proud of himself, if he really believed that he had done the right thing, exchanging Gita's life for hers" (296-297). Finding a reluctant Jamil, she decides: "Gita has to be saved. Gita must be saved. Gita is not a lamb to be slaughtered" (294). Laila is able to gather courage and accuses Jamil of betraying Gita: "You betrayed Gita, simply because she was a Hindu. Actually, you betrayed us both" (300). Eventually, she convinces him and Santo and Kamil to plan her rescue from the army camp. Before being rescued, Gita undergoes sexual violence, which is compounded because of the anti-Hindu mindset of the Pakistani military officer.

*Blame* approaches Gita's plight in the military camp and her subsequent rescuing by identifying Laila's contribution which includes killing a combat soldier and then sheltering a suffering Gita. She articulates the unifying vision of the Bengali struggle by contributing as a warrior – having previously challenged Jamil with the question "why not [she can play ] the role of a warrior" – who will then be Gita's shelter after she has been rescued from the army camp (234). Laila's earlier proximity to Santo during 1971 strengthens her. After she convinces others

that Gita be rescued, Laila becomes part of a successful campaign that ends the extreme suffering of a Hindu girl.

We have noticed that Laila is drawn to Santo by subsequently rejecting the traditional Muslim family values. Besides, her efforts to safeguard a vulnerable Gita highlight the novel's articulation of Laila's positive contribution in the changing of societal attitude with regards to East Pakistani minority Hindus. Previously, she embraced them as friends by contradicting familial expectations and an overpowering nationalism during the 1965 war. Now that the persecution of Hindus has become more common in 1971, Laila's effort is highlighted in the novel as a task the majority must undertake to safeguard minorities.

In fact, as the political situation in East Pakistan began to deteriorate around 1971, Laila's family welcomed the Hindu family. But they were not prepared to accept Laila's love for him, Santo thought: "Laila's family lineage, Laila's home – an acknowledged seat of Muslim piety – her family's riches, everything used to scare him" (128). His "affection" thus did not transform into "a single pure feeling" as "a mixture of fear, awe, longing, guilt and sadness" dominated his longing for Laila (128). The war brings them closer, but the intimacy is brief as he is captured during the rescue operation that ends in Gita's freedom.

Though the connection between Laila and Santo significantly informs the novel's depiction of the anti-minority atmosphere during the 1965 war and the gradual realization of common Hindu-Muslim destiny through Bengali nationalist agitations just before the 1971 war, the question of minority in the latter part of the novel is primarily evoked through Gita's misery as a captive in the army camp and her rehabilitation efforts represented Laila's as benevolence. she is rescued, Gita endures torture simply because of being a Hindu. That in 1971 Hindus were primarily targeted has so far been argued in this chapter. For example, Salil Tripathi refers to

Peter Kann of *Wall Street Journal* who used the term "ethnic cleansing" to situate the anti-Hindu intent of the Pakistan army (143). The novel recreates some of the existing documentation of hatred against Hindu women during 1971. Thus, the army was particularly harsh on Gita – now incarcerated in a Pakistani camp – because she was a Hindu.

We also find the Pakistani officer feeling both attraction and repulsion towards Gita. Gita is able to impress him with her beauty and her rudimentary knowledge of Islam: "Gita's eyes resembled those of the *houris* described in the Koran, he thought. And he further delighted that, despite being a Hindu, Gita knew several verses from the Koran" (315). Her beauty and her mastery of the "several verses from the Koran" the officer was convinced she would undergo Islamic conversion. Gita was assigned a translator to "give her some lessons about Islam and to teach her Urdu" while the officer also decided a dietary regime for her as "West Pakistanis preferred chapatis and meat to rice and fish" (315). Attempts to covert Gita and to regiment her diet were undertaken with an aim to coerce her to a West Pakistani lifestyle. She also endured physical punishment.

The officer in his drunken state was overtly violent towards Gita as "he would lose his temper and beat Gita, slap her, punish her for not speaking Urdu, tell her that she was a disgusting infidel, a doll-worshipping Hindu," which reflects anti-Hindu attitude (315). The officer's rage contributes to Gita's further dehumanization in captivity. Afterwards, her mistreatment becomes worse as a very disturbing account of Gita's assault is presented in the novel. The officer discards her to be subjected to collective sexual violence: "Gita was a Hindu whore; instead of protecting her, he should have had the dogs fornicate with her. He dragged Gita by the hair and threw her into the room which the soldiers shared. She was his gift to them"

(316). the narrative suggests the officer was particularly harsh on Gita because of her Hindu identity.

Salil Tripathi situates the instances of mass rape in 1971 in the context of warfare strategies where one side attempts to establish full control over the other. Aiming to establish control over the invaded, sexual violence is perpetuated to render the subjected female body helpless: “It is part of a patriarchal discourse where the woman is seen as a man’s property, and by humiliating her, the invader humiliates the man who was meant to protect her” (193). Sexual violation of women during the 1971 war follows the pattern of “a patriarchal discourse” that seeks to score points by invading the women belonging to the side of the enemy. The novel delineation of Gita’s humiliation suggests her powerlessness against soldiers who were encouraged by their officer to commit violence against the “other” woman:

> Within an hour she was attacked by several men, now turned into wild beasts. Her clothes were torn away. Her naked, soft body was pinned to the ground, twisted, turned and bent, manhandled, tossed, pressed against a wall; they clawed at her, bit her, and filled every orifice of her body with the juice. There was the smell of sweat, blood, semen, saliva, urine and other body odours. Gita held her breath as long as she could before inhaling again. Finally, when she was almost dead, one soldier took off his belt and tied it around her neck and then he moved around the walls of the room as she struggled to crawl behind him, like an exhausted dog on a leash. The others stood watching, jeering and laughing raucously (316).

The “several men” participating in Gita’s dehumanization is identified as “wild beasts.” Extreme acts of sexual gratification is evident from the soldiers fulfilling their desires as “they clawed at her, bit her, and filled every orifice of her body with the juice.” Perhaps Gita’s torture is severe

because of her religious identity, the author of *Blame* insinuates, and it is Laila – having perceived the message of common Hindu-Muslim destiny espoused by Bengali nationalism during her university days in Dhaka before the war – who takes responsibility of rescuing and rehabilitating her Hindu friend Gita.

She convinces Kamil, Jamil and Santo to carry out a rescue mission. The mission is a success as Gita is rescued but Kamil and Santo are captured by the army. Moreover, Laila's killing a Pakistani soldier to overturn the humiliation Gita suffered – the act of violence against the Pakistani soldier represents a form of retributive justice on behalf of the family. She tries to compensate Jamil's betrayal, which in turn makes her an individual full of wrath. She seeks revenge against the Pakistan army's tactics to sexually violate Bengali women by murdering a soldier. As Laila imagined a "dead and half naked [soldier] with a soiled anus on show" she was overtaken by a desire to counter-attack which "churned up her buried fury" (328). Laila strikes the soldier with repeated brutal acts of shooting but was able to kill the man by cutting his throat with a weapon: "She straddled him, took out her knife, pulled his head back, and with a single slash slit his throat. Blood spurted out, covering her clothes and face, but now she was calm" (329). Rescuing Gita became more significant the moment Laila protested war-time humiliation of women by killing a male soldier who had possibly raped Gita.

It has been widely noted that women who were tortured by military forces found it difficult to rehabilitate after. Despite Gita's skepticism towards Laila's goodwill, presented in her uttering "Because of you Santo is probably dead, and I am regarded as a disgraceful whore. Even my parents don't want to know me anymore," (335) Laila is able to gradually gain Gita's confidence. While she doubts that the anti-Hindu characteristics of the military campaign might have led to Laila's betraying her ("I know that you are an upper-class Muslim girl and I am a

lower caste Hindu" 335), Gita eventually realizes Laila is not complicit in her suffering by deciphering Laila's outward reaction at her accusation: "Laila flinched" (335). Since "Gita could see that she had hurt Laila badly," she comes to accept the new reality.

Laila's approach to Gita's plight stemmed from her love for Santo: "To Laila, Gita was an extension of Santo, whom she loved" (335). The effect of this cross-religious intimacy transformed Laila to a dutiful individual ready to take care of Gita in Santo's absence: "The civil war might drag on, and Gita needed proper care" (336). Despite the tension existing between the two, Laila hopes their past amity will be rekindled: "Gita's nature has always been to forgive; perhaps she was looking even at this moment for some excuse to forgive her" (336). Laila's taking responsibility of Gita's rehabilitation should be understood from this context of forgiveness.

Ara in *Blame* presents Gita as wounded, a popular trope of representation of women who were victims of sexual violence in 1971. While previously captured, Laila is depicted as far from being wounded, and after Gita's rescue becomes active in the task of rehabilitating Santo's sister. Gita's belief that Laila might have been aware of Jamil's plans, who traded her off because she was a minority, is addressed in the novel through Laila's efforts to save Gita. She is sheltered with the Kazi family in an Old Dhaka house. Though distressed, she gets to become comfortable in this sheltered space: "Gita created her own room within her burkha. She lived inside it, telling Laila that it made her feel safe" (345). Having to share space with Jamil: The sound of his voice would start her heart rattling and she would press her hands tightly on her ears under the pleated drape of her burkha's headpiece (345). Traumatized by Jamil's presence, Gita feels insecure and she uses "the pleated drape of her burkha's headpiece" as a shield against Jamil's voice. To cure her boredom Laila brings her books and sometimes news of the war (345).

Eventually, their fragile bond is somewhat restored: “When they could be alone, they spoke of their childhood and what they would do when the war ended, but never of the time they spent at the Military camp” (345). They were scarred by the experience of “the Military camp,” which they did not talk about but their reminiscing about their “childhood” and their anticipation of the future brings them closer.

The novel’s engagement with the plight of the Hindu minority also considers the Bihari community (non-Bengali speaking migrants from Bihar) and their persecution in the aftermath of the war. Visible to the children of the Kazi household was “Narinda’s Gauri Moth (temple) where an emaciated old man with a white beard and a green tupi on his head, and a young mother who carried an infant in her arms, lived in a shed and took care of the temple” (345). Their identity would not be revealed until the end of the novel when the Pakistan army is defeated in the war. In the meantime, Laila thinks if her contribution to the war is going to receive acknowledgement or if only men deserved to be a war-hero (345). Another terrible realization awaited Laila and Gita as soon as the war had ended.

They witnessed “a group of young men with guns in their hands jumped off a lorry, pushed open the gate of the boundary wall of Gauri Moth and ran into it” to commit three murders. They saw “the old man’s head was bashed with the butt of a rifle, and his body dumped on the blood-stained road” (359). The baby and the mother were violently killed too. The position of the oppressor is now reversed.  Now they were Bengali insurgents, previously identified as oppressed now belonging to the oppressor category, murdering the Bihari community: “They had been killed because they were Biharis – non-Bengalis” (359). Laila is able to look after Gita after she was rescued from the Pakistani army camp but she was taken aback by another form of atrocity as was Gita.

Helplessly they witness the violence acted out by the Bengali insurgents against another minority community, which indicates minority oppression may take newer forms in post-1971 Bangladesh. The novel also indicates that Laila and Gita underwent post-war rehabilitation where "they were not alone; there were many girls and women who had been raped by Pakistani soldiers and then abandoned by their families" (367). Ending of the war brought a symbolic unity among the Hindus and Muslims. Those who fought the war had to pay a greater price; for example, the readers learn that freedom-fighters Kamil and Santo gave up their lives.

**Conclusion**

Thus, Ghosh's approach to the problem of East Pakistan's Hindu minority is mediated through the experience of Partition in West Bengal and thus is different from Ara's depiction of Pakistan's increasingly anti-Hindu atmosphere in the 1960s., In my analysis, I have argued that Ghosh captures the increasing marginalization of East Pakistan's Hindu community transnationally by focusing on the divided South Asian societies – an outcome of 1947 – across the border in East Pakistan and West Bengal. Contesting versions of the 1964 riots emerge with the narrator's East Bengal-born grandmother changing her perspective of "desh" having witnessed the anti-Hindu attitude in East Pakistan and Tridib's untimely death in the riot becomes virulently opposed to East Pakistan. Sustained by the popular war-time nationalist narratives, she begins to regard her homeland as the territory of the Muslim "enemy." Therefore, the narrator's critique of nationalism in *The Shadow Lines* is presented from re-telling the crisis of East Pakistan's Hindus as witnessed by his Tha'mma, who is oblivious of the parallel anti-Muslim sentiment in Indian West Bengal, as well as by introspecting on the hatred for the "other" that recurs in the Indian side of Bengal too, which he witnessed as a young boy in Calcutta.

In *The Shadow Lines* Tham'ma's fondness for East Bengal turns into bitterness after her visit to the region in 1964, where she experiences anti-Hindu antagonism, but in *Blame* the oppressive climate against the minority is depicted as an effect of Pakistan nationalism, which begins to transform as Laila becomes a university student in Dhaka but the returns during the 1971 war. The war would signify Pakistan army's brutality against the Hindus but it was the Hindu-Muslim unity among the Bengalis that eventually emerged triumphant.

Laila plays a key role in *Blame* as she supports Gita after she is rescued from the Pakistan army camp. Her taking the responsibility of Gita mirrors the ethos of Bengali struggle against Pakistani concept of nation. Laila's action reflects the inclusion of Hindu minority into the fold of Muslim majority when Bengali ethnolinguistic nationalism surged as a reaction to Muslim nationalism of Pakistan. Consequently, Laila's initial shock at her family's treatment of Gita and Santo and their family is turned into surprise when she discovers the activism against sectarianism in Dhaka.

Finding Santo amidst the protesting activists, now enchanted by the non-sectarian message of Bengali uprising, her love for him is rekindled. The rendezvous is short-lived as the war broke out in which Santo and Laila participate. After his capture during the mission to rescue Gita, it is Laila who fraternizes Gita. Tha'mma's bitter experience of East Pakistan in *The Shadow Lines* is thus transformed in Dilruba Z Ara's *Blame* as it is able to document the active Hindu participation and their sacrifice in the 1971 war.

# Chapter 3: Fracturing Pakistan, Forming Bangladesh: Class and Gender Insurgencies in the Time of "Passive Revolution" in Akhteruzzaman Elias' *The Sepoy in the Attic* (*Chilekothar Sepai*, 1987) and the Many "Birangona" Stories in Shaheen Akhtar's *The Search* (2004)

## Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to interrogate the late 1960s East Pakistan and the 1971 war by foregrounding the characters marginalized in history instead of highlighting nationally recognized individuals who were the leaders of the agitation against the Pakistan state. These characters either participated in the national struggle, as in the case of the subaltern men engaged in various forms of insurgency, or those who were exposed to the conflict's fallouts such as quotidian patriarchal oppression and gendered violence. This strategic probing of the paradigmatic break-up of postcolonial Pakistan and the birth of a new nation Bangladesh illuminates the many experiences of these marginal characters. These multivocal narratives consider de-territorialization and unmapping from the experience of ordinary men and women, whose quotidian struggles as a kind of history-making has received scant attention in the Bangladeshi national imaginary. Their struggle to find space is largely due to the middle-class obsession with the war, which tends to present 1971 as a form of glorified heroic resistance.

The national bourgeoisie's tendency to glorify the Bengali struggle against Pakistan often takes a reverential form that turns Bangladesh into a "martyrological landscape," argues Nayanika Mookherjee (2015). Mookherjee (2015) identifies a nexus of professionals and artists, whose depiction 1971 in films, poetry and novels adheres to a uniform narrative: "Most of the producers of these literary and visual texts are from a middle-class background and are referred to (by the middle-class and lower-middle-class literate readers in Dhaka and suburban towns in Bangladesh) as buddhijibis" (178). Pointing out their left-leaning allegiance, Mookherjee has noted that these intellectuals (in Bengali "buddhijibis") give centrality to 1952, as they draw

heavily from the events that justify their nationalist understanding of Bangladesh's history as a culmination of a series of political causes against Pakistan.[61] Consequently, "starting only from the anticolonial Tebhaga peasant struggle in 1946 (before partition), Bangladesh's historiography jumps over 1947 to 1952," – this narrative perpetuates its hegemony by glorifying martyrdom (46).[62] Therefore, Bangladesh's official historiography takes little cognizance of 1947, as it relies on the history of successes of the political movements that shaped Bengali nationalism in united Pakistan.

However, "a growing critique of Bengali nationalism" has emerged to oppose the bourgeoisie cultural fixation with 1971, as the war-time experiences of the "ordinary people" are now finding recognition, argues Catherine Masud in the essay "Cinema & National Memory in Bangladesh." The essay is a postscript to the public screening of her documentary "Songs of Freedom," which Catherine Masud co-directed with the late Tareque Masud. Ordinary people's interpretation of the war vastly differed from the middle-class renditions of the war – a contrast that becomes the departure point of the documentary "Words of Freedom," made by the Masuds. In fact, "Words of Freedom" articulated an inclusive story of 1971 by addressing the occlusion of the majority population's lived experience of the war, thereby, pivoting away from the literary and cultural expressions informed by the ideological claptraps of the national intelligentsia.

My analysis of Akhteruzzaman Elias' *The Sepoy in the Attic* (*Chilekothar Sepai*, 1987) and Shaheen Akhtar's *The Search* (*Taalash*, 2004) interrogates the subaltern classes shaped by their quotidian struggles. Both the novels problematize Bangladesh's official historiography that

[61] This class of intelligentsia can be distinguished from the military and conservative Islamists, who propagate "Bangladeshi" nationalism modelled after the two-nation theory of Pakistan.

[62] I have coined the term "contested narrations" to define literary and film texts that simultaneously interrogate the Bengali nationalist discourse of 1971 and informs the liminal spaces that emerged during the clash between Pakistan's ruling class and the Bengali insurgents. The multiple sites of the conflict give voice to the margins represented by the subaltern classes depicted in the two novels.

provides little or no space to the people's experiences of the war. Elias and Akhtar make visible the margins, as the subaltern classes of urban and rural East Pakistan, as well as the victims of sexual violence provide their perspective of events as participants in the history-making process.[63]

The literary rendering of the political crises in East Pakistan from 1966 to 1969 before its paradigmatic secession from the body politic of Pakistan in Elias's *The Sepoy in the Attic* (1987) and the fictional enunciation of the complicated equations associated with the unleashing of violence on the female bodies in Shaheen Akhtar's *The Search* (2004) exposes the fault lines of national identity formation.[64] They are set in opposition to "the official version of history [that] is always constructed by the political elite – whether cultural, military, or religious – thus marginalizing its subaltern subject," – thus, they offer a critique of the two nationalisms in Bangladesh (D'Costa 3).

The historically marginalized characters in *The Sepoy in the Attic* (1987) are both the urban and rural commoners – whose struggles against West Pakistan's hegemony and uneven land-reform in post-1947 East Pakistan echo the rural resistance of the 1940s in the form of the Tebhaga peasant movement fictionalized in Elias' other major novel *Khoabnama* (1996). In *The Sepoy in the Attic*, the rural resistance exists alongside the periodic eruptions of the urban subaltern classes. Both forms of resistance interpret the anti-state rebellion in their own terms, as we notice from the novel's juxtaposition of the two sites of struggle. Multiple dimensions of the

[63] The novels make visible the margins including the urban and rural subaltern classes, while they also engage women's voices caught up in the violent war during East Pakistan's transition to Bangladesh.

[64] Elora Halim Chowdhury ("When Love and Violence Meet," 2011) argues that "although there is a robust tradition of literature, film, theatre, and television dramas in Bangladeshi mainstream media on the topic of the War of Liberation," recent scholarship has facilitated "a critical discussion of war, genocide, and gender justice on a transnational level" (761). Chowdhury's argument is premised on the idea of a late bloom, and is somewhat akin to Ananya Jahanara Kabir's idea of post-amnesia (2013).

very resistance therefore emerge through the organized peasant opposition to local feudalism in the rural regions of East Pakistan and the urban agitators led by protesters belonging to the various Dhaka-based groups. According to Taj ul Hashmi (1992), central to Bengal's peasant movements before 1947 was the question of land redistribution, which remained unresolved in independent Pakistan as well. Thus, it became a significant factor in rallying the Bengali peasants in the villages of East Pakistan at the same time when urban insurgency had begun.

Elias' novel also points out that masculinity has shaped the violent nature of the insurgency. The insurgents in both urban and rural Bengal displayed manliness to enact violence against their oppressors, which in turn contributed to their committing acts of domestic violence. The instances of domestic violence capture in *The Sepoy in the Attic* (1987) highlight an extended dimension of the masculine aspect of the insurgency. Therefore, the struggles of women like Jummon's mother against the dominant patriarchal notion of family are connected to the narrativization of insurgency in the novel. While victimized by the men around her, Jummon's mother fights back at times, but we also witness her defeats. In Elias' documentation of the anti-authoritarian insurgency, the societal gender dynamics is very much present in the larger theatre of resistance in East Pakistan. The oppressive regulation of women's bodies perpetuate discrimination against the female subaltern characters in *The Sepoy in the Attic*, which I comparatively examine in conjunction with my analysis of Shaheen Akhtar's *The Search* (*Taalash*, 2004).

Akhtar's novel documents war-time rape used as a weapon by the Pakistan army against the Bengali women. Highlighting the central character Mariam's struggles during and after the 1971 war, the novel marks her fight for recognition, primarily informed by Mukti's field work. In Akhtar's novel, the intertwined stories of the women, who the Bangladesh state identified as

"birangona" after 1972, "comb" – a term used by Mookherjee (2015) – the class, religious, and ethnic backgrounds of the female victims of violence.

*The Search* (2004) is also an interrogation of nationalism with the novel implicating men from both the warring sides as the perpetrators of sex crimes against women. Moreover, the voices of the other "birangona" victims complement Mariam's experience as a "birangona" ("war-heroine"). Therefore, the novel offers us Bakhtinian double-voiced narrations of the determined survivors of state and societal impositions. Their stories expose the fault lines of the masculinist violence committed during 1971, as the male fighters from both sides of the conflict emerge as perpetrators.

If Mukti had begun her activist initiative to buttress the agenda of punishing the collaborators of the Pakistan army accused of committing war crimes in 1971, she soon finds out that the nationalist discourse's linking the "birangona" subjecthood and the "rajakar" ("collaborator") actors of sex crimes has its limitations. The much precision attributed to popularize the idea of raped women being the helpless victims of the army and their collaborators also offered legitimacy to the perpetuation of violence against the non-Bengalis. In 1971, they became the "other" of the Bengalis, and were subjected to violence and killing that replicated the atrocities committed by the Pakistan army against the Bengali and the Hindu minorities of East Pakistan.

I will use Partha Chatterjee's enunciation of "passive revolution" to examine the struggle of Khijir and Chengtu's marginality, as informed by the influence of Osman and Anwar respectively, as oppositional to nationally reified history in *The Sepoy in the Attic*[65]. While Chatterjee's (1986; 1993) conceptualization of the nationalist attempt to include the peasantry in

[65] I should note that the aura of the Bengali nationalist leader Sheikh Mujibur Rahman is similar to Partha Chatterjee's (1986) theorization of the foundational figure of India decolonization, Mahatma Gandhi.

the nation-state project helps us to distinguish between the politics of the urban and the rural sites, I will also draw from Fanon's analysis of the developmentalist state and the nature of mass movements in the postcolonial societies in my analysis of the urban site.

To situate gendered and patriarchal subalternity in *The Search* with a comparative context, I will evoke Spivak's "Can the Subaltern Speak?" to read Mariam's subalternity and the anti-patriarchal battles waged by Jumman's mother. While the conceptualization of gendered subalternity has association with the national struggle in *The Sepoy in the Attic*, Akhter's novel *The Search* (2004) portray widespread war-time rape in all its complexities to problematize the foundational "birangona" narrative in the national discourse of Bangladesh. It contends that sexual violence was primarily committed by the Pakistan army and their collaborators.[66]

The national discourse is then pompously flaunted by official history-makers, according to Mukti's critical framing of nationalism in the novel: "Research scholars, journalists, columnists jog their age-weakened memories on December 16, March 26, and some other days in the year. It was almost like plucking fruit from a tree" (346). Mukti's chosen metaphor of fruit-picking from a tree is a critical assessment of the insurgency struggle and its relation to gendered violence occurred during the war, I will suggest by reading the novel in relation to Mookherjee's *Spectral Wound* (2015).

**The Sites of Insurgency**

First published in 1987 Akhteruzzaman Elias' *Chilekothar Sepai* (*The Sepoy in the Attic*) is a major Bangladeshi novel of the late Twentieth Century. Set in the backdrop of the mass movement of 1969 against the Ayub Khan regime, the novel captures both the rural and the

[66] While the army and their allies are held responsible for the gendered crimes including rape in 1971, the Bengalis participating in the insurgency also committed sexual violence against non-Bengali women and men. The perpetuation of gendered crimes involved different ethnicities that were engaged in violence in 1971, argues Veena Das in the foreword to Nayanika Mookherjea's book (2015).

urban milieus of East Pakistan at the crossroads. Connected by the two separate explosions of insurgencies, the settings present Khijir and Chengtu as representative political voices of the masses of the struggles in a politically disintegrating East Pakistan.

The seemingly unrelated insurgencies in Elias' novel present a people's struggle against Bengali nationalism's linear nationalist perspective. The Bengali nationalists are portrayed as the beneficiaries of the urban unrest that would topple Ayub Khan, while they also overpower the popular uprising against feudalism in the countryside. By delineating both the urban and the rural movements, the novel *Chilekothar Sepai* (*Sepoy in the Attic*) eloquently captures the intensification of the East Pakistan unrest during the 1960s.

Therefore, in Elias' novel, the depiction of the passive revolution engineered by the Awami League forms a story that has connecting parts. One part is the tale of a city awash with demonstrations and the counter-insurgency measures of the militarized Pakistani state. The other part is about a rural uprising against the exploitations of local feudalism and their representatives like Khaybar Gazi and his accomplices, Kader Mandal and Hossen Ali. Despite their point-of-views mediating the depiction of the urban unrest and the subaltern revolt, the young middle-class men Osman and Anwar do not participate the frontal battle against oppression. Contrarily, the subaltern characters Khijir and Chengtu seize control – albeit momentarily – of the enraging political movement in the urban and the rural frontiers respectively. Osman and Anwar's escapism suggests that the bourgeoisie does not have the potential to revolt.

While Osman's desire to actively participate in the rebellion remains ineffective, his psychological torment intensifies after Khijir's death, turning him into a lunatic in the process. On the other hand, Anwar's failure is that of the bourgeoisie intellectual's failure to fully understand the unrest in East Pakistan. With his *mejo mama* (maternal uncle) using the rhetoric

of the Bengali nationalism to seize control of the peasant rebellion, Anwar could only reflect on his own ineffectiveness.

In Elias' work, a surging Bengali nationalism begins to take over the unstructured people's struggle, with the former as the stakeholders of passive revolution seizing control of the latter – the urban and rural insurgents. Thus, the novel's fictionalization of the mass movements in Dhaka and in the villages is critical of Bengali nationalism, which can be read from Partha Chatterjee's theorization of nationalism as "passive revolution." Lacking uniformity, the insurgencies simultaneously existed, and made different emancipatory claims, which is suggestive of one version of the anti-Pakistan agitation contesting with the other, while also opposing state repression.[67]

I present my analysis of *The Sepoy in the Attic* in three segments. The first segment "The Urban Site of Protest" deals with the Dhaka-based popular struggle against the military rule of Ayub Khan in 1969, the second segment "Analysis of the Village Episode" describes rural uprising against the feudal lords, and the third segment "The Understated Revolutionary: The Case of Jummon's Mother" analyzes women's struggle against the society's patriarchal structure at the time of an uprising that has entangled the state, the urban middle-class and the rural classes.

[67] Willem van Schendel (2009) has noted that besides the guerillas ("mukti bahini") loyal to the Bengali nationalists, there were radical factions that participated in the insurgency against the Pakistan army: "There were also various local groups of freedom fighters joining battle with the Pakistan army. These remained outside the Mukti Bahini but often collaborated with them. Among the many groups were the Kader Bahini in Tangail, the Afsar Bahini in Mymensingh and the Siraj Sikdar group in Barisal" (166). It should also be noted that *Words of Freedom* (*Muktir Kothar* 1999), directed by Tareque Masud and Catherine Masud, documents the response from 1996 to 1999 of the subaltern classes to the documentary *Songs of Freedom* (1995). The Masuds have also produced a film *Clay Bird* (*Matir Moyna* 2002) that is about the people's struggle in East Pakistan.

**The Urban Site of Protest**

It is through Osman that the readers get to know about much of the protest in the Dhaka city. During his sojourns in the city, Osman takes a keen interest on Dhaka having undergone a transformation after the Partition in 1947. The readers become familiar with his background as we are told his family had migrated to East Pakistan from West Bengal but since the death of his mother his father moved to their native village in India. We are told that Rahmatullah's house in Old Dhaka –where Osman is now a tenant –belonged to a Hindu family: "The Poddars went to India in the 1950s after selling the house to Rahmatullah" (3, trans. mine). Elias thus establishes a correlation between an increasingly volatile East Pakistan drawing closer to 1971 and 1947.

We are reminded of the riot in 1950 that led to more Hindu exodus from the city. Osman comes across vacant houses in Shankhari Bazar during one of his walks in the streets of Old Dhaka: "Osman was now walking by the dilapidated tall houses in Shankhari Bazar. He could feel the pungent smell and cold air in his body emanating from the innermost core of the dried-up marrows of those houses" (138, trans. mine). The emptiness of the once Hindu-dominated area of Shankhari Bazar still bears the signs of the Partition. As he witnesses rebellion flaring up in East Pakistan against the Pakistan state, Osman is reminded of the tragic consequences of Hindu migration from East Pakistan to India.

More importantly, Osman is a witness to the uprising in Dhaka but not a participant in the ongoing struggle. Sometimes he is a curious onlooker; he sees the unfolding of protests but there is much distance between him and the participants of the movement. When he comes across a procession in Rayshaheb Bazar, he could hear the "thunderous roar" and imagines as if the Buriganga river has become a participant, but he is not able to see the entirety of the procession: "Standing on his toes, Osman tries to see further but he could not see the front-end of the

procession" (131, trans. mine). While he does not, one of his acquaintances, Khijir, spontaneously participates in the movement.

The complex interrelationship between Khijir, a subaltern, and Osman, a middle-class is possible because of the nationalist struggle that has accommodated the disparate residents of Dhaka. There is also difference between the two characters. Osman's inability to act can be understood as his powerlessness to act out what he imagines doing. Thus, he remains imprisoned in the pedagogic realm of nationalism. In contradiction, Khijir's political participation is performative in nature, while he continues to work for urban *jotedars* Rahmatullah and Alauddin.

We can argue both Osman and Khijir are imprisoned by nationalism, yet in their distinctive pedagogic and performative positions, they remain outside of its full control. Their different positions never meet; Osman's pedagogic understanding of nationalism takes him to the verge of insanity and Khijir's performative actions end when he is killed by the security forces during a demonstration.

In the novel's fateful encounter between Khijir's performativity and Osman's pedagogy is a depiction of the misconstrued meeting of the two characters. The meeting taking place nearly at the end is conceived as real by Osman now suffering from mental illness. Anwar witnesses Osman's imagined announcement that Khijir is beckoning him to go outside in the midst of a curfew. Osman starts to use force so that Anwar lets him go out, while Anwar tries to ensure his safety by holding him back. The success of Osman's effort in nearly subduing Anwar is described in the following way: "Its 10 pm and we are in the midst of a curfew but how has the deceased Khijir taken over Osman? How can he withstand the combined power of one dead and one living men?" (295, trans. mine) We can interpret this moment as the novel's problematizing

the unity of the pedagogic and the performative that defines a successful nationalist moment.

Elias' depiction of the failed interaction between Osman and Khijir can be compared to the presenting of mock nationalism in Salman Rushdie's seminal novel *Midnight's Children* (1982). While suggesting that the story of South Asia is grand because it is comprised of the history of the three nations, India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh, the novel's narrator can only tell a fragment version of the entirety. On a similar note, postcolonial theorists consider that the narrative of the nation is incomplete without the multi-dimensional stories contained within. According to Homi Bhabha (1990),

> The liminal figure of the nation-space would ensure that no political ideologies could claim transcendental or metaphysical authority for themselves. This is because the subject of cultural discourse – the agency of a people – is split in the discursive ambivalence that emerges in the contestation of narrative authority between the pedagogical and the performative" (299).

While it attempts to impose dominance, nationalism cannot attain "transcendental" or "metaphysical authority" because there is always certain splitting in its form. In another sense, it could be defined in consideration to the evolving relation between "the pedagogical and the performative." We can find a similar splitting in Osman's pedagogic identity and Khijir's performance.

The text offers several moments where Osman finds himself in the midst of an insurgent crowd but is unable to act. The allure of the performative beckons, but owing to his pedagogic inclination, he can only gaze at the outcome of the anti-state performance. In Chapter 23, a riotous crowd draws him and other office goers out in the street. Before entering Jinnah Avenue,

Osman finds himself on the Nawabpur road where he notices a lamppost that has caught fire. As the electricity goes off, Osman notices Khijir too.

Khijir's attentiveness to the consuming fire makes Osman think that he is an active participant in the revolt. Maybe, Khijir has also caused the arson to destroy the hotel: "The fire consumes him; it seems, he has begun the arson. Now he is thinking of his next program by looking at the burned houses" (147, trans. mine). Osman can only gaze and insinuate Khijir's performative acts but remains distant from the action. This is suggestive of the disunity between the pedagogic and the performative.

There are moments when Osman's sojourns in streets of Dhaka – infested with the protesting masses – to meet Shaukat and Altaf, who like him are members of the bourgeoisie class. Still, Osman remains a witness, as he watches the crowd burning Ayub Khan's effigy from a distance:

> Osman has mastered the technique of bypassing a crowd. He elbows a few, while pushing the others in the back; later floats himself with a sea of people to reach closer to the stage. He feels the fire but he had to withstand it to see the burning of Ayub Khan. But his luck ran out, he could see the twisted effigy of Ayub Khan a little. From the top and from the gallery behind the stage, copies of *Friends Not Masters* in English and Bengali came tumbling down on the book author. Ayub Khan lay buried under his own book. The green and white cover of *Friends Not Masters* create the illusion of Pakistan's flag and flutter in the fire-bed of the president (202, trans. mine).

In the moment of burning Ayub Khan's *Friends Not Masters*, which is symbolic of the rejection of the military dictator in East Pakistan, there is a split between the pedagogic and the performative. Osman is successful at times in maneuvering the attending masses, but he could

not see the entirety of the performance. For example, he sees "the twisted effigy of Ayub Khan" after some desperate attempt, but the core of the masses participating in the conflagration remains out of his sight.

Osman's attention is then diverted to Altaf, who appears out of the crowd to announce: "Ayub Khan is already expired in East Pakistan. His books have also ceased to exist" (203, trans. mine). Altaf's proposition reflects the Bengali nationalist leitmotif of the passive revolution. With the ensuing of a discussion on the political situation of Pakistan, the agenda of Bengali nationalism is voiced with the idea that the fall of Ayub Khan will contribute to Bengali resurgence. Shaukat disagrees with this nationalist sentiment by arguing in favor of the movement's multidirectional nature. Similar to his ineffective presence during the effigy burning, Osman offers no perspective, as if he half-participates in the discussion critical of the nationalist agenda.

As a counterpoint to Altaf's claim that the Awami League nationalists are leading the movement, Shaukat says, "If you manage to survive, it will only be at the cost of the movement. The movement will wither away, while the army will clamp down on you" (204, trans. mine). Shaukat offers a critique of the Bengali nationalists, as they aim to appropriate the movement's democratic spirit that brings together both the students and the mass people waging a common struggle against the state hegemony. In fact, Altaf's political gestures are representative of the nationalist voice in the novel.

In Chapter 4, Altaf pours out his sentiment in front of Osman, Anwar, Sekandar and Parvez during one of their "addas" or small talk sessions. His nationalist rhetoric is captured in the following sentences:

> The table is now occupied by Altaf, his confidence at everyone's silent recognition is revealed in the following manner, 'Per capita of Pakistan has seen a 180 taka rise after the years 1958-1959. But do you know the amount of increase in East Pakistan?' He is clearly annoyed when he makes the following declaration, ' 22 Taka. Twenty-Two. What will be the consequence of this exploitation?' (24, trans. mine).

Altaf's premise is a projection of the nationalist logic that economic disparity between the two wings of the country exists because West Pakistan exploits East Pakistan. Therefore, betterment of East Pakistan's economy is offered as a perfect reason for the continuation of the ongoing unrest. Furthermore, he argues, the nation that will emerge through the struggle against the colonial mindset of the West Pakistani administrative structure will find solution to the economic crisis. Altaf's argument is very similar to Nehru's idea of economic transformation, which Partha Chatterjee (1986) analyzes as a nationalist claim made on the basis of creating a sovereign economy (131-166).

Caught up in the pedagogic exchange between Shaukat and Altaf, Osman becomes restless as he is unable to form a logical argument of his own. It seems as if he is going to repeat what is already being said by Altaf, as the nationalist logic has an emotional impact on him. Before he could react further, the conversation is interrupted by Sekandar's remark that the girls at the university are freely mixing with the boys these days. We can notice the irony of the situation here –a nationalist viewpoint is disrupted by a casual remark about the changing gender norms in Dhaka. This is an ironic presentation of the nationalist rhetoric in the novel.

To return to Osman's predicament, he has now lost the jest to repeat what Altaf had already said. In fact, he is caught up in the polyphony of narratives competing to politically control of the East Pakistani insurgency. In fact, he used to gaze at the popular movement from a

safe distance before Khijir's death in the hands of the security forces. A performative member of the mass movement, Khijir's fiery slogans draw Osman's attention, who observes him from the balcony.

The novel's depiction of the moment is another example of the complex interplay between the performative and the pedagogic: "In the presence of Shaukat, Osman observed Khijir's sloganeering with only 7 men: 'Curfew, curfew,' - '*Mani na, Mani na*,' 'Lit the fire, lit the fire,' - 'Lit the fire everywhere' - 'Will break open the jail' - 'Will free Sheikh Mujib.' Within minutes these slogans are reverberated in all directions" (236, trans. mine). Khijir's utterance "Will free Sheikh Mujib" – an Awami League rhetoric – suggests his performative is not devoid of nationalism. While he accommodates other slogans that capture the mass movement's spirit, Khijir is also part of a crowd that has internalized Bengali nationalism.

Yet, there exists a conflict of interest between what the middle-class/ "bhadralok" demands and the spontaneity of the subaltern procession participants. Perhaps the pedagogic of the "bhadralok" is too closer to the nation-building aspirations than the performative of the subaltern. However, nationalism remains a powerful presence in the uprising but the crowd it draws has interests beyond the nationalist's decolonial goals.

In *The Wretched of the Earth* (2004), Fanon identifies them as insignificant, as they act as the wedges of bourgeoisie nationalism (64). Fanon is critical of nationalism's political strategy of using a numerically non-existent segment of the colonized population to attend to its emancipatory goals. According to Fanon, no distinguishing features exist between the middle-class and the working-class elements of urban politics, as the urban working-class proletariat is propelled by a similar vision to that of the bourgeois: "Their way of thinking in many ways already bears the mark of the technically advanced and relatively comfortable environment in

which they live. Here 'modernism' is king" (65). Fanon's argument implicates the compromising tendency of the urban struggles in comparison to the commitment of the rural populace. Thus, decolonization remains unattended in the aftermath of post-colonial transition.

Following Fanon's prescription, Khijir is not different from the urban middle-class men like Osman, Shaukat, Altaf, Parvez and Sekandar. Insofar, Osman significantly regards Khijir's joining the revolution, while also imagining that Khijir would play a greater role in the political transformation. Convinced of the transformative power of Khijir's political activism, he also imagines that his performative role has attributes fitting for martyrdom like those who had perished during the 1857 Sepoy Mutiny: "The 100-year-old corpses killed by the *shahibs*, killed by the *nawabs*-the domesticated hounds of the *shahibs*, the sepoys of Meerut, Bareilly, Lucknow; the humans of Ghoraghat and Lalbag" (236, trans. mine). In fact, Osman nationalizes Khijir by comparing him with the martyrs of a past anti-colonial movement.

With his imaginative vision caught up between the pedagogy of nationalism and the performative of the popular struggle in East Pakistan, Osman confusion intensifies. Osman's is also a form of revolt against the disorder outside, as his inside is now on the verge of insanity. Armed with the pedagogic but distanced from the participatory nature of the struggle, Osman reacts to outside violence when firing starts amidst a curfew, hallucinating that he is also participating from his attic: "He is repeatedly going to the attic, and then coming back to the room again. Sometimes he straightens up, and throw his fists upwards. This happens in the room as well as in the attic. When his fists are stuck in the ceiling of the room, he is getting injured. In the open attic, the bloodied hand seems like a torch" (237, trans. mine). Osman's dissent is inconsequential, but it seems to have given momentum to Khijir's participatory politics. Now it seeks to act on behalf of the passive revolution.

The procession to which Khijir is a part of is a crowd that contains fragments of history. Eventually it will be attacked by the military, which will cause Khijir's death too. Yet, from the perspective of the insurgency, there is grandeur to the processional crowd as it suggests a strange unity of the past and present histories of Dhaka's traditional and older regions. Also, this connection between the insurgent Khijir, whose bravery outshines his confined life in the squalor of postcolonial Dhaka, and, the city's past residents makes the procession momentous. It brings back those that died in the historic events of 1857 and 1947:

> It is difficult to figure out the actual numbers of the participants. Is it that necessary? The moonless sky, the starry presence of a cloudless sky, but their light is compromised by the presence of fog. The yellow light of the lamp-posts are mixed with it. The human procession enlarges under the black-yellow light. Khijir quivers since he is certain that the old residents of the *mohulla* have joined the procession. But he is not frightened - call it *jinn* or the living-dead, they have become united with the present dissidents (252, trans. mine).

Khijir's *mohulla* is animated by the ghost-like presence of the martyrs of the colonial era, as well as the deceased of the riots during and after 1947. Struggle against the colonial-minded nation has supplemented by the participation of the people long deceased, but is back in the realm of the living to boost the uprising. The mass movement attains a new meaning; consequently, it arms Khijir with a sense of the pedagogic, fulfilling the requirements of the "passive revolution" that cannot be attained only by remaining performative.

The working-class urbanites, who Fanon dismisses as subservient to the nationalists, join the mutiny. I read the novel's description of this moment as a passive revolution that strengthens Bengali nationalism: "The past comes alive as sepoys who were hanged in the palm

trees has come down by taking off their noose. They will now turn right with those already gathered, when a vociferous crowd also joins from Northbrook Hall road. The scooter drivers of Patla Khan Lane are in front the procession" (253, trans. mine). This amalgam of dead Indian soldiers from the 1857 mutiny, the public and the working-class give strength to this instance of urban mutiny, which would eventually be attacked by the armed soldiers. At the same time, the Mass Movement of 1969 draws strength from what Bhabha identifies as "the agency of a people" that is "split" between the pedagogic and the performative, as they act on behalf of the nationalist passive revolution (299).

With the Bengali nationalist movement intensifying against the postcolonial state, Khijir, the urban proletariat, is killed by the military assault on the procession. Also, he becomes a victim to state repression after molding his performative according to Osman's pedagogic nationalism. His death is described in terms of his body being compared to a motorcar: "Has chassis of his body broken? Has the tires lost pressure? Has the new tires become blunted?" (254, trans. mine) Khijir is a representative of what Fanon calls the minority group supported by the nationalists; his death in the hands of the state security forces contribute to Bengali nationalist gains in Pakistan's politics.

The novel hints that Khijir's death and the ascendency of the nationalist leader Sheikh Mujibur Rahman is interlinked. With the ousting of Ayub Khan after Yahya Khan becomes Pakistan's new ruler and with the silencing of Khijir's performative, the passive revolution finds a new outlet in the bourgeois-nationalist leader Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. He promises to uphold the demands of the Bengali-majority people of East Pakistan. An embodiment of authoritarian leadership, he starts to dictate the path of the movement by encouraging a nationalist agenda in

his speech (260-261). The nationalist leader urges the people of East Pakistan to show restraint, as they negotiate with the state following the fall of the military regime of Ayub Khan.

Therefore, the nationalist leader's politics fundamentally changes political equation in East Pakistan. Willem van Schendel (2009) has argued that the nationalist movement "did not envisage social change," as opposed to the "leftists of various parties who advocated social revolution" (125). In the backdrop of Osman's psychological deterioration, the Bengali nationalists emerge prominent, as the groundwork for a passive revolution has been accomplished in the city. In other words, the two contexts of the mass movement, the pedagogic and the performative, gives legitimacy to Bengali nationalism against the authoritarian Pakistan state. In the village episode, we will witness nationalism's swallowing the proletariat movement.

**Analysis of the Village Episode**

The novel's depiction of rural politics is reflective of the conflict between Bengali nationalism and revolutionary politics aimed at overcoming the feudal lords of the countryside. In its attempt to control the rural strand of politics, the nationalist movement undertakes a similar maneuvering, which enables it to successfully take advantage of the popular struggle in the city. I will close-read the revolution in the countryside by analyzing the novel's documentation of the people's court and its pledge to punish the landlords (*jotedars*) of the countryside.

In the city episode, we have witnessed Khijir's revolt against the Pakistan state and his eventual martyrdom. We have also identified Osman's pedagogic commitment to the movement, as opposed to Khijir's performative association with the struggle contributing to his death. An urbanite, and Osman's friend, Anwar is the pedagogic presence in the episodes that document

Chengtu's performative activism against a traditional feudal social order. Like Khijir, Chengtu is also killed by the reactionary forces opposed to change in the countryside.

The articulation of peasant politics is radical and modern at the same time. Anwar sees the power of the peasant struggle that successfully exterminates local "jotedars" like Hossen Ali. But it fails to overcome Khaybar Gazi, who is affiliated with national politics. We can read the novel's depiction of rural politics through the lens of Partha Chatterjee's assessment of postcolonial nationalist politics in the context of the meeting between bourgeoisie and peasant politics in *Nation and Its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories* (1993).

In *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World* (1986), Chatterjee suggests that the nationalist political vision – which is also pedagogic – attempts to infiltrate the performative space of peasant politics. He further expands this conceptual framework in Nation and its Fragments (1993). The political scene of passive revolution, as the stage of the nationalist bourgeois' quest for territorial self-determination, overrides the popular will to freedom. Informed by "the existence of a structure of duality in the nationalist mass movement," this uneasy political relationship brings together two distinct worlds (*Nation and its Fragments* 159).

"A coming together of the two domains of politics seems to have occurred," argues Chatterjee, to point out the success of the anti-colonial logic, that must depend on what it gains from this synergy (Chatterjee 159). To enact passive revolution, nationalism utilizes mass politics for its success. In exchange, the domain of mass politics also seems to gain from the encounter with nationalism. Chatterjee also points out that the coalescing of bourgeoisie and peasant politics contributed to some understanding of one another, but "the unity itself remained fragmented and fraught with tension" (160).

The tension would resolve in the form of passive revolution, when nationalism is able to justify its claim over the state by promoting the schema of socio-economic transformation in exchange of the consent of the peasant. Thus, Chatterjee's argument suggests that the peasants were aligned to the nationalist attempt to establish a nation:

> While the nationalist leadership sought to mobilize the peasantry as an anticolonial force in its project of establishing a nation state, it was ever distrustful of agitational politics among the peasants, suspicious of their supposed ignorance and backward consciousness, careful to keep their participation limited to the forms of bourgeoisie representative politics in which peasants would be regarded as a part of the nation but distanced from the institutions of the state. On the other hand, while peasants became aware of the hitherto unknown world of nationalist agitation, they made sense of it not in terms of the discursive forms of modern bourgeoisie politics but rather by translating it into their own codes, so that the language of nationalism underwent a quite radical transformation of meaning in the peasant domain of politics (160).

The alignment of peasant politics with the national aspiration of bourgeois politics is characteristic of the anti-colonial movement. However, the bourgeois aiming for the nation was wary of the peasants. As the nationalist leaders were suspicious of their "supposed ignorance and backward consciousness," the peasants were also seen as a threat to "the forms of bourgeoisie representative politics" (160). Moreover, "the language of nationalism underwent a quite radical transformation of meaning" as it traveled to the countryside (160). Peasant politics achieved a new sense of identity without giving up its unique characteristics. Consequently, the peasants confronted national politics in their own terms.

Elias depicts a similar interaction between the bourgeoisie and the peasant domains in rural East Pakistan, where the peasant's political standpoint constantly negotiated with nationalism, until it became fully overwhelmed more like the agitations in Dhaka. The tussle between bourgeoisie and village politics, as described by Chatterjee, is illustrative of a dense interaction between the two domains. To emerge triumphant, the proponents of nationalism must enact a passive revolution – a method signifying its success.

That there is difference between peasant politics and the objectives of the nationalist intelligentsia is suggested by the duality of the peasant movement's own pace and the pedagogic participation of Anwar. Similar to the interaction between Osman's ideological mooring and the performance urban insurgency, the pedagogic of the nationalist eventually overwhelms the performative of rural politics.

While they interact, tensions begin to appear, and for the nationalists to emerge victorious, it must quell the spontaneity of rural resistance that have the potential to undo the feudal power structure in the countryside. Peasant insurgency can be located in the depiction of the rural people's court in *The Sepoy in the Attic* (*Chilekothar Sepai*). The people's court promises justice, as Ali Baksh and his followers are able to punish the village heavyweights before the nationalists usurp the movement. Chengtu plays a key role in the rural agitation, as Khijir did during the revolt in Dhaka. The people's struggle against feudalism is intense and is filled with the promise of liberation. The trial ignites passion in the villagers like Karamali, Nobejuddin and Banka Sakidar.

That the trial ensures quick justice against feudalism and is aimed to address the corruption of Khaybar Gazi encourages people to gather in numbers to witness the trial. Accused by many to be the mastermind of robbery, Khaybar Gazi is now held responsible for his

past crimes, as people have joined collectively to deal with his reign of terror. The novel describes people's participation in the following sentences:

> People have come in large numbers. The size of the crowd makes one wonder whether there is a single man left in one of the households of the following villages: Getia, Talpota, Podumshohor, Chithulia on this side; Chandandoho, Dorgatola, Kornibari to the north, and Koritola, Dorogtola, Kamalpur, Golabari to the West. People have also arrived from the distant *chars*. People living in the newly created lands in the distant ends of the Jamuna do not come to this side very often. But today they are all there [However, most of them do not know about the oldest inhabitants of the Bairagi's Bhita] (238, trans. mine).

The promise of instant justice against Khaybar Gazi has gathered the landless peasants and the emigres of the new *chars*. This "spontaneity" of the people is reflective of the subaltern political consciousness theorized by Ranajit Guha (1983). In Guha's prognosis of peasant insurgency, we identify a distinction between colonial era insurgency and "the qualities of a subsequent phase of more intensified class conflict, widespread anti-imperialist struggle and generally a higher level of militancy among the masses," in South Asia (10-11). People's faith in justice at this juncture of political action seems to justify Guha's conceptualization of peasant politics.

More intriguing is the venue of the people's court "Bairagi's Bhita" or "Residence of the Bairagi," which the villagers believe is the residence of the "jinns." Focusing on the people's faith in the supernatural and Anwar's incredulity towards the political significance of their faith, "for these beliefs were located in the realm of 'unreason,' of 'passions,' of 'spontaneity,'" a clear disjunction emerges between the political ideas (Chatterjee, *Nationalist Thought* 142-143).

Anwar's bourgeois political values are therefore at odds with peasant politics of the rural milieu.

Rural politics demonstrates its own characteristics and captures the struggles that are local in nature. Situated within the orbit of national politics in Elias' novel, the actions of the rural peasants are also shaped by the larger movement in the nation, but the locality of their political expression is worth considering. Chatterjee's argument that the subaltern political expression was able to retain its unique characteristics is demonstrated in Chapter 39 of the novel.

The chapter depicts the trial in the people's court against Khaybar Gazi. That the decorum of elite politics has been assimilated by rural politics is demonstrated in the chapter. While the public demands a swift punishment to avenge Khaybar Gazi's crimes against the community, the representatives of bourgeois politics, Ali Baksh and Anwar, suggest a due trial.

While the local uprising against the rural "jotedars" was spontaneous in the beginning, order gave away to spontaneity, with the discourse of bourgeois politics becoming more influential. This influence is identified in the novel as disruptive to the insurgency, as it also paves the way for passive revolution. As expressive of the people's wishes, rural politics changes, when the nationalists usurp the struggle in the countryside.

We can recall the swift trials of Kader Mandal and Hossen Ali, who were accomplices of Khaybar Gazi. Their execution is delineated in Chapter 32: "'Oh, yes!' Ali Baksh suddenly recalls, 'Kader Mandal received the death sentence at the people's court held in the Sinduria Primary School premises. We took him to Dakat Marar Char in a cage. Hossen Ali was also given death sentence by that very court. We threw both of them in the fire we made in Hossen

Ali's farm" (201, trans. mine). The prompt execution of the verdict in this earlier instance of trial is suggestive of what Guha calls "spontaneity."

However, the successes of the court trials are hindered by the intrusion of urban politics. When the peasant insurgency begins to share space with national politics, fissures between the subaltern classes and the bourgeois begin to emerge, according to Partha Chatterjee in *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World* (1986). The rationality of bourgeois politics does not appeal to the masses of the countryside – they identify it as an excess. Yet, there is a confluence of the two.

In the novel, the young progressive politician Anwar's vision is at odds with the logic of subaltern politics. As his concepts are accommodated, there are delays in the trial, causing the people's court to abandon its precocity for which its failure becomes inevitable. It facilitates the escaping of Khaybar Gazi. Also, in the process, the people's court becomes divided as the performative is halted and the pedagogic is deployed to urbanize local spontaneity.

We are aware of Chatterjee's (1986) argument that national politics must interpret subaltern politics locally: "To turn the springs of localized and spontaneous resistance by the peasantry into the broad stream of the national struggle for political freedom was the task of the organized national movement. Yet the task could never be accomplished by acting according to the rational principles of political organization" (150). That "the springs of localized and spontaneous resistance by the peasantry" can be of benefit to "the organized national movement" also depended on who interpreted the rural political activities as too diffused lacking any organization.

It turns out that the progressives Anwar and Ali Baksh are interpreting the activities of Chengtu and his peasant accomplices in bourgeoisie terms causing delay in their action. As a

result, they fail to fully punish the rural land-grabber. At that juncture, nationalist politics disrupts the people's court, when a procession arrives at the scene of the trial. Before the procession's arrival, we can notice the difference of opinion among the trial executives: "Anwar whispers into Ali Baksh's ear: 'What would happen if he were to live another day? The government courts offer such clemency all the time'" (244, trans. mine). Anwar's argument is referring to the rationale of state bureaucracy, which is in contradiction with popular politics asking for a quick trial. This divisiveness delays the trial of Khaybar Ghazi, while we also notice the disruption of the court by the nationalists.

The crowd gathered to see the feudal lords being punished is caught up in the nationalist slogans that are aimed to bring down the military regime of Pakistan: "Agortola Sharajantra Mani Na Mani Na ('We do not accept the Agartala Conspiracy')," "Padma Meghna Jamuna – Tomar Amar Thikana ('Padma Meghna Jamuna –Our Collective Destiny')," "Jeler Tala Bhangbo –Sheikh Mujib Ke Anbo ('We will free Sheikh Mujib from the jail')" (238, trans. mine). These slogans weaken the momentum of the court, which comes to an abrupt end. Khaybar Gazi escapes and Chengtu is murdered.

The bourgeois alliance formed in the urban centers of East Pakistan overpowers the resistance movements in the remotest corners of the region. The readers realize Anwar is only a witness and to some extent an accomplice of the bourgeoisie that has made the people's court dysfunctional. There is evidence to the successful bourgeois takeover of the popular movement when the novel begins to describe a rally presided over by Anwar's maternal uncle. It took place in the very spot where the feudal lords were being punished a few days back.

**Insurgency and the Women's Experience in *The Sepoy in the Attic***

To understand the gender dynamics of the novel, we need to focus on the delineation of Jummon's mother's marginality in *The Sepoy in the Attic*. She is depicted as having to navigate the contrasting influences of Rahmatullah and Khijir to survive the patriarchal social norms stifling her at the juncture of the popular struggle in the nation. The novel's illustration of her pregnancy and eventual abortion is reflective of the effacement of her subjectivity what Spivak in "Can the Subaltern Speak?" has argued is mediated by "the ideological construction of gender [that] keeps the male dominant" (41). It also mirrors the trauma of the "birangonas" caught up between the crimes perpetrated against them in 1971 and the post-1971 nation in Akhtar's *The Search*.

Jummon's mother struggles in a very oppressive patriarchal structure as the tension between Rahmatullah and Khijir has a direct influence on her well-being. Rahmatullah refuses to acknowledge her maternity because she is carrying Khijir's child. Khijir's insurgency contradicts Rahmatullah's allegiance to the state. As their differences become irreconcilable, Rahmatullah's men try to dislodge Khijir on the pretext that his actions are acts of betrayal against the "mohajon" Rahmatullah.

Jummon's mother is also confronted by the possibility of eviction as she is now having a relation with Khijir. In Elias' illustration of her misery, her subaltern status becomes significant as she suffers because of poverty as well as because of her gender. As a working-class mother, she is caught up between her employer's wishes and the free-spiritedness of her lover Khijir. Again, it is a politically fraught moment, when Khijir's politics becomes an anathema for Rahmatullah, who attempts revenge by targeting Jummon's mother as well. It suggests that

"women's bodies" become "battlefields on which nationalist wars are fought and won or lost" (D'Costa 25).

In Chapter 24 presents an agitated Rahmatullah who is thinking of evicting Khijir: "He should be evicted from the slum. But for ethical reasons we will let Jumman's mother stay" (153). While the main concern is Khijir's eviction, the gathered men are also curious about Jummon's mother fate. While one of them wonders how she will live after Khijir's departure, Bajlu, a close ally of Rahmatullah declares, "What do you know? Jumman's mother has eloped with Khijir. She is Kamruddin's wife, and Kamruddin will take care of his wife" (153, trans. mine). They also discuss her son Jumman's fate during Khijir's absence to which Bajlu adds that Khijir is a born traitor who opposes his employer by shouting slogans against him, thus, he will never look after Jumman.

The issue of Khijir's eviction is hotly debated in the slum later in the evening. Khijir's presence in the meeting adds fuel to the debate as he protests his eviction saying that he has a wife and a son. A raucous begins when Bajlu's wife insinuates that Jumman's mother is Rahmatullah's mistress. Presenting the struggles between the members of the subaltern classes as a microcosm of the larger anti-Pakistan struggle, Elias depicts the society in the context of several sites of insurgency.

The contesting sides deciding Khijir's fate in the slum are presented as living precariously from the narrator's point-of-view: "In Rahmatullah's small colony the shrill cries of Bajlu's wife causes some dwellers to lose their sleep, while others keep on sleeping by turning the other side" (155, trans. mine). Depiction of Rahmatullah as a colonizer of the subaltern classes is significant, as it enables us to understand Jumman's mother's marginalization as more acute that the problem of her and Khijir's impending homelessness.

We get access to her interior monologues to trace dilemma regarding Rahmatullah. While she thinks that Khijir might be overreacting against Rahmatullah, Jumman's mother is overwhelmed by the possibility of dislocation: "Where would he live tomorrow night, where will he place his dislocated ego? Now we have a roof over the head though we sleep close to the soil but if we are evicted, we will lose it. Jumman's mother avoids pedantry. What do Khijir have to wage battle against powerful men?" (157, trans. mine). In her mind, Jumman's mother identify Khijir's actions as tendentious, since he disregards the power the "mohajon" wields over his tenants.

She remembers about her former husband, Kamruddin, was also overpowered by Rahmatullah: "Now mohajon Rahmatullah says there is no better carpenter than Kamruddin. Once he tricked him by masterminding Jumman mother's bond with Khijir. He is now wooed with the promise to get reunited with his former wife and son. Or, is a plan being hatched to remove Khijir forever by installing Kamruddin instead?" (157, trans. mine). Jumman's mother thought processes express the influence of Rahmatullah on these poor people.

We also notice her pragmatism in the way she tells us about Rahmatullah's sexual assaults on her. She thinks it is justified of Khijir to punish the old man's perversions ("If Khijir burned your mouth wouldn't that be a perfect justice against your lascivious senility"), but she is concerned if that would also cost her a shelter to live (159, trans. mine). Aware of Rahmatullah's anti-insurgent pro-government position, she wonders if the crowd will burn his house down: "They are lighting up fire everywhere, if they also burn down the mohajon's house. Will be public stop at only burning the house? Will not they drag the mohajon outside holding him by his hairs?" (158, trans. mine). Jummon's mother's concern for Rahmatullah is realistic when we realize she is now pregnant with Khijir's child.

Later, pressure mounts on her to abort the child. Jummon's mother's losing her unborn child is described in Chapter 45. The scene is described as if the dead Khijir had a role to play in the abortion: "In a state of terrible pain, Jummon's mother wards off her premonitions to realize it is Khijir who has provoked the child. Its bravado resembled that of Khijir" (272, trans. mine). The connection that is established between the deceased Khijir and the child's refusal to live is striking.

The subaltern woman's suffering culminating in the abortion is extraordinarily depicted as a moment when she saw the image of the deceased man she loved:

> She extended her right hand during the moment when everything became dark in front of her eyes –she felt the tall figure of Khijir is crushing to the ground after a bullet hits him. Did she extended her hand to get hold of Khijir? At one point she felt a blood soaked Khijir might have risen only to find shelter in her abdomen. Khijir's blood has rinsed her thighs, keens and feet. A fountain of dark red blood is spluttering out of her body –the whole room became dark in black and red color. Then everything became invisible (272, trans. mine).

The moment of abortion is depicted as a moment when Jumman's mother reconciles with Khijir's death. The painful moment of letting go of the child becomes indistinguishable from the realization that Khijir has died from bullet wounds. The blood Jumman's mother lost becomes one with Khijir's blood. Much as it is a reflection of her being caught up in a patriarchal system during the insurgency, Jumman's mother's resilience connects her to Khijir's performative participation in the 1969 movement.

The patriarchal structure is unwilling to accommodate her, as they did with "birangona" femininity and maternity but accepted them as miserable. The subaltern working-class woman

and the women violated sexually during the war undergo similar experiences: "Within the effaced itinerary of the subaltern subject, the track of sexual difference is doubly effaced" (41). Signified in the abortion of Jumman's mother's child is a precarious marginality. This treatment of her motherhood is one of effacement as she is caught between Rahmatullah's whims and Khijir's insurgency.

Later, she tries to guess if it was Bajlu's wife or Kamruddin who was instrumental in planning her abortion. Connecting Khijir and the death of his child Jumman's mother dreamt of giving birth to is illustrative of the novel's sensitivity to the doubly marginalized gendered subaltern woman caught up between patriarchy and the insurgency. Jumman's mother's plight anticipates the plight that will consume the women raped during the 1971 war, as is depicted in Shaheen Akhtar's *The Search*.

**The Local Contours of Gendered Nationalism and the Many Stories of the "Birangona" women in Shaheen Akhtar's *The Search* (*Taalash*, 2011)**

As Bangladesh emerged as a liberated country from the conflict between the Bengali majority in East Pakistan and the West Pakistani-dominated military forces of Pakistan, the burning issue of widespread gendered and sexual violence gradually came to the forefront. Women raped during the 1971 war became a national stigma for the largely conservative society, which has more or less attempted to put behind their suffering by silencing their voices, or by endorsing programs seeking to rehabilitate the individuals, many of whom were now the child-bearers of the very soldiers who violated them.

Sheikh Mujibur Rahman – the first prime minister of postcolonial Bangladesh - coined the term "birangana/birangona" (war heroine) to re-establish respectability according to the norms of patriarchal nationalism. According to Yasmin Saikia, "the effort was to re-create a

semblance of normality and family life for women who suffered sexual violence," but, on the contrary, "the outcome was counterproductive" (56). The state's intervention imposed a definition of war-time sexual violence, as it was the imperative of the new national community to cope with the stigma of violated mothers/ sisters/ daughters and wives during the early stages of the birth of the nation. however, it's target was the Pakistan army's utilization of sexual violence against the Hindu minority, as well as the Bengali Muslim women of ordinary background.

Evocative of national empathy, the term "birangona," as a form of redress against rape, redacted atrocities committed by the Bengali insurgents against non-Bengali women in 1971. accounts of rape expressed in languages such as Urdu were silenced, as they identified the *mukti bahini* (insurgents) orchestrating retaliatory rape against Urdu-speaking, non-Bengali Muslim women. Yasmin Saikia quips that "the war of 1971 is a well-told tale of [Bengali men's] *liberation* in Bangladesh," as "we hear about the sacrifices that men made during the war, their fighting abilities, strategies of guerilla warfare, and triumph despite the betrayal by rajakars, the Pakistani supporters living in East Pakistan" (55). Indeed, stories of surging Bengali nationalists saving the honor of the Bengali women they set out to protect abound.[68] Consequently, literatures, personal narratives and memorialization in Bangladesh reproduce a particular narrative of the "birangona" informed by a patriarchal discourse of the Bengali insurgency.

According to Nayanika Mookherjee (2015), Bangladesh's local feminist activism is also implicated in the cultural narratives offering a national cultural model suited to nationalism and localized gendered patriarchy. While activists seek justice for those women victimized war, they also act as stakeholders of the nation, their construction of women's identities raped during the

[68] The stories of triumphant men sacrificing their lives dominate the public and national imaginary, leaving little room for considering those women who had to endure terrible pains as a byproduct of a conflict involving armed men. In fact, some of the popular patriotic songs like "Shob Kota Janala Khule Dao Na" and "Amra Ekti Phul Ke Bachabo Bole Juddho Kori" are addressed to men who sacrificed their lives for the country.

war disregard the complicated "birangona" experiences. Mookherjee problematizes cultural narratives that coincide with the establishment's quest for a seamless narrative that connect experiences seeking to augment the hegemony of the nation. Mookherjee's approach to war-time rape during the Bangladesh War in 1971 is premised on the necessity to understand the overlapping of history, memory, fact, and fiction, as she posits it is impossible to reach to an empirical understanding of violence against women captured by the Pakistan army. Simultaneously, Mookherjee's claims puncture the activists' approach to war-time sexual violence as one "birangona" story, which was then presented as a fact crucial to stage "a public trial of war crimes." My analysis of Akhtar's *The Search* (2004) will contextualize her assessment of the victims of sexual violence during the war.

I will illuminate the many stories of the war-heroines in *The Search* (2004) as a critique of the nation's handling of violence against women. The intertwined stories of the war-heroines in the novel are accounts of the plurality of suffering endured by the sexually violated women in the aftermath of the conflict, as they were betrayed by both the family and the nation. For example, the several instances of Mariam's sufferings and her standing up to patriarchy become navigable if a sense of "imagination" is engaged to deal with the facts and fictions generated through the findings of Mukti. If she had set out to establish facts, Mukti's construction of an authentic "birangona" exposes the limitations of research with gaps and slippages overdetermining her project. In the process, story-telling ("a story that she herself will cook up") serves the role of recollection of sexual violence during the war in 1971, instead of factual evidentiary proofs as a form of witnessing.

**Mookherjee's *Spectral* Bodies**

Nayanika Mookherjee (2015) foregrounds the inconsistencies of the nationally produced narrative of the gendered violence that took place in 1971. She argues that the political appropriation of the women who were raped as well as became subjected to morbid forms of violence including enslavement has further contributed to their dehumanization. Bengali nationalist political and cultural forces have been invested in the production of the "birangona" narrative as they implicate the Islamists of war crimes during the war. The cultural activists claim that justice is prolonged since the alleged perpetrators of sex crimes have remained politically relevant in post-1971 Bangladesh's political scene. Thereby, they have successfully foiled attempts to redress sex crimes against women who suffered various atrocities of a sexual nature during 1971.

The accounts of rape and victimization of women during the 1971 war drew widespread global attention. The Pakistani army men were the major contributor of these crimes inflicting sexual violence against Bengali women of all backgrounds. Post-independence government of Bangladesh struggled to deal with the problem, as sexual violence became a matter of public shame in a deeply conservative society. Moreover, the state tackled the problem by focusing on the victimhood of women. Thus, "their sexuality" was made the primary site of intervention to facilitate "state-sponsored welfare programmes by social workers, medical personnel, government officials, religious groups, and others –but not by the women themselves" (D'Costa 14). The disregarding of women who were raped during the war and the subsequent national management of their plight have piqued the interest of the scholars, who also draw from the seminar works interrogating the crucible of women raped during the 1947 Partition.[69]

[69] Nayanika Mookherjee (2015), similar to her predecessors Bina D'Costa (2007) and Yasmin Saikia (2011), is drawn to the Bangladeshi context with a quest to illuminate the various aspects of sexual violence committed during

These scholars are critical of state-policies while they draw from the specific "birangona" experiences to challenge the violence against women that occurred in 1971. Their work posit that the heterogeneous locations of gendered violence in 1971 were shaped by the societal dynamics of post-1971 Bangladesh, and, therefore, "birangona" narratives were censored with the dictates of patriarchal nationalism silencing their agency. As I argue in this chapter, the many "birangona" stories in Shaheen Akhtar's *The Search* (2004) contain slippages that disrupt the fact-building approach to gendered violence undertaken to justify the political narrative of bringing the war-criminals to justice, as much as they problematize the earlier post-independence state imposition to provide a quick fix to the war-time sexual violence. The nation's subjection of the "birangonas" to a narrowly conceived "instituted truth obscures the history that produces the conditions for making victims and perpetrators," since the very framework that perpetuates the many forms of binaries is not under scrutiny (Saikia 7).

Binary formulations set the parameters of established truth, as nationalist historiographies of India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh function by taking a panoptical approach to the divergent versions of history, argues Yasmin Saikia (2011). This official history-telling regime tends to favor an authoritative, unquestioned binary orientation of historiography:

> And this instituted truth and its resultant history cannot explain how victims and perpetrators experience the violence and deal with their memories. Thus, the engineered history can only bear witness to a narrow definition of truth, and, in turn, it defines the boundaries of what is permissible, what can be spoken and consumed by an audience coached to forget the rest (7).

1971, as they extend the research works of Kamla Bhasin and Ritu Menon (1998), Urvashi Bhutalia (2000) and Veena Das (2007) on gendered violence in 1947.

Nationally sanctioned narratives operate by drawing distinction between the "self" and the "other" that results in the formation of divisive narrative. Instead of probing into the interstitial spaces of sexual violence, gory narratives of Pakistani soldiers and their collaborators victimizing the Bengali women are highlighted. The linear presentation of stories censors the heterogeneous sites of gendered violence in 1971, and resists questions such as "can we write a people's history of the subcontinent using the language of humanity," – an inquiry that could impact present day relation between Bangladesh and Pakistan (Saikia 22).

Saikia calls for "a different self and other relationship" that is premised on humanity – a narrative of humanism is important to "initiate multiple tellings of 1971" (5). A perspective founded on humanity can recuperate women's agency contained in the multiplicities of women's experience of 1971 partially lost in the tumult of violence.[70] For Saikia, the multiple stories can potentially help us to create an understanding environment that would overcome the discourses of the nation-states: "Telling [the many] personal stories serves as a meaning-constructing activity and an affirmation by women toward reclaiming their humanity" (26). Seeking out in-between areas that refocus on the edifying instances such as disregard for authority's order to inflict violence on women can offer spaces for mutual recognition.

Therefore, the complicated, multi-layered stories of the survivors of gendered atrocities that transpired in 1971 are significant to oppose nationalist narratives: "This space enables a renewed interrogation aimed at understanding the relationship between men and women –Indian, Pakistani, and Bangladeshi, Hindu and Muslim –and facilitates multiple narratives of people

[70] Saikia, highlighting the importance of humanism that has its roots in the "Sufi" and "Bhakti" traditions in South Asia, invokes Jalaluddin Rumi and Lalon Fakir to argue that the violence perpetuated against the women should be considered productive locations to initiate a transformation that defies nationalist narratives, as "it is a site for engaging and developing humane concerns while accepting the tensions between the groups and the subsequent dialogical process" (25).

capable of altering the received narratives of history in South Asia" (25). Situated in the fault lines of national narratives, these "contested narrations" narrate the "resilience" of the women traumatized by the events of 1971.

According to Saikia, "Bangladeshi women's narratives are personal stories that are also political and this makes women's narratives inherently valuable," since they embody "resilience" against the warring men, who can claim a quick victory by tarnishing what the patriarchal nationalist discourse defines as the sacrosanct image of the women (26). "Women's lived experiences of violence," therefore "challenge us to engage and work through the losses they suffered and their resilience in making meaning beyond it," as they are voices against injustice (26). Interrogating the outbreak of societal retribution against women during national struggles is not much of a theatrical gesture, as it is the cost of ethical and political choices made to produce an understanding of the 1971 war.

Following Saikia, Mookherjee in *The Spectral Wound: Sexual Violence, Public Memories, and the Bangladesh War of 1971* (2015) also humanizes the "birangonas." Unlike Saikia, she refrains from explicitly using the term "humanize" or "humanity." Instead, she takes cognizance of the critical task that would restore the agency of the "biragonas" – and, thereby, offer a more nuanced reading of the gender politics of sexual violence – against patriarchal nationalism. In such a reading "the birangona [is] not [presented] as the haunted spectar that would feed the imaginary of the nation but as one who has to make her life in the world in a mode of ordinary realism" (xiv). Thus, she proposes an exploratory approach instead of an interventionist one.

Mookherjee, similar to Saikia, identifies nationalism's impedimental role, as it seeks to understand the women through past instances of victimization. The effect of such reified

understanding is that it constructs a uniform discourse of the "birangona." It is then appropriated to gain advantage in Bangladesh's local politics, as in the case of the state's intervention in the social activism that seeks to punish the "collaborators" of the Pakistan army.

In the context of Bangladesh's national politics, the image of the "birangona" is then connected to the image of the "razakar." Rooted in the local contestation between Bangladesh's two nationalisms, the "razakar"/ "birangona" dichotomy shapes the dynamic of competition between religious nationalism and secular nationalism: "The razakar and the birangona are iconic figures in the public memory of 1971: male and female, perpetrator and survivor, both public and both secret, both being memories of that past which are erupting and shaping the present" (Mookherjee 9). Both the "razakar" and the "birangona" are part of a double-bind critical to the domestic political scene in Bangladesh. Contemporary invocation of the sexually violated women as victims and the Islamist male perpetrators as aggressive, anti-Bangladesh elements is inscribed in the popular conceptualization of 1971.

Mookherjee argues that the dichotomy between the "birangona" and the "razakar," uniformly conceptualized in local politics, is repeated in the Bangladeshi visual and literary representations. The "birongona" is characterized as a silent sufferer, a common trope of representation of gendered violence in these cultural texts. Mookherjee analyzes the photographs of Roshid Talukdar and Naibuddin Ahmed and the vulgarization of the women raped during the war in popular films to argue that in "the performative domain of the literary and visual representations," a trend exists to create a uniformity of representation in which "the birangona can only be present through the ambiguity of her absence, by being made to exit from the narrative" (178). The cultural projects serve the agenda of the Bangladeshi nation-state: "Literary and visual representations of the history of rape 'combed' the birangona and helped

configure the new Bangladeshi nation-state" (226). Thus, these cultural projects accentuate a discourse of unending suffering for political gains, as they utilizes "the personal 'trauma' of the birangonas into narratives of the nation and international human rights" (252).

Mookherjee points out, the cultural project of the Bengali nationalists foregrounded "the birangona as wounded" to facilitate the beginning of war crimes trial; consequently, "they erased the complex experiences of these women and the consequences of wartime rape" (252). Both the political and cultural projects thus exhaust any attempt to differentiate between the "birangonas" with agential voices and those who were driven to marginalization, prompted by the political realism of new-born Bangladesh.[71]

Mookherjee asks us to do a careful reading of the relation between sexual violence and war: "A nuanced account of women's experience of sexual violence decenters the idea of wound –both physical and social –as evidence and as a site of authenticity of the raped woman. This argument has further implications for comprehending the subjectivity of the raped woman, and for not figuring her as a site of alterity or 'abnormality'" (252). In Bangladesh, the quotidian existence of the "birangona" women is implicated in the liberal project of the nation, as much as the "birangona" conceptualization is a failure of cultural and visual texts obsessed with "the idea of wound," and, therefore, intertwined with the national imperative to utilize "birangonas" as "evidence" and "as a site of authenticity of the raped woman."

Mookherjee, therefore, proposes a negotiated reading of the gendered and sexualized bodies to cogently analyze sexual violence. Her injunction to look beyond the "wound" and to

[71] In Mookherjee's reading, the "literary and visual representations" as a form of cultural project has framed gendered violence both in terms of presence and absence: "They do this by citing her various assumed physical attributes in the 1970s and lack of social attributes in the 1990s that identify her as being raped. So they bring the birangona into presence in her absence" (178). In both instances the "birangonas" were subjected to cultural and political negotiations, with the evocation of their bodies bearing unwanted children in the immediate post-war context and the establishing of their status as being raped to strengthen the case for war crimes tribunal.

remain sensitive to the raped women's framing, as we analyze cultural and visual texts to tease out the complex positionality of the "birangona" in opposition to the nationalist discourse. This theoretical insight will inform my reading of Akhtar's novel *The Search* (2004), as I demonstrate that the many stories of the women delegitimize hegemonic narratives of the war, as the researcher Mukti gains a complicated perspective of sexual violence. Her empirical goals (collecting stories and documenting them for a possible trial) remain elusive thereafter.

**The Intertwined Stories of the "Birangonas" and the Marginalized "Others"**

Mukti's search for the "birangona" stories has a journalistic approach to it. Aimed to expedite the public trial of war criminals, Mukti seeks to create a unified narrative, when she begins her attempt to compile the narratives of the raped women: "In the research project that Mukti and her peers had undertaken, there was a proposal for a possible trial of war crimes" (117). This national inquiry surmised that the project undertaken by Mukti and others has empirical value that is crucial to try the war criminals.

The novel's primary interlocutor Mukti was born in 1971, when Mariam and others suffered atrocities like rape, having been caught up in the war-time violence. Mariam's misfortunes "provokes Mukti's curiosity," who in her pursuit of justice against war-criminals begins to investigate further (32). Perhaps, Mukti's inquisitiveness stems from a sense of camaraderie towards the Bengali girl from an ordinary family, whose identity underwent sea-change, having been sexually violated, and, thereafter, came to be identified with "the new tag of Birangana, the courageous one" (32). She becomes involved in the project because she wants to understand the traumatic experiences of women in 1971: "Twenty eight years –more than a quarter of a century. Mukti is also twenty-eight years old" (32). The enthusiast in Mukti believes

"twenty eight years – more than a quarter of a century" distance from the actual event will be useful to gather empirical evidence about sexual violence. Later, she gets a reality check.

While she attempts to create a coherent narrative of the "birangona" plight, the task becomes impossible: "Two years is a long time –especially for a case study. There was no written evidence or document certifying that Mariam was a Birangana" (346). She fails to find the facts because "no written evidence or document" can be found. Any attempt to establish a factual narrative of the "birangona" becomes a slippery slope. Moreover, Bangladesh's post-1971 political infighting discredited the "birangona" narratives that did not fit the perspective of the ruling party; therefore, evidences were compromised based on what could be an inconvenient truth: "In a country where the struggle for power is the primary aim, no great project can move in a smooth, straightforward fashion" (346). Periodic political interventions impinge on Mukti's project, which struggles to move forward. She discovers that the nation's official narrative imposes uniformity on the sexually violated women, as it defines them by their past "wound," thus, marginalizes the stories of their resilience.

Despite being challenged, Mukti "combs" – to use Nayanika Mookherjee's terminology – the factual and fictional fragments to trace an accumulative narrative of these sexually violated women's ability to withstand hostile stereotyping. Thus, Mariam's story becomes part of a non-linear commentary of survival uniting many suffering-voices narrating their plight in the prison camps of the Pakistan army, as well as their experiencing abuses in the hostile socio-political climate of the newborn country Bangladesh.

Mukti's painstaking exploration of Mariam's accounts of the war contains the manifold experiences of Anuradha Sarkar, Shymali Rahman, Bindubala, Shobha Rani as well as the landless peasant Aminul, the freedom fighters including Mariam's own brother Montu and

Majibar, and Rameez Sheikh. In fact, in her version we can see the emergence of intertwined complex stories that reveals to us the problem of viewing the "biragonas" as "wounded," which according to Nayanika Mookherjee denies them subjectivity.

For example, Mukti comes to know about the much-revered Majibar and his death in 1971, when she visits Madhyamgram. The villagers consider him "a ferishta" (100) but are unhappy that he has not been recognized yet. They remember Majibar as a spirit, whose ethereality has escaped national attention: "They demand a stone sculpture that is leaping in the air with raised arms and with no stakes in the soil of Bangla" (100). Moreover, insignificant national memorials replete with misrepresentations: "The residents of Madhyagram complain to Mukti twenty-nine years after the war that the liberation statues are not being crafted properly in the city" (100). While the freedom fighters are misrepresented, the memories of the "mukti bahini" fighters are also betrayed, as in the instance of the desperation of "an octogenarian woman" who is "the mother of a martyr from the village." Mukti finds a living memory of a freedom fighter in the mother's quest for her son's recognition: "She has not given up her son's claims on the Bangla soil" (100-101). Mariam's story is linked to these unsung freedom fighters, as much as it is symbolic of the other "biragonas" too, who Mukti finds while she searches for Mariam.

Mukti's investigating the post-war lives of war-time rape victims leads her to Mariam's erstwhile acquaintances. As she begins to acquire some of their stories, Mukti learns that they became scattered around the country after 1971, which made it difficult for her to find them and trace their stories. While some never revealed themselves, Mukti would gradually locate some of them through various sources including rehabilitation offices, ordinary villagers, and brothels.

Most of these stories are then filtered through Mariam's life-story, central to the narratives of gendered violence depicted in the novel. In Mukti's imagination, a coherent reception of the news of Bangladesh's independence might have triggered a sense of joy amongst many with vested interests, but for Mariam it was a moment that could only capture her suffering:

> The laughter and tears, the reunions of the new country, did not seem to touch her. The old photographs of a martyr's family exhausted her. The stories of eagerness and dedication on the part of foreign volunteers, she bundled up like trash and threw under her bed. All this din and excitement over a pile of debris and destruction was not for her, she wanted no part in it (110).

Mariam's apathy towards "the laughter and tears, the reunions of the new country" can be interpreted as her reacting to the news of her missing brother in February 1972. In Mukti's reading, her reaction is also a "birangona" account, an addendum to more stories of becoming humiliated as a woman captured by the men of the opposition forces. Her becoming morose despite the ending of the war is connected to Anuradha Sarkar's story, "who used to crouch behind the wall of the torture chamber and eavesdrop," as a sex slave languishing in an army bunker even after the war had ended (113).

At this point, the narrative draws our attention to a fragmented conversation between Mariam and Anuradha that is more of an intricate rendition of the horrific details of the Pakistani torture camps. It implicates these camps as encouraging many forms of violence including sexual violence during 1971, including one event in some detail: "The day the youngest among them was shot by the military just outside the door, Anuradha beckoned to Mariam from the edge of

the wall" (114). Narrated as if they are "the invisible pages of [Anuradha's] dairy without a pen," this conversation delineates several instances of violence against women (114).

Often, East Pakistan's minority Hindus were singled out by the Pakistan army and their local collaborators, as they were alleged to be the instigators of the conflict. Rural Hindu women who lived through their captivity during the war months endured torture so much so that the stories of their plight also capture the trauma suffered by women held captive in the same spaces as them. Therefore, the narrative's articulation of Pakistan army's brutality during their mistreatment of Shobha Rani ("Shobha Rani was dragged from her hiding place and raped by two soldiers") becomes an extended correspondence regarding the army's unsparing violence targeting an under-aged Bengali girl: "The happy, smiling girl named Jaba died on the spot after a gang rape. She breathed her last even as the last soldier was still mounted on her" (114-115; 115). These livid stories of horror and torture become more powerful than the investigative approach underlying Mukti's initial thoughts of collecting "birangona" stories for the purposes of activism.

Mukti realizes the importance of jettisoning the purposeful activist's approach to better understand the forms of violence revealed by the livid narratives of the "biragona": "Perhaps, after the war, some investigators will search these rooms. But looking at the shreds of lungis and vests or the remains of bones, they will not be able to make out whether men or women were confined here. At that time, Anuradha pulled her tangled hair to her face and predicted, 'This hair will bear testimony in the future'" (116). While initially convinced that she could locate uniformity in these accounts of violence, as was demanded by a dominant construction of "the birangona image for the nation," through her tracing the story of Mariam and others she realizes "the spectral threat of the eroticized, unstable, dangerous, transgressed war heroine remained,

and remains" (Mookherjea 227). Mukti's vision of the "birangona" becomes less overgeneralized after she gleans accounts, containing layers of voices, from their scattered life-stories in *The Search* (2004).

These many stories have an "inchoate" form, according to Yasmin Saikia (2011): "The memories of violence are inchoate; there is nothing coherent about the violence that has left survivors asking how to tell the experiences" (8). The novel's enunciation of the "birangana" experiences identify different forms of violence including war-time rape and the gendered national construction as a collective attack on the female bodies. Mariam along with the women endured post-war neglect because they were "considered a 'weakness' in the structure of nationalism," and, thus, prone to patriarchal exploitations (D'Costa 25).

As an "aesthetic genre," *The Search* (2004) is implicated in the narrativization of gendered moments of the war, with stories of violence and betrayal presenting intertwined "birangonas" narratives (Mookherjee 227). Mukti's intervention is also a reconsideration of and a departure from the preconceived concepts of "family line" and "chastity" – valued in patriarchal society – as she links the women's plight to their feminine biological identity:

> The real cause of her misfortune are [sic] her reproductive organs –needed for continuing the family line and hence the need for chastity –which were reserved for the legalised use of single male. These became unprotected the year of the war. The enemy's phallus entered them; his sperm moved towards the ovary. The foetuses began to mature rapidly (63).

In contradiction to the nation's representation of the sexually violated women as wounded, Mukti presents the reality of the war as precipitating the traditionally oppressive condition for women. The "reproductive organs" that society understood as the reservoir of patriarchal lineage became

exposed to the sexualized excesses of the militaristic aggression in 1971. When they became pregnant with children fathered by the "other" side, their quotidian status as individuals with child-bearing potentials to sustain the heteropatriarchy ceased to exist. To establish the agenda of the nation, the authority concerned with male lineage decided to intervene.

A key articulation of the nation's intervention was the state ordained abortive measures. Women therefore were subjected to the interventionist agenda of patriarchal nationalism that seized the lives of the "birangona": "Even after special orders were given for an abortion, the chastity of the female body could not be restored" (63-64). The order to abort the fetuses that threatened "the chastity of the female body" thus resulted into the social othering of the women. Moreover, eliminating the war-babies did not overturn the collective national perception of the "birangona" as "a threatening figure because of her transgressed sexuality" (Mookherjee 25). Paradoxically, the sexually exploited women became prone to new forms of exploitation in the new-born country, while the Bangladesh nation attempted to restore their honor in the society by rebranding their femininity.

Thus, *The Search* (2004) locates Mariam's suffering within the discursive formation of gendered patriarchy regulated by nationalism. Since the link between nationalism and the patriarchal solutions adopted to address war-time sexual violence is identified in the novel as a hindrance to ensure justice the "birangona" women deserve, it is necessary to further establish the centrality of the anti-nationalist tone of Akhtar's novel as a connecting point between critical understanding of the 1971 war and the processes that must be followed to offer support to the "birangona" women.

**Nationalism and Patriarchy in *The Search***

Akhar's *The Search* (2004) is critical of the nation and its one-dimensional rendition of what are often complex circumstances under which the women who were raped in 1971 negotiated their existence. The novel can also be read as a response to Nayanika Mookherjee's claim that Bangladeshi cultural forms have "sedimented and crystallized an image of the birangona" for domestic political gains (Mookherjee 227). Indeed, an aggressive patriarchal nationalism in post-colonial Bangladesh has contributed to the formulation of a more uniform image of the "birangona."

The nation's fixation with the image of the raped women was shaped by the turbulent early years of Bangladesh's independence. The novel's omniscient narrator posits that the nation at its incipience was oblivious of the "birangona" women:

> The women who were raped during the war of independence had no role in either the looting and extortion or the reconstruction of the new nation apart from their jobs. They did not respond to the home minister's call to citizens to 'come forward with a revolutionary mindset and put a stop to smuggling.' They played no role in the nationalization of factories and industries. They had nothing to do with either the constant setting of the jute storehouses on fire or with putting the fires out. They had neither killed, snatched, plundered nor had they resisted these acts. They took a back seat when the new Constitution was being framed and new laws enacted. They did not worry about the loopholes in the 'Collaborators Act 1972.' They listened quietly to Bangabandhu's announcement of general amnesty. They did not once condemn the cruelties perpetrated by the security forces. They did not participate in the movement of eradicating class enemies by the Sharbahara Party . . . They did not raise their voices when the

> Constitution was amended and the President was given the power to declare Emergency. They did not join the single party BAKSHAL either. Actually, they were engaged in a struggle themselves. They had a single agenda –the social rehabilitation of the Biranganas (239-240).

*The Search* (2004) describes the new nation as wounding itself with acts of self-destruction. Moreover, it has relegated the crisis of the raped women to insignificance. Men are often behind the drastic changes that are illustrative of greed and violence. They include "the looting and extortion or the reconstruction of the new nation," "the constant setting of the jute storehouses on fire or with putting the fires out," as well as the acts of terrorism and the countering of terrorist activities. Here a more dystopic picture of the nation emerges. Popular emancipation has been replaced by meaningless transformation, such as, formulaic political resistances ("the movement of eradicating class enemies by the Sharbahara party"), the arbitrary declaration of "amnesty" to many who were accused of war crimes, and the creation of "the single party BAKSHAL" against the popular democratic spirit of the war.

Apathy of the state prompts the "birangonas" to seize control of their own lives. For example, Mariam goes to Abed's office – her fiancé before the war – to request for a job. As described in the novel, Mariam's actions suggest her desperation in earning a livelihood: "Birangona connoted a helpless, oppressed woman, whom people despised under the cover of pity. How had she acquired such courage that she'd been able to come to her ex-lover not to plead for his love, but to demand a job?" (224) A sense of pragmatism dictates her post-war life, unlike her past when she led a secured life: "She had come on her own self-serving mission. But she wasn't like this before the war" (223). Mariam's identifying employment to emancipate herself is illustrative of the novel's upending the stereotype of the silently hurting birangona.

Deplorably, she had to depend on Abed's generosity, who with "his new found power" during those early years of Bangladesh's achieving nationhood, held the key to Mariam's rehabilitation (223).

That the ending of the war came as a blessing to ambitious Bengalis is addressed in the portrayal of Abed as a fortune-seeker. He married the daughter of the non-Bengali factory owner and has become the new owner himself after the war. He is also presented as an opportunist, who has a manufactured image of "a well-known Mukti Joddha" (224). Therefore, when Mariam begs him for a job, Abed is threatened by Mariam's presence: "He could shoot her. He could call the police and tell them that the woman was an extortionist, a Pakistani spy or a CIA agent, who had been paid to take the life of a well-known Mukti Joddha" (224). Here, the novel hints at Abed's ability to manipulate any situation. Particularly, interesting is his embodying the glorified title of "a freedom fighter," donned to placate the pedestal of Bengali nationalism. This manipulative stratagem highlights the unpleasantness of his character. While being insensitive to Mariam's struggles, "Abed packed her off soon with the promise of a job," instead of offering a solid employment opportunity (224).

In contradiction to Mariam's recollecting Abed's unpleasantness, Rameez Sheikh's humanity – to recall Saikia's concept "*Insaniyaat*" (humanity) – is etched in her memory. In the novel's illustration of the enduring bond between Rameez Sheikh and Mariam, a complicated depiction of the "razakar" and the "birangona" dynamic can be located. This problematization of the conventional understanding of the relationality in Bangladesh's literary and film texts is aligned with the narrative complexity of the novel, as it counteracts conventional nationalist portrayals of sexual violence.

In *The Search* (2004), Rameez Sheikh is depicted as an ambivalent character invoking both fear and kind-heartedness. If he has participated in violent acts, he has also been an influence in Mariam's life: "Beyond the abyss, Rameez Sheikh is an object of terror as he hangs upside down like a bat within his window. On this side of the abyss, he is a saviour, emerging like a ferishta, an angel, through the billowing smoke" (56-57). If Rameez Sheikh's image of "a saviour," "a ferishta," or "an angel" is defined by his kindness to Mariam, his terror-invoking attributes are linked to his being drawn to the competing nationalisms in East Pakistan.

With Bengali nationalism challenging Pakistan's two-nation theory, two distinct opponents emerged in the political landscape of East Pakistan. Thereby, "Rameez Sheikh becomes confused and disoriented between the slogans Pakistan Zindabad and Joi Bangla" (57). His failure to distinguish between "the slogans" of the opposing nationalisms coverts him into a "razakar" – an aide to the Dhaka-based Haji Shaheb – when the war breaks out. Rameez Sheikh takes up "collaboration" as a profession: "Like a fisherman throwing a net, Rameez Sheikh had had instructions for rounding up women and chicken from different neighbourhoods every day" (57). While he engages in crimes such as looting and oftentimes facilitates sexual violence, his displays a sympathetic attitude towards Mariam. If he had been indifferent to his actions as a collaborator, his sympathy for Mariam is noteworthy: "But he won't hand over Mary. Not even if the army people insist. He has saved the girl by burning chillies; now the rest of her life is in his hands" (58). From his sympathetic behavior, we could surmise that perhaps Rameez Sheikh fell in love with Mariam and vice versa.

Though eventually killed by the Pakistani army, Rameez Sheikh's influence on Mariam was long-lasting, it has been suggested in the novel. A "razakar" in the conventional sense of the term, Rameez Sheikh appeared to understand Mariam's desperation. Since "both of them were

prisoners then" he extended his tenderness by commiserating with her "birangona" experiences: "Mariam grieved for Rameez Sheikh many years after the war. This was when she realized that the men of liberated Bangladesh would use her body which had been used by the enemy in the very same way" (85). She shares the same warmth as his, remembering Rameez Sheikh long after he died, while simultaneously learning to disassociate him from the patriotic men who let her down. Mariam's admiration for Rameez Sheikh, therefore, is a powerful critique of nationalism. This mutual admiration shared by a "razakar" and a "birangona" exposes the inconsistency of national discourse. Now, we will shift our focus on the overlapping traits Mariam shared with other war-heroines.

**The Slippages in the "Birangona" Narratives**

The exploration presentation of the many "birangona" stories through Akhtar's *The Search* (2004) demonstrates the multifaceted aspects of sexual violence that occurred in 1971. This strategic approach complicates conventional representations of 1971 in the national discourse, as in the binary conceptualization of the "collaborator" ("razakar") and "freedom fighter" ("mukti bahini") double-bind. Therefore, Rameez Sheikh's recollection of his war experiences appears more significant to Mukti than her novice effort to collect empirical data. She realizes that her ongoing project has become reliant on collected anecdotes, memories, and fictive inventions, without which Mariam's story cannot be told. The open-ended stories oppose the nationalist discourse that have shaped our understanding of the concepts "birangona" and "razakar" in Bangladesh. As more stories begin to emerge, it becomes increasingly difficult to use them for a public trial. If Mukti had previously imagined the "birangona" narratives as coherent, she could not find such uniformity in the stories she came across. To facilitate "a public trial of war crimes," Mukti and her fellow researchers were searching for facts.

The factuality regarding the "birangona" women – long held sanctimonious in the nation's official narrative – now appeared to Mukti as conjectural to some extent. The forging of a complete trajectory of Mariam's life during and after the war therefore remains elusive:

> Mariam is going to vanish forever leaving the story behind also unfinished. And she, Mukti, to establish her credibility with her readers, has till the end remained true to reality –right from the start of her interviews which she conducted with care and patched together the statements and confessions of several people, even though occasionally she felt hopeless. But one day she will have to console herself by concocting a story of a long boat journey, a story that she herself will cook up (356).

This passage articulates Mukti's realization that her attempt to establish "credibility" by involving meticulous "interviews" and gathering "the statements and confessions of several people" might remain "unfinished." capturing "birangona" stories in an empirical manner is impossible because like Mariam's their tales were slipping away too. It becomes inevitable that she must create a story ("a story that she herself will cook up") that exists in the middle of reality and imagination, as the accounts of plight of the war heroines that the trial seekers want to highlight are muddied by other forms of objective stories including that of Mariam's romantic interlude with Ramiz Sheikh that resists easy compilation.

The slipping away of the mainstream "biragona" narratives is further strengthened by the complexity of their experiences in the post-war years. As the attitude of the nation became neglectful towards the women victims, some of them chose the path to various compromises: "The problem that the nation had failed to solve –the social rehabilitation of the Biranganas – they had now to bear its heavy responsibility on their shoulders" (241). These varied stories

could not have been captured from a more linear perspective, as one had to be vigilant of the inconsistencies that now began to shape the narratives too.

As a new political elite decided to erase history, "the Bangladeshi press did fall silent on the birangonas between 1973 and the 1990s, as did the government," *The Search* mentions (Mookherjee 7). This shift took place after Sheikh Mujibur Rahman was ousted from power and "an elderly social worker" narrates the changes in Bangladesh in the novel: "'With Bangabandhu's assassination, the rehabilitation centre was closed down. I heard they hurled everything out onto the streets. The women were thrown out as if a brothel was being shut down'" (301). The "birangonas" were declared unwanted, as a right-wing regime took control of Bangladesh that took advantage of society's conservative attitude towards sexuality. Dismissing the rightful redresses of the raped women contributed to their slipping away from the public sphere.[72]

In fact, new forms of violence were added in their life-saga: "Those who had fallen into the clutches of traffickers and had gone abroad were lost forever. Some had committed suicide. There were those who had voluntarily emigrated and settled abroad, for nobody cared about these kinds of things in those lands" (302). The escape from the imposition of the state leads to more dangerous territories including "the clutches of traffickers" and worst still "suicide." Mukti comes to understand the sensitivity of the political change for the women; for many "it was an extension of the concentration camp of 1971" (248). In fact, the luckier ones "voluntarily emigrated" with the hope of escaping the local political change.

[72] Nayanika Mookherjea has also pointed out the political transformation of the country had also affected the "birangona" narrative. She has argued, "It is important to note that the Bangladeshi press did fall silent on the birangonas between 1973 and the 1990s, as did the government" (7).

The research Mukti had set out to conduct earlier to demand justice in connection to sexual violence in 1971 has found a different articulation as the novel has progressed. We find supplements, often a mix of facts and fictions, keeps redefining the "birangona" women's identity. However, the various impositions of the nation, be it the progressive or the orthodox ones, impinge on those who suffered war-time sexual violence. The narrow definition of their experience as a form of wound creates a form of stasis that misrecognizes the instances of overcoming stigma. *The Search* engages with the story of Mariam to inform her multiplicity as she is introduced to the readers by associating her with other "birangona" women as well as their experiences.

The associations create a fictive universe that is able to comport the birangona experience from a nation-centric narrative to a multi-layered perspective, including the delineation of their existence as incorporeal: "Meanwhile, the unmanned boat skims towards Anuradha. When Mariam catches hold of the outstretched ice-cold hand as it hangs in nothingness, Anuradha climbs onto the deck of the boat. Even then, they do not let go of each other's hands" (359). Here, Mariam's suicide might have been a suggestion but the impact of the description is such that becomes an enactment of after-worldly reunion. The lost camaraderie between Anuradha and Mariam is rediscovered after "Mariam sheds the sombre mien of a corpse and now looks quite cheerful" (359). *The Search* is able to deconstruct Bangladesh's nation obsession with the "birangona" by making them robust travelers between the world of reality and the fictive netherworld.

**Conclusion**

My reading of Akhteruzzaman Elias' *The Sepoy in the Attic* (1987) and Shaheen Akhtar's *The Search* (2004) broadly illuminates two distinct historical moments central to understanding

East Pakistan's transition to Bangladesh. They are the late 1960s East Pakistan undergoing significant political transformation leading up to the war, and the 1971 war itself when gendered atrocities including sexual violence occurred on a large scale. Elias' fictionalization of the 1969 Mass Movement against Ayub Khan's military rule registers both the urban and the rural sites of insurgency. My conceptualization of the two sites of anti-authoritarian struggle is founded on the notion of "passive revolution," as used by Partha Chatterjee. I track the growing influence of Bengali nationalism on both sites of the insurgency, with its middle-class proponents deploying the pedagogic to usurp the popular energy of the anti-Pakistan movement. With the nationalists gaining advantage over the urban proletariat and rural peasants, they also impose their patriarchal presence.

I analyze this imposition by exploring the novel's depiction of Jummon's mother's maternity and her subsequent experience of abortion after Khijir's death. With patriarchal Bengali nationalism's overriding the insurgency, we witness that Khijir's insurgency has tragically ended, while Jumman's mother's hope for new motherhood also ends with the abortion of her child fathered by Khijir. I have explored the portrayal of gendered violence in Shaheen Akhtar's novel by following the novel's elucidation of the many birangona stories. I argue their narratives problematize the national understanding of war-time rape reliant on imposing linearity on the fragmented stories of "birangona" life during and after the war. *The Search* resists easy categorization of war-time crimes by foregrounding marginal voices encapsulated in the life story of the war-heroines of 1971. The experiences of women, who withstood morbid patriarchal oppression and sexual violence, offer a more complicated perspective of the 1971 war. They implicate the male warriors of both the warring sides as

perpetrators of sex crime, thereby, exposing the fault-lines between the neat distinction often drawn between “Bengali heroism” and “Pakistani villainy.”

# Chapter 4: "Us" Beside "Them," Not "Us" Versus "Them": Cosmopolitan Imagination and Familial Reckoning of 1971 in Zia Haider Rahman's *In the Light of What We Know* (2014) and Kamila Shamsie's *Kartography* (2002)

## Introduction

After the release of Rubaiyat Hossain's film *Meherjaan* (2011) in Bangladeshi film theaters, the work provoked vitriolic reactions from the nationalized cinema viewers. They were opposed to the film's plot depicting romance between a young Bengali girl and a Baloch deserter belonging to the Pakistan army in the backdrop of 1971. Usually referred to another India-Pakistan war in South Asia, the conflict in 1971 ended with the birth of Bangladesh on the 16th of December in the same year. The 9 months' war that led to the cessation of East Pakistan and the emergence of Bangladesh significantly informs Bangladesh's nationalist discourse.

Bangladesh's national historiography relies on a neat "us" versus "them" narrative to define the 1971 war – during which the Pakistani army, it is conjectured, had killed millions – to highlight what it calls the atrocities committed by the enemy forces. Any narrative aberration is viewed with hostility since "the war has been ensconced in a nationalist narrative that essentially conflates the history of the liberation war with the history of Bengali nationalism" (Guhathakurta and van Schendel 221). The cross-cultural courtship between a Bengali woman and a Pakistani man in Hossain's film offended the public imagination of the war in Bangladesh, which is a sanctified and self-glorified version of history allowing little space for narratives that are either fuzzy or not glorifying the Bengali struggle.[73]

If this one-dimensional rendering of history is problematic and is impinging on the narratives seeking to expand the scope of critical and imaginative inquiry of the conflict in 1971,

[73] Elora Halim Chowdhury (2015) and Nayanika Mookherjee (2011) have provided a detailed discussion of the contours of sexual politics, gender, and nationalism to situate the war and its legacy in the context of present-day Bangladesh.

there is a fundamental contradiction in the quotidian interpretations of 1971 in Bangladesh and Pakistan. There exists two opposing versions of the outcome of the struggle between the Bengalis and the West Pakistani ruling elite, according to the joint editorial of the collection *Fault Lines: Stories of 1971* (2008) by the Bangladeshi academic Niaz Zaman and the Pakistani scholar Asif Farrukhi: "1971 was victory, was liberation, was the creation of a new nation. For Asif, as a Pakistani, 1971 was a double loss" (x). Divergent meanings of the fall-out of the 1971 war exist in the two nations – often, they are linear narratives of 1971 impinging on the literary cultures of the two countries.

Bangladeshi literary vernaculars usually invoke the mainstream discourse when they depict a Pakistani national and imagine their activities in 1971. In these representations, as in Bangladesh's national consciousness, a Pakistani is an oppressor, existing as the "other" within the parameters of a series of binaries. They are presented as either enablers of their local non-Bengali and Bengali collaborators fighting the freedom fighters – the sanctioned national heroes, or, as a lurid and sexually deviant Punjabi officer oppressing the helpless Bengali girl/woman. In some depictions, the Pakistani soldier is on a murdering frenzy, while in others they are an ally of the vindictive Muslim preacher out to grab the land of the fleeing Hindu refugee. These affective narratives are therefore negative characterizations of a Pakistani national, who is determined to annihilate the ever-suffering collective of ethnic Bengalis. If one-dimensional presentations of the Pakistani dominate Bangladesh's cultural and literary landscape, contemporary literary and visual narratives have tended to present a more complicated story of the war and a Pakistani figure's imbrication in the event.

In comparison to Bangla literature, Pakistani literary culture is less effusive about 1971. Inattention meted out to the war is the result of "a general amnesia about what had actually

happened," since there has been a national attempt to silence discourses on the war, because the fact that "the West Pakistani army had committed systematic atrocities against the local population" has been established (Vitolo 38). In fact, 1971 is framed in Pakistan as a national loss. The secession of the entity "East Pakistan" is nationally signposted as "*sakoot e Dhaka*" (Fall of Dhaka), to emphasize the surrendering of the Pakistan army to the joint allies of the Indian army and the Bengali insurgents. Since the historical moment is treated as another India versus Pakistan war, the violent military clampdown on its own people is not given due significance (*Fault Lines* 2008). The national sentiment of loss meant Pakistani vernacular language literatures have only sparsely engaged with 1971.

According to Muneeza Shamsie, a Pakistani literary critic and writer of note, "Pakistan's literary response to 1971 was also very limited for years" because the military excesses in the eastern wing were largely forgotten (23). The event was nationally branded as "defeat by the Indian army and the loss of half of a country came as a shock to most West Pakistanis, thanks to a censored press and a policy of disinformation," therefore few ventured to expose what had actually happened (23).[74] The presence of divergent narratives on the 1971 war in Bangladesh and Pakistan meant literary responses existed in contradistinction. If the nationalized Bangladeshi literary and cultural representations accentuate the binary between the oppressed Bengali and the West Pakistani oppressor, the 1971 war in the Pakistani literary depictions is sparse due to the culture of silence.

Characterized by animosities rooted in the history of conflictual nation-state formations in South Asia, originating in the 1947 Partition, and then expressed through the 1971 war, it is important to question the nationalized viewpoints of East Pakistan-West Pakistan conflict in

[74] Importantly, literatures like Tariq Rahman's story 'Bingo' existed, which detailed Pakistan army's atrocities including their perpetuation of rape against the Bengali women (23).

Bangladesh and Pakistan. Interrogating the narrative of nationality can initiate a meaningful inter-nation dialogue and create a reckoning with the past, quips Yasmin Saikia, the author of *Women, War, and the Making of Bangladesh: Remembering 1971* (2011):

> The tendency of national histories in Bangladesh, India, and Pakistan is to partition the memories of 1971, allowing for blame to be relegated to the Other; nearly four decades later the binary memories of "us" as good versus the Other as evil produces simplistic narratives without addressing the complexities of the conditions and circumstances that produced horrific outcomes in the war and the impact of violence and terror on people's lives (Saikia 4)

If 1971 continues to be defined by the monolithic discourse of the national governments of South Asia with propagandizing motives, "the complexities of the conditions and circumstances that produced horrific outcomes in the war and the impact of violence and terror on people's lives" will be rendered ineffectual. Narratives "allowing for blame to be relegated on the Other" have serious consequences for those peoples significantly impacted by the war.

In the recently flourished Bangladeshi and Pakistani Anglophone literatures, one-sided narratives of 1971 are robustly opposed. By breaking away from the orthodox narrativization of the war, these globally circulating literary works reimagine 1971. I consider in this essay two such novels that are skeptical of the exclusivist nationalist discourses; the novels I analyze are Zia Haider Rahman's *In the Light of What We Know* (2014) and Kamila Shamsie's *Kartography* (2000).

**The Cosmopolitan and the Nation: Representation of 1971 in Contemporary Pakistani and Bangladeshi Anglophone Novels**

I have been arguing that the literary landscape of Bangladesh and Pakistan presents a contradictory picture when it comes to represent the experiences of 1971. If the war has been assigned a central position in the Bangladeshi Bengali literatures, the vernacular language Pakistani literatures, following national marginalization of the event, have tended to avoid the depiction of 1971. With the proliferation of Bangladeshi and Pakistani English language literatures, we have seen a growing interest in the depiction of 1971 among the writers.[75] I propose that these literary examinations of the conflict are insightful attempts to create an understanding of the fallouts of the past.

Therefore, I have built my case by problematizing Cara Cilano's (2016) argument that "the 1971 Bangladesh Liberation War occupies an inverse position in Bangladeshi and Pakistani English-language fictive traditions" (65) and by expanding on Nasia Anam's (2018) contention that English fictions are antidotes to the crisis of nationalism in South Asia, as they foreground "otherwise silent narratives" (331). The Pakistani and Bangladeshi Anglophone novels, my comparative study posits, examine the uneven episodes of the history of 1971. Both the fictional traditions offer a more inclusive space of narrativization by either opposing narratives that glorify the past or by questioning narratives that are favorable to national self-promotion.

If Bangladeshi English-language novels subvert linear narratives of a nation's emergence by discussing the peripheralized stories of 1971 and by capturing the contending voices of 1971

[75] Bangladeshi Anglophone novels Tahmima Anam's *A Golden Age* (2007), Syed Manzu Islam's *Song of Our Swampland* (2010) and Dilruba Z Ara's *Blame* (2015) among others address the multiplicity of 1971; they create a more inclusive space generally missing in the Bengali vernaculars that depict 1971. However, it should be noted that Bengali writers such as Shaheen Akhtar, Akhteruzzaman Elias and Shaheedul Zahir have addressed the war from a more nuanced perspective. Pakistani authors Kamila Shamsie, Sorayya Khan and Aquila Ismail have depicted 1971 by highlighting the military atrocities in East Pakistan.

that do not glorify Bengali nationalist narratives, Pakistani English literatures break the nationally imposed silence by fictionalizing the atrocities committed by the Pakistani army in 1971.[76] In the same vein, the two Anglophone novels I discuss in the essay – Zia Haider Rahman's *In the Light of What We Know* and Kamila Shamsie's *Kartography* (2002) – are about recognizing the overlapping of the "self" and the "other." As they problematize the filiations of family and friendship and critique the effect of a singular narrative of belonging, they trace affiliations beyond the discourses of hostility formed by the 1971 war.

Both the novels reckon with that fact that "the military junta shut down all prospects of realizing Bengali national aspirations within a federal or confederal framework," after which they conducted "indiscriminate killing of civilians, with Hindus and intellectuals serving as the main targets" (Jalal 176; 173). Rahman's work questions the military campaign of the Yahya Khan government by enunciating that Zafar's Bangladeshi mother was raped by a Pakistani soldier in the army camp. Therefore, the protagonist's life-journeys are linked to his efforts to unpack his destiny of being born a war-child. On the other hand, Shamsie's novel addresses the erasure of the Bengali woman Maheen's story. An inquisitive Raheen discovers the marginalization of their Bengali family friend and Karim's mother during the 1971 conflict. This long-silenced episode in her nation's history has parallels to the ethnic conflict in Karachi, Raheen discerns, as she contemplates her ill-fated romance with Karim. I read the novels as cosmopolitan iterations by analyzing how the characters probe the nation and bordered identities by uncovering the less well-traversed stories of the conflict between East Pakistan and West

[76] In her book-length study of Pakistani literary culture's engagement with the disintegration of East Pakistan in 1971, and the complicated relation literary representations has with the nationally sanctioned narrative of 1971, Cara Cilano in *National Identities in Pakistan: The 1971 War in Contemporary Pakistani Fiction* (2011) has made a similar argument regarding the culture of silence prevailing in Pakistan. To encapsulate the sentiment regarding 1971 in Pakistan, Cilano (2011) refers to Zaman and Farrukhi's (2008) editorial observation of "the national attitudes which wanted to be done with the events of 1971 and not reminded time and again" of the atrocities Pakistanis themselves committed.

Pakistan. Moreover, by mapping the instability of kinship bonds and the anxieties of non-belonging and depict homelessness, they recognize the juxtaposition of the "other" and the "self."

Scholarly conceptualizations of cosmopolitanism have grappled with the tension between the nation and the many angles of cosmopolitan belonging. While Nussbaum (1994) identifies the importance of the cosmopolitan as an opposition to the divisive corollaries of nationalism, Pheng Cheah (2006) has decentered the concept "cosmopolitan" from its European origins to articulate its complex existence in the context of the nation state and in the postcolonial distributions of global capital. Moreover, Appadurai (1996) discusses cosmopolitanism in relation to the adaptation of modern living and technologies in the non-Western territories and Bruce Robbins (1998) emphasizes the entrenched position of the cosmopolitan in a national culture, which is a critical distance adopted by the uncompromised individual, who also disregards parochial nationalist belonging. I identify Robbins' theorization of the cosmopolitan cogent to understand the textual moments critical of nationality and homogeneous belonging in the two novels.

Robbins identifies the cosmopolitan position as "valuing the negative relation to nationality without giving up an insistence on belonging – an insistence that includes the possibility of presence in other places, dispersed but real forms of membership, a density of overlapping allegiances rather than the abstract emptiness of nonallegiance," through which I analyze the novels (250). This idea of a cosmopolitan who is associated with the nation but negates nationalism because "a density of overlapping allegiances" defines her/him is applicable to the two novels' exploration of nation, belonging and non-belonging, and history. In my analysis of *In the Light of What We Know*, I highlight the connection between Zafar's knowledge

of his birth-story during the historic emergence of Bangladesh in 1971 and his attempt to reconcile with the struggles to belong in the diaspora. As he searches for a home, Zafar discovers cosmopolitan camaraderie with his interlocutor's father, who in 1971 became a dissenter by going against the official Pakistani narrative of the conflict. He also finds a connection with the English workman Bill whose in-depth knowledge of 1971 fulfills Zafar emotionally. I analyze *Kartography* by highlighting Raheen's unravelling the suppressed episodes of 1971 including the discrimination Karim's Bengali mother Maheen was subjected to during the war. If to the cosmopolitan Karim a stable Pakistani identity never existed, Raheen discovers the contemporary ethnic conflict in Karachi is an echo from the past. Moreover, her romantic attachment to Karim is tenuous because Karim rejects her father, Zafar. In 1971, Zafar deserted his mother Maheen because of her Bengali identity. Raheen attempts to forge a cosmopolitan connection with Karim's mother Maheen and her Bengali ethnicity. It is also her pursuit of Karim's cosmopolitan longing for maps, which means being empathetic to Karachi amidst an ethnic political crisis.

**A Dissenting Pakistani voice, A British Working-class Historian and a War-child's Cosmopolitan Peregrinations**

Zia Haider Rahman's *In the Light of What We Know* destabilizes the familiar leitmotif of vernacular Bangladeshi literature and films, where a Pakistani national either appears as a villain or as a murderous invader in cultural productions. Zafar is the focus in the novel, who is a British-Bangladeshi with Sylheti roots and whose life is shaped by the profound circumstances of his being a war-child – fathered by a Pakistani soldier, who raped his biological mother in 1971. We come to know Zafar's life-story from the tale presented to us by a narrator with Pakistani origins.

His tale is a concoction of Zafar's confessions presented to the narrator when Zafar suddenly reappears in his life at the height of the global financial crisis and Zafar's "Notebooks," which he kept documenting the history pertaining to 1971. In the process, the Pakistani narrator gets close to the riddle called "Zafar," who is an itinerant cosmopolitan invested in his Bangladeshi identity portrayed in the image of his gendered violence-stricken "wounded" mother (Mookherjee 2015). Zafar's confessions included his fascination with mathematics, his brief stint as a British aid specialist in Afghanistan and his forlorn romance with the high born Emily Hampton-Wyvern, but more importantly, his memories of going back to a certain woman in Sylhet during his childhood. Moreover, it is from one of the notebooks that the narrator discovers the facts about Zafar's origin, which scribbled that "his father, his true father, was a Pakistani soldier who raped his mother, and that his mother, his true mother, was the young sister of the man who raised him as his own son" (125). Zafar's recourse to 1971 no longer remains a mystery to the narrator: "Notebooks that show an old and recurring interest in the subject of rape in war and rape in Bangladesh during the liberation struggle" (125). If the writings in the Notebooks are about the crimes committed during a nation's birth, they are also about Zafar, fathered by "a Pakistani soldier," who committed sexual violence and impregnated "his true mother," the Pakistani narrator realizes.

Years later when Zafar had recounted more about his past sitting with the narrator, the Pakistani narrator of Rahman's novel struggles to suppress the fact that he is also to be held an accomplice to his friend's plights. Himself on the verge of ruin because of a failing marriage and having been implicated in the financial market crisis, the narrator begins to depict a more complex story of the conflict that pitted West Pakistan and East Pakistan. Drawn from various sources, they are about Zafar's going back to Sylhet in his childhood, about his family's

connection to 1971, and particularly, his father's castigating the Pakistani military campaign, about Zafar's forging a connection with the British working-class man Bill and about his betraying Zafar, who wanted to become a father to reclaim his forlorn birth-origins.

The Pakistani narrator's interest in Zafar, his college friend, stems from the willingness to explore the different family backgrounds they came from. If their distinct lives had overlapped in the pursuit of an elite English education, familial circumstances positioned them against one another in the novel. Pointing out his own cosmopolitan background, with "an academic at Oxford" father and a maternal grandfather who served as "Pakistan's ambassador to the United States and had moved in that country's elite internationalist circles," the narrator's early impression of Zafar is shaped by what he observes as his inadequacies, "that Zafar's pronunciation of the names of various Continental mathematicians – Lebesgue, Gauss, Cauchy, Legendre, and Euler – was grotesquely inaccurate" (5). That Zafar fumbles with European names was the first impression of the narrator, who begins to find out more about his new acquaintance. He discovers Zafar was a self-learner, "unlike mine, which carried the imprint of excellent school masters" (5).

As their friendship grew, he begins to gather a full picture of his friend's "otherness," upon realizing "the greatest difference between us . . . lay in our social classes" (5). Zafar's underprivilege was reflected in his father: "His father had a beard and was wearing a skullcap. Standing in gray trousers, Hush Puppies, and a green V-neck sweater, he greeted me with a smile, tilting his head in what seemed a rather deferential way" (7). Not only did Zafar's father appeared "rather deferential" to him, but he was also fond of the narrator's Pakistani identity, noticeable in the elderly man's blending Urdu in the conversation.

The narrator's earlier impression of Zafar and his familial background would undergo transformation from one of surprise to that of an inquiring outlook, particularly after he engages more with Zafar's confessions and his notebooks. If the Pakistani narrator's decision to tell Zafar's story was linked to his own guilt after having betrayed Zafar by becoming sexually involved with his girlfriend Emily, it is also informed by his sensitivity towards Zafar's origins in the birth of Bangladesh – a watershed moment in Pakistan's history – and his realization of his family's deep connections to 1971.

His construction of Zafar by the time of their growing affiliation was formed by his estimation of the parents of his friend. But Zafar reveals there is more to his story. He had sensed very early in his life "that the people whom I called my mother and my father were not my biological parents," and yet, Zafar confesses, he was not able to develop "a more refined concept" of what had constructed this gap between him and his parents (41). Therefore, he thought it was "the huge cultural and social leap I had made in one generation" by moving towards a life "with unimagined possibility" is what separated him from his parents (41).

He confesses to the narrator, "It only came to me much, much later, as I learned more, that perhaps they had wanted me to spend time with someone in particular," to reveal how his adopted parents wanted him to know more about a kin in Bangladesh (51). To the narrator, Zafar's revelation appeared significant because it uncovered what appeared to him a fated birth linked to Bangladesh's creation.

If his journeying to Sylhet laid bare his filial anxieties stemming from his becoming aware of the "wound" of his biological mother, which according to Nayanika Mookherjee (2015) is a socio-cultural condition imposed on the rape victims of the Bangladesh War, the trip also illustrates to Zafar the ephemerality of belonging and provides him a sense of his nascent exilic

cosmopolitan identity. Due to a fully formed homelessness, he admits to the narrator his story may not be able to illuminate the significance the word "home" held for him at that time: "My friend, you know me well enough to know that I couldn't possibly use the word *home* without couching it so many caveats as to make it useless" (75). Yet, he recalls the Sylhet trip being infused with a desire to belong: "I was going back to my father's village, the family homestead, the place where I had lived as an infant, the place where I believe I was born" (75). Zafar's confessions appear convincing to his friend with Pakistani ancestry, who also realizes he must relay "this episode [in Zafar's life] of being sent back [to Bangladesh] as a child," as this trip Zafar undertook as a twelve-year old shaped the cosmopolitan identity of an estranged individual (51).

If Zafar's journey to meet his biological mother was formative, it made him aware of his affinity to strangers – even if he was a young boy – but also of life's tragedies: "This is how I began the next four years of my life in a village in the northeast corner of Bangladesh. They were the happiest years of my life, but they began with tears" (81). On his "home," an accident occurs in the form of an egregious train crush, during which the train carriage carrying Zafar crushes in the river, while passing a fragile bridge past Srimangal on its way to Sylhet. Zafar's new acquaintance, a young stranger, from an unfamiliar region of Bangladesh, disappears along with his parents after the accident. If Zafar and the boy were becoming closer to one another – evident in Zafar's declaring to the narrator, "Friendship is one of life's mysteries" – the train's halting by the bridge before the imminent collapse forever separates them (74). The tragedy separates Zafar from his newfound friend, but it must have prepared him for an even more profound tragedy of being separated from his own mother.

Before the tragedy ensues, Zafar and the boy, who were in the same carriage, slowly develops an affinity by exchanging gifts: “The boy came up to me and held out a mango” (69). The gesture prompts the young traveler from England to reciprocate to the stranger: “Reaching into the pocket of my trousers, I took out an unopened tube of Polo mints that my parents had given me in London and I offered it to him” (70). As the bonding extends further, with Zafar conversing “in my awkward Sylheti,” the boy asked where he was from, to which Zafar replies by using the word “Bilaath” (73). We can see this as young Zafar’s attempt to overcompensate diaspora sensibility and to create cultural commensurability.

Later, when the train was halted by a bridge, due to the possibility of an imminent collapse, both Zafar and his friend venture out, but soon after, Zafar’s new companion decides to go back to the train: “It would be nice to walk with you, he said. But I have to go back to my parents” (73). When the boy leaves, Zafar crosses the bridge by walking to the other side: “I walked farther onto the bridge, the first town receding behind me, into an unlit region between two hives of human activity” (74). Assured of the momentary friendship’s strength, Zafar also had asked the boy to look after his bag left in the carriage. To compensate his request, he buys some snacks for the boy and his family too: “The snack was delicious and I asked for four more: another for me and three for the boy and his parents” (74). He tells his Pakistani interlocutor friend, no sooner the snacks are brought, the train collapses in the river.

The accident claimed his friend, as Zafar could not find the boy anymore: “Of course I waited for my new friend and his parents, but I never saw them again” (75). During the train journey, he had created an affinitive bond with a fellow traveling companion but losing him in the accident makes Zafar miserable. His misery is compounded, as he was unable to help the victims of the crush.

Not an insider to the deltaic landscape of Bangladesh, Zafar becomes incapable of rescuing those in need. To the Pakistani interlocuter, it appeared his friend's confessions pointed out to a sense of helplessness. The event fixates Zafar into a diasporic alien ("but I was an outsider," p.75), who could not adapt to local conditions: "After the train crush, I spend a few hours trying to help, but I was an outsider, a small boy from Bilaath, who didn't know how to stir a boat, who couldn't pull a body out of water" (75). In a land of rivers and waterways, Zafar felt like a stranger; if he had wanted to help, he could not because Zafar was not quiet at home in the place.

The crush appeared to Zafar's Pakistani friend to be one of the "some many caveats" Zafar had to account for in his search for a "*home*" (75). If he felt at home in the village where his biological mother lived, he also had to concede his outsider's status in Bangladesh. The aftermath of the train crush made it clear to him that he was a stranger even amidst the more familiar racial and ethnic milieu: "The townspeople were incredible; they'd quickly taken control of the situation and seemed to know exactly what to do, as if their collective consciousness preserved the means to meet such adversity" (75). While the "townspeople" performed an "incredible" rescue act because they possessed a "collective consciousness" to withstand "adversity," Zafar was disconnected from the locality.

The disconnection remained even when he eventually met his biological mother, Zafar confesses to the narrator, while reflecting on the moment he met her. Zafar's reaction to her embrace is one of exhaustion, even if it embodied the qualities of motherhood: "She was in her midtwenties in those days, slender and beautiful, and I do not think I will ever forget the tenderness in her eyes. She lifted her hand to cup my cheek and then curled it around the back of my head and pulled me into her breast, holding me tightly. My body gave way, and the

exhaustion from the day folded over me" (80-81). Speaking from memory, the Bangladeshi protagonist of the novel remembers a "slender and beautiful" woman, who has remained unforgettable to him because of "the tenderness in her eyes." During the very moment of their meeting, Zafar reacts with exhaustion to her motherly warmth – perhaps the shock of losing a friend in the accident made him so wary that he fails to connect with this person in the village.

To his Pakistani friend he confesses that even during his adolescence he had a conviction that "the stuff set down in the store of memory" can be utilized to re-imagine one's "world" (78). But, since then, he has come to realize that "it was simply wrong in the root, a false premise: to think it possible to re-create a world" (78). If Zafar believed in the past that an identity free of blemishes could be created, he has lost faith in it by the time he was relaying his story of going back to Sylhet to the Pakistani narrator. If he had spent some memorable times with his biological mother during childhood, Zafar's quests to understand the circumstances of his birth in 1971 also unpacks her as a socially constructed, silenced and wounded "birangona" languishing in the Bengal countryside (Mookherjee 2015).

To the Pakistani narrator, Zafar's meeting his biological mother appears consequential to the cosmopolitan identity he nurtures. If Zafar's life has been "a break against the lonely tides and the lurking anxiety of a whole life of homelessness," it has also been a quest to come to terms with Bangladesh's birth in 1971 (170). More than a predilection, Zafar is on the look for more stories about the war. The narrator recalls Zafar's introspection of a cartographic map during one of his visits to their family house.

His inquiry, as is interpreted by the Pakistani interlocutor, had an intensity that revealed his curiosity with the Indian subcontinent: "Zafar drew up to the maps and it was apparent that his focus had fixed on one in particular, a map of the northeast corner of the subcontinent" (6).

Unaware at that time that Zafar's intensified interest with a particular region of the subcontinent – formerly East Pakistan, now Bangladesh – was more than an exercise in intellection, he construes Zafar's cartographic gaze as cosmopolitan yet invested in the familial. In fact, the novel's Pakistani character reveals, Zafar's visit to his family enables his father to recall his dissenting role in 1971.

While Zafar received a heartwarming welcome in the narrator's family, the narrator too was benefitted from the conversations about the South Asian reality, and particularly that of Pakistan: "Talk of Pakistan and events there had been brought back into the home" (197). As the household welcomed Zafar, the narrator's father begins discussing politics of the South Asia region not only as a gesture to ensure the Bangladesh-born friend of his son feels at home but also to reveal his position regarding the imbroglio between East Pakistan and West Pakistan. *In the Light of What We Know* thus complicates the conventional portrayal of the quotidian Pakistani as an "other" in Bangladeshi cultural representations. The narrator's father, a Professor of Physics, by being ethically opposed to the Pakistani military campaign in 1971, emerges as a complexly depicted Pakistani in a Bangladeshi novel.

If Zafar's visit led to a more involved discussion of 1971, the narrator, sometimes before his Bangladesh-born friend began to visit regularly, had realized his family underwent duress due to the dissenting of the father. While previously unknown to the narrator, the family's connection to 1971 unfolded at a slower pace: "At a certain point I started to ask and my father answered, at first with a trickle of information" (196). As he asked "more questions," his parents began to talk about 1971 more "extensively," but they were struggling to recount the horrors of the war, as "to recall those days caused visible discomfort" (196). If the narrator had realized Bangladesh's story is intricately connected to his family, his father as well as the family may have received

counter-productive reactions due to the dissent, including being shunned by the fellow Pakistanis at Princeton and New York.

In Zafar's presence, his father evokes how Pakistan's map was transformed due to the state perpetuated violence in East Pakistan. Triggered by his own difficult circumstances, which was the outcome of his condemning the ethnic cleansing, the past silencing of his voice clouded his retelling. "The war of 1971 and the holocaust of West Pakistan's conduct in East Pakistan, his criticism of his homeland, the ostracism and then my parents' disengagement – all of this was a history of personal suffering that my father carried with him," the narrator interpolates (197). Militating against the establishment of his country meant the narrator's father invited trouble in the family, as fellow Pakistani ostracized him, and they soon began to distance themselves from South Asian affairs.

With Zafar's emergence, the past is retold once again, as if the professor remembered those anguishing moments of being silenced because of his response to the army atrocities in 1971. "I had never connected the dots before," the narrator mentions, as he situates the dialogue between his father and Zafar as a reconciliation of the "self" and the "other." If in his "father's attitude" he had discovered "an aspect of hope," he found in Zafar a willingness to listen to the "other" side despite the trauma he had to bear because of the correspondence.

Recalling the father-friend encounter, the narrator begins to realize Zafar must have known about his war-child's status when his father talked about 1971: "The discussion must have been close to the bone and yet he held back so much" (200). Despite his birth circumstances, Zafar withheld his emotions and showed more willingness to listen to the professor's anecdotes about his own imbrication as well as the international dimension of the war. If "Zafar's enormous restraint" surprises the narrator, he also recalls his own ignorance,

since “at the time, I knew nothing, of course, about the facts of Zafar’s origins” (200). The Pakistani friend by the time of his narrating Zafar’s story had deciphered in his friend “a tendency to take on an academic tone when it hit something emotionally charged, by way perhaps of a defense mechanism” (200). Therefore, Zafar becomes interested in the elderly professor’s scholarly and historical enunciation of the Bangladesh War.

The narrator’s father enacted his dissent intellectually, as he felt the immediacy to condemn the army’s action by penning a letter. To his audience he mentions, “he wrote a letter to *The New York Times* – we were in Princeton then – condemning West Pakistani aggression” (198). He adds that others have also condemned the military action at the time of the East Pakistan crisis: “Many others also did” (199).

While understated in the novel, we can recall another set of Pakistani intellectuals who expressed opposition to the army clampdown in East Pakistan. Published in the “Letters to the Editor” section of the 10 April, 1971 edition of the New York Times, an undersigned letter by Eqbal Ahmad, Aijaz Ahmad, Feroz Ahmed and Saghir Ahmed urged the international community to stop “the current massacre of the Bengali people” by taking an ethical position against ethnic cleansing (“Home Rule for Bengal”). The scholars strongly “condemn” Pakistan’s policy arguing that the campaign is a ruling class design to stifle “the home-rule movement in Bengal.” These intellectuals dissented against the Pakistan state not only from a personal moral position but attempted in their protest to break the international silence regarding 1971.

While the narrator’s father’s protest against his own government is very similar to the 10 April, 1971 New York Times letter version of opposing the national policy, they both illuminate a cosmopolitan action that is emerging from a sense of responsibility towards the

nation. Furthermore, he discusses the international dimension of the conflict arguing America had been deeply implicated in the war.

If America's role in the South Asian conflict suggested its own geopolitical interest, it is also an irresponsible behavior that disregards the suppression of people in a nation: "In 1971, while the butchery was in full swing, Pakistani was a conduit for secret negotiations with China. In July, Kissinger detoured to China in total secrecy while visiting Pakistan to clear the way for Nixon's visit. The Americans . . . were relying on Pakistan as an intermediary, even as the slaughter was raging" (198). America condoned the military aggression since in the context of the Cold War, since "Pakistan was a conduit for secret negotiations with China." If the involvement of international powers was one of the many dimensions of the 1971 war, the novel's underscoring the fact is critical of its failure to urge a nation to be respectful of its peoples wishes. On the other hand, the dissent of the professor – echoing the dissent of the Pakistani intellectuals who penned "Home Rule for Bengal" – is a cosmopolitan act because it is carried out from a sense of accountability towards the nation, what Bruce Robbins calls "valuing the negative relation to nationality without giving up an insistence on belonging."

While the novel's Pakistani informant considers as significant Zafar's many visits to his family, he also discusses what had convinced him to give Zafar's life-story a life of its own. His friend's reappearance in his life and the changing global circumstances inspires him to narrate the life of his Bangladeshi friend. In this narration, the "self" and the "other" overlaps as the Pakistani interlocuter combines Zafar's confessions as well as his notebooks: "Only now, prompted by Zafar's return and the circumstances of work and marriage, not to mention the world's new interest in that region, have I gone back over the past and taken time to discover more" (198). Though Zafar had not revealed the woeful circumstances of his birth while the

narrator's family discussed the war, his emotional connection to Bangladesh's creation was too personal, located in the zone between his tense relationship with his uncle and aunt, who raised him, and his memory of a motherly figure in Bangladesh.

To the narrator it illustrated his friend Zafar was invested in Bangladesh. The chapter "Blood Telegram or Bill and Dave" explores Zafar's conversation with the two carpenters Bill and Dave. This moment in the novel reveals how Bill's recollection of the conflict in East Pakistan turns him into a working-class British historian in the eyes of Zafar. According to the narrator's interpretation of his friend's confessions, Zafar grasps Bill's understanding of history as something revelatory as it coincided with his own sentimental association with 1971.

If Bill empathizes with the narrator's friend, this moment of correspondence between the British working-class man and the Bangladeshi protagonist of the novel is linked to the events of 1971. It also draws on the theme of Zafar's strained relation with his adopted parents. The novel's narrator recalls Zafar's anecdote about "how I spent the summer vacation before college," when he joined his working-class father to do the task of "waiting tables alongside him" (139). If Zafar's relationship with his father was already troublesome, this moment exacerbated the existing tension with his father, who was biologically his uncle too.

One day at work, the owner of the restaurant mentioned Zafar father was concerned about his education adding that the family wanted him to go to college. Bemused that his father did not say anything before, he feels insulted (140). Later, when they return home, his father suggests, he should seek out other opportunities. The comment of the father is interpreted by Zafar with the following reaction: "I did not express any emotion then, when my father made his suggestion. I simply did not feel anything I recognized as anger, and even if I had, I knew of nothing in him to appeal to" (141). If his uncle played the father's role, it was fraught with

neglect. His lack of response to the owner was neglectful, and it was hypocritical too, Zafar concluded: “But when the head chef praised my father for an unearned credit that my father then failed to deny, I did feel something” (141).

With the familial ceasing to become his refuge, Zafar takes a flight from his Bangladeshi household. “I took a bus from Willesden Green to Kensington, uncertain what it was I hoped to find there,” he mentions while recounting this past event to his friend (141). Comparing himself to “the economic migrant who travels to the West,” he becomes the postcolonial immigrant persona hoping to find work in the inhospitable West, since “I thought vaguely that opportunities abounded in the streets of the affluent royal borough” (141). Eventually, he is employed with the carpenters Bill and Dave. With them, Zafar starts to work “on the renovation of a five-story Georgian house on a crescent-shaped terrace,” and he gradually warms up to them (142).

Zafar acknowledges the new-found friendship by appreciating the working men’s habit of exchanging pleasantries: “I remember that both of them always said ‘thanks’ or ‘cheers, mate’ even to each other” (143). Remembering him being “charmed” by Bill’s and Dave’s use of “please” and “thank you,” Zafar soon discovers his alienation from the cultural world his non-biological mother had inhabited (144). If he had developed a nuanced cosmopolitan outlook towards the Sylheti and the Western culture, his mother’s cultural sensibility was Sylheti. Remembering her disapproval of the requesting or thanking gestures (“My mother had always winced when I said please and thank you”), Zafar invokes the Sylheti culture’s non-Western core: “Such words did not seem to figure in the vocabulary of Sylheti, a language in which, rather than saying thank you, one balanced the whole sentence on terms of deference to age or class” (143). In Sylheti, “age or class” hierarchies exist; thus, Western felicitous exchanges do not fully capture the closeness of hierarchical relations.

If he had uttered the niceties of English culture, his mother would react intensely: “My mother would grimace and insist that I stop saying it” (143). The woman who had adopted him found it ominous that he adopted a foreign culture and discarded “the cultures and values she had inherited,” therefore, Zafar stopped being a Sylheti (143). Distant from fatherly expectations and alienated from his mother’s home culture, Zafar is drawn to the working men’s Western felicitous gestures.

When, misrecognizing his Bangladeshi origins, Bill starts to call Zafar a “Paki-man,” his accomplice Dave objects to such terminology since “some people might construe it as derogatory, offensive, even” (145). It is at that moment of the conversation Bill demonstrates his knowledge of history that takes Zafar by surprise given the working-class man’s in-depth understanding of the complex history of South Asia. After being chastised by Dave, Bill apologetically asks, “Zafar, where are you from,” to which Zafar says, “Bangladesh” (147).

With a prompt regret, Bill retracts what he said about Zafar’s identity. He appeared to have conflated his work buddy with Pakistani migrants: “A Paki comes from Pakistan. You, my boy, are from Bangladesh, and as anyone who watched George Harrison’s 1971 Concert for Bangladesh will tell you, Bangladesh – or should I say East Pakistan, as it was then? – Bangladesh didn’t fight a bloody war with Pakistan just to have the likes of us calling its good people Pakis. You, in short, are not a Paki-man” (147-148). When Zafar said he is a Bangladeshi, it prompts Bill to interpret the word “Bangladesh,” which not only surprises Zafar but also assures him of recognition of his origins in 1971.

Bill’s ability to distinguish his ethnicity from a “Paki-man” by recollecting “George Harrison’s 1971 Concert for Bangladesh” appears to him to be a distinct mark of cosmopolitan sensibility. The Bangladeshi protagonist connects with Bill, who had learned postcolonial

history. Speculating if Bill may have uncannily surmised his birth-story, Zafar's wonderment turns to being impressed by the nuanced perspective of 1971: "They could not have known of the four happy years that I carried in me" (148). Zafar is puzzled by Bill's historical precision wondering "how two carpenters from Essex could know the story of a small country on the other side of the planet," to which Zafar advances his own theory of appreciation of the humane support to liberating causes (148). Bill's lucid political reference to 1971 appears visionary: "Bill hadn't described it as a 'civil war'; it was never an internal war" (148).

If Zafar's "Notebooks" attested to his finding peace with the biological mother in Bangladesh, which also gave him "a break against the lonely tides and the lurking anxiety of a whole life of homelessness," the working men were answers to his desperate search for love and belonging (170). They were a compensative recourse from the alienation Zafar felt having to deal with a hostile love-less environment: "I felt connected to these two men from the edge of London and to the world they inhabited because they knew about Bangladesh, knew even about its liberation war" (148). Zafar could relate to Bill and Dave because they embodied the ethos of "cosmopolitanism [which] is about intelligence and curiosity as well as engagement" (Appiah 168).

Since the cosmopolitan camaraderie between Zafar and the working men is established upon Bill's appreciation of the particularities of Bangladesh's emergence in 1971, the Pakistani protagonist narrates the moment as he committed himself to comprehensively narrate Zafar's life: "Only now, prompted by Zafar's return and the circumstances of work and marriage, not to mention the world's new interest in that region, have I gone back over the past and taken time to discover more" (198). His engagement unfolds his friend's deeper attachment to the circumstances of his birth during the 1971 war. He therefore illustrates an effort to reconcile his

Pakistani "self" with the Bangladeshi "other," Zafar. However, this process is marked by betrayal too, as the Pakistani narrator had a momentary fling with Zafar's girlfriend Emily Hampton-Wyvern during the time when he was lodged in the psychiatric ward in 1997.

When Zafar met his friend after the financial collapse, he not only tells the Pakistani character about his war-time related birth and how it prompts him to seek cosmopolitan affiliations, he exposes to his friend by reconstructing the time of Emily's impregnation through mathematical calculation. Zafar also delineates the circumstances of Emily's abortion. the moment of Zafar's revelation that he find out "she conceived at some point during the second week I was in hospital, give or take a few days" is unsettling for the Pakistani narrator, as he realizes Zafar has found out about his betrayal (422). But, Zafar told him, he was anguished because he had lost the child.

To Zafar, the child Emily was carrying, before she had aborted it, emerged more significant. If the Pakistani narrator came between Emily and Zafar, he also realizes his complicity in ruining Zafar's wishes to be a father. Though feeling unsettled, the narrator recreates the conversation with Zafar that illustrates the role of mathematical calculation in Zafar's figuring out the circumstances of his Pakistani friend's relationship with Emily: "It turns out that everything hangs on precise mathematics. Not complex but simple and precise. Funny really that it came down to simple arithmetic" (408). If mathematics held the capacity for exposing the narrator's embarrassment, it had brought him and Zafar closer: "It was of course mathematics that framed our first meeting as students. Both of us loved it – or *her;* Zafar used to say, 'I've been with the mistress' – though for me there was never quite the same passion that there was for him" (161). Perhaps, it becomes clear to the narrator that Zafar's birth identity –

which linked him to the history of sexual violence committed by the Pakistan army – was so pivotal to his quest for belonging that he saw the unborn child as a way to undo his past.

The imaginary attachment he grew with the unborn child was more than a wish for fatherhood – Zafar thought the child's birth would undo the circumstances of his birth in 1971. He confesses to his interlocutor: "Giving my child her family name was an act of *cleansing* to me. However distasteful that now sounds, that is what it meant. It was a means of overcoming the bonds with bastardry, with my parents, overcoming bondage" (414). Isolated from his uncle and aunt who had adopted him, and self-aware that her mother is a victim, being one of the raped women of the 1971 war, if Zafar was initially delighted by Emily's pregnancy, he also determined his child must bear her lineage. Zafar's penchant the yet-to-be-born child was in fact his obsession with his past signified by the realization of being illegitimate.

Therefore, Zafar's inquiries into the events of 1971 grew out of his emotional attachment to a remote village in Sylhet, where he had journeyed to meet his birth mother, but they also resulted from his estrangement. If those years he spent with the mother had been etched in his memory, he was also negotiating with his birth circumstances. When Zafar lost his child, his wishes to be cleansed diminishes because of the betrayal of the Pakistani friend. Consequently, the Pakistani narrator decides to tell his Bangladeshi friend's narrative to negotiate with his own "self," and to reconcile with his own complicity in isolating and in turn "othering" of his Bangladesh born friend by becoming intimate with Emily.

**History against the Nation: Examining Family, Romance and Ethnicity in Kamila Shamsie's *Kartography***

*Kartography* is about chronicling Maheen's struggle and estrangement during 1971, which had remained silenced in Raheen's Karachi life, until she discovers the impact of the war

on the Bengali woman's life and her family. The novel suggests that the political tensions Raheen witnesses in the 1990s Karachi is very similar to the conflict in East Pakistan where the ethnic Bengalis were oppressed by the West Pakistani ruling class. Eventually causing Pakistan's dissolution and Bangladesh's creation in 1971, this past conflict continues to impinge on the present in Pakistan. This suggests to Raheen, the narrator of *Kartography*, that the nation state's map is unstable.

A narrative of stable Pakistani identity begins to unravel, when out of a coincidence, Raheen discovers that her family was entangled in the 1971 crisis. She discovers Karim's mother, Maheen, was silenced and marginalized in 1971, and if, her love interest Karim seems estranged and disconnected, she identifies Maheen's helpless during the war as the cause of his disaffection. The East Pakistan tragedy is a cautionary tale for the violence-torn Karachi, a city where Raheen grew up in, alludes Shamsie's novel. Therefore, Raheen realizes, Karim's cosmopolitan web is not merely escapism, manufactured to escape the violence in Karachi, but is a demonstration of what Bruce Robbins interprets as a cosmopolitan nurturing of a sense of place through the metaphor of the world. Past humiliations imposed on his mother's Bengali ethnicity is the burden of Pakistan's history, which Karim withstands by getting lost in maps.

*Kartography* revolves around the youthful Raheen, Karim, Zia and Sonia as representatives of the globalized urban upper-class Karachi society and the elderly characters Maheen, Ali, Zafar and Yasmin, whose lives, we discover in the course of the novel, underwent paradigmatic transformation in 1971. Raheen becomes curious about this past – a past that is defined by the West Pakistani aggression against East Pakistan – after she discovers a marriage photography in Uncle Asif's farm. Gradually, she begins to discover the historical and political

circumstances contributing to the perpetuation of "the version" she had been told regarding their parents' marriage.

As she finds out more about the photograph, a forgotten chapter in the annals of the nation unfolds before her. She finds the senior members in her familial circle are implicated in the silencing of Maheen, who was the Bengali fiancé of her father, Zafar. Not only had Zafar abandoned Maheen to cope with the societal stigma of being called a "Bingo Lover," but, he married their friend Yasmin, Raheen's mother. Cognizant of this unfortunate treatment of his mother, Karim adopts a cosmopolitan fascination for maps to survive the erasure of the Bengali identity in him.

If Raheen eventually finds out about her friend's idiosyncratic fascination with cartographic changes, she is initially puzzled by Karim's quirks with maps: "'Cartographers.' He wrote down the word, forming a circle with the letters, and we both bent our heads over the paper" (23). The "'Cartographers'" drew Karim, and if his love for map-makers is an example of his knowledge of the world, soon the making and unmaking of Pakistan become the focus of their life. In fact, the shape of Pakistan's map is sardonically probed very early in *Kartography*. Raheen and Karim were attending a dinner at Uncle Asif's farm, when the host blurts out that the two wings of Pakistan were a pair of testicles to the larger entity India. If this bizarre comparison unsettles the young characters, soon more comes to the surface about Pakistan's past.

Quite suddenly, the young Karachiites discover a carved sign on the bark of a tree: "On the tree trunk someone had written 'Z+M,' the letter biting deep into the bark" (28). Sooner, Karim tells that their parents (both his and Raheen's) were at the farm during the New Years' Eve in the year 1970. In fact, the carving in the tree reveals more than just a romance.

It was an insignia of a more idyllic past when the parents of Raheen and Karim were happy couples before the persecution of the Bengalis during the gradual fragmentation of Pakistan in the 1970s. If the cartographic transformation had a political aspect, it also disrupted many lives. Abandoning Maheen, Zafar had married Yasmin, who was to marry Ali. Ali eventually married the Bengali woman Maheen. The political significance is hollowed out in the version told to the kids. Raheen's and Karim's parents pretended as if couples changed partners on a whim: "We had first heard about the fiancé swap when we were ten and our mothers told us they hadn't mentioned it before because it might have seemed too weird. They knew, they said, how sensitive kids can be about their parents" (28). The narrative of "fiancé swap" now appeared too flimsy and Raheen decides to probe further into the story.

Interested to uncover the nature of the friendship that connected her parents with Karim's parents, Raheen undertakes a historical inquiry. Soon she locates a family photograph "which was framed and prominently displayed in both Karim's house and mine," and recollects, "a few days earlier I had come upon a copy of it, along with stacks of other pictures, in the rosewood cabinet in Laila and Asif's drawing room" (33; 34). The gregarious photograph appeared to be from the wedding of Karim's parents. Raheen observes and recollects no such photograph was taken during her parent's wedding: "Taken at Karim's parent's wedding, it showed my parents flanking the bride and groom, all four of them laughing" (34).

The elders offered her an explanation. She was told Aunt Maheen had been absent because she was not in Pakistan. The creation of "Bangladesh" was mentioned as the reason behind her absence: "She'd been in the newly created nation of Bangladesh, spending her last weeks as a single woman with her family there" (34). What previously appeared to be a matter-

of-fact explanation suddenly puzzles Raheen. She begins to dig into her country's past to uncover what had happened in 1971.

Further introspection of the photograph reveals to Raheen, "they were not looking at one another, not at all," which suggested to her the usual signs of friendship and bonding were missing (34). It seemed they were merely reacting to the photographer's command: "Or had the photographer said something amusing to make each of them, as individuals laugh?" (34). Later, at a family conversation, another political chasm in contemporary Pakistan is exposed.

It appears that Uncle Asif has not yet forgotten the comment made by Raheen's father regarding "the need for land reforms," which he deems to be an outsider's perspective (37). Of Muhajir background, Zafar is a proponent of land reforms, which is detested by the landlord Uncle Asif: "I mean, Muhajirs will never understand the way we feel about land. They all left their homes at Partition. No understanding of ties to a place" (37). Uncle Asif's viewpoint hurts Raheen, as it questions her identity, inextricably linked to Zafar's immigrant identity in Pakistan. Moreover, she thinks Uncle Asif's words "muhajir. Immigrant" is a slight on Pakistan's unity (37). Then, the debate intensifies, and the conversation begins to discuss the political situation in Karachi.

When Uncle Asif is asked, "Tell me what's going on in Karachi. What do your contracts in the government say?" Uncle Asif again makes an insulting remark: "I'm not a Muhajir" (38; 39). Unsettled by the elders' opinions in the farmhouse drawing room conversation, Raheen wonders, if the muhajirs of Karachi are now viewed as threats to the narrative of Pakistan's unity, were the Bengalis treated alike once in the country?

Raheen invokes the Bengali family friend Aunt Maheen, and recalls her own attraction for the Bengali language, because the "stray words of Bengali" that "clustered around her (Aunt

Maheen) tongue, falling off in ones and twos, un-understood and untranslated," and appeared exotic (39). If Aunt Maheen's Bengali identity was an attraction, in Pakistan's national life it was also slandered.

Raheen recalls an incident thinking she has witnessed lingering uneasiness towards the Bengalis in Pakistan. In her childhood, an ethnic tension occurred during school recess. Zia mentions the simmering political rivalry between India and Pakistan by invoking the war with India that took place two years before they were born, but he had ignored the problem in East Pakistan (39). Agitated, Karim begins to argue with him. What Zia calls a war with India is framed by Karim as the war through which Bangladesh was born. He says he has a dual identity, since his mother is from Bangladesh, he is "half-Bengali" (39).

Zia strongly reacts to Karim's declaration; he also ends up physically assaulting him. "He's not Bengali, he's not. He's my friend," Zia utters frantically, as if the word "Bengali" was taboo, and hence, should not be mixed with friendship (40). The incident on the playground had a wider repercussion, as the parents also became involved.

While Zia's family tried to cover-up the incident, their blotched effort suggested a wider problem in the society: "When Zia said he thought Bengali was a bad word, his father went straight into his room and fired his ayah. But I don't even remember if she was the one who told me that, Zia said, and his mother yelled at him to be quiet" (48). If Zia had been ignited by Karim's associating himself with the term "Bengali," it is perhaps in Zia's family the national narrative of Bengalis betraying the Pakistanis in the war against India was predominant. Young Zia in his mind came to nurture indignation towards the Bengalis and began to see them as unworthy of friendship. Therefore, as soon as Karim said he was a Bengali, Zia reacted viscerally.

If Raheen had recalled this past incident to understand the societal uneasiness with the "immigrant" Muhajirs, she becomes more interested in 1971. While it evoked in the elders a hushed emotional response, the event was linked to Karim's identity too: "I was forced to consider that Karim and I were separate in some way that seemed to matter terribly to people old enough to understand where the significance lay" (41). The mystery of her difference with Karim can perhaps be traced in Pakistan's history.

The nation was becoming embroiled in a new ethnic tension, but the past political events were inextricably linked to their lives, Raheen concluded. If Karim had fragmented identities, Raheen wonders, how does it affect their blossoming romance: "These days, with Civil War treated as a long-distant memory that had nothing to do with our present lives, his Punjabiness would probably be more of an issue on the nation's ethnic battleground than his Bengaliness. But did any of it really have to do with Karim and me?" (41). In the process of negotiating with the political fissures in Karachi, Raheen discovers the past conflict in 1971 mattered more in the family.

Kamila Shamsie uses a flashback technique in *Kartography* to examine how the lives of Raheen and Karim's parents were altered by the circumstances in 1971. Through flashbacks the novelist recreates the silenced parts of history, as the parents of the young protagonists negotiate with the reality that forced them to marry a different person than the ones they were dating. If Raheen is aware of the facet of the present day struggles of the immigrants in Karachi, she comes to learn ethnic tensions simmered in Karachi when the war broke out in East Pakistan. Targeting Bengalis, the West Pakistani public spawned a rhetoric of "otherness" that would impinge on Maheen's Bengaliness. Her ethnicity came between her relationship with Zafar, Raheen's father, who eventually abandons her to marry Raheen's mother, Yasmin.

One of the flashbacks presents a heated political conversation that took place in 1971 in the restaurant Ampi in Karachi. After a post-election political crisis before the impending war of 1971, the characters discuss the future of Pakistan. Uncle Asif opines, he is hopeful that the Bengalis will compromise: "Everyone's playing brinkmanship, that's all. Here's what'll happen: Mujib will back down on his Six Points, give up the whole idea of a decentralized federal system of government in exchange for some political and economic concessions towards East Pakistan" (166). If he expresses confidence that the political crisis will be resolved, his perspective belittles the Bengalis of East Pakistan. His voice is supremacist, as it was common among the West Pakistanis before the partitioning of the country.

He says that the nation's army will take care of any resistance movement that Bengalis were inclined to begin. "Our army will decimate them if they try to make some kind of one-legged stand," Uncle Asif warns, being boastful of army's superiority (166). Unsympathetic to the Bengali demands, he calls them "rabble," and insinuates, they will be "slaughtered" if they do not give up demands for autonomy (166). Apathetic to the moral depths of the demand made by East Pakistan's Bengalis, he suggests force should be used to subdue them.

Subsequently, Aunt Maheen reacted to Uncle Asif's insensitive racist opposition to the Bengali people by pronouncing "No one wants to be enslaved either," when Aunt Laila entered the restaurant with her husband (166). As a minority, Aunt Maheen could only express her concerns regarding the opinionated West Pakistani popular sentiment towards the Bengalis. It is the statistical information of Uncle Ali that counters the anti-Bengali narrative of Uncle Asif.

Ali's rebuttal lends credence to East Pakistan's demand for autonomy: "It gets less than 30 percent of foreign aid allocation, less than 20 percent of civil service jobs, less than 10 percent of military positions, fewer schools, fewer universities, it makes up nearly 70 percent of

the country's export earnings but receives the benefits of less than 30 percent of our import expenditure" (167). The data Uncle Ali provides is reflective of Sheikh Mujib's Six Points Demand. Despite the statistical information, the gathering of family and friends treats the political crisis in East Pakistan in a light-hearted manner. We notice that in the comment made by Zafar: "Why don't Mujib and Bhutto just have a duel to the death, pistols at dawn, and leave the rest of us to it?" (167). If the Bengalis were taken lightly, they were also discriminated against.

The intensity of the discrimination is exposed when a Bengali waiter accidentally spills water on Laila's saree. Her husband reacts with a racist slur: "Halfwit Bingo! Go back to your jungle" (167). The reaction suggests the Bengalis were viewed as an inferior race in Pakistan. The racist attack of a family friend hurts Aunt Maheen, who expresses her feeling by exchanging glances with the ethnic Bengali waiter. Raheen's father, Zafar, notices her gesture that suggested to him she understood she did not belong in her familiar Pakistani circle: "She was looking at the Bengali waiter. He walked past and caught her eye, and for a moment the barriers of class and gender became porous and something passed between them that Zafar couldn't quite identify" (168). The sense of Bengali solidarity between Aunt Maheen and the waiter was even beyond Zafar's grasp, because it grew out of Bengalis feeling marginalized in West Pakistan.

Another flashback in the novel takes us to the Karachi racecourse, where we find Zafar and Yasmin chatting without their respective partners being present. If he were about to marry the Bengali woman Maheen, this episode illustrates to Zafar he was attracted to Yasmin too. *Kartography* establishes through this flashback the backdrop of the crisis that impinged on Zafar and Maheen as a couple. If it was the conflict that led to an intensified social pressure to not marry a Bengali, to which Zafar capitulated, it is also about Zafar's feelings for Yasmin (169). If

they had liked each other, they feigned there was attraction between them: “What was she doing? It could only do harm to revisit the past, particularly when he was wearing the same black shirt – why did he always have to wear black, even in the heat of Karachi’s days, and why did he always have to look good in it?” (169). If they still liked each other, they refused to comply with what they felt inside: “She gripped her finger with its engagement ring” (169). The novel’s detailing this moment of tension between Yasmin and Zafar suggests, if Maheen was confronted with casual racism in West Pakistan, Zafar failed to protect her. Therefore, his decision against marrying a Bengali had a more subtle dimension than him being bullied by fellow West Pakistanis because Maheen was his lover.

At least, this is how Karim interpreted his actions in 1971, if we analyze the moment when he accuses Zafar of betraying his mother. Even if the wartime racism and discrimination against the Bengalis prompted Zafar’s decision, Karim had conjectured, his choosing to separate with Maheen made him complicit in his mother’s vulnerability. He severely criticizes Raheen’s father because he thought Zafar had compounded Maheen’s misery by refusing to marry her.

Karim’s confronting Zafar and Zafar’s subsequent recounting of his version of events that had happened in 1971 take place during a moment when Zafar reacts strongly to the news that Raheen’s friend Sonia’s engagement is broken. The abrupt ending of the engagement draws the fury of Zafar: “With an explosion of invective, Aba crumpled up the fax and flung it against the wall. The strength of his reaction shocked me out of my own fist-clenched fury. He was fond of Sonia, certainly, but this was entirely out of character” (205). As Raheen tries to fathom the dramatic anger of his father, Karim enters, which leads to more tensions, and she finds out Karim knows more about the past involving her father and his mother than she does.

She discovers a furious Karim, who was fuming with rage "because nothing was moving in the unblinking, unsmiling mask that had settled on his face like a second skin" (205). Then, he yells at her father, "If you ever see him you'll what, Zafar?" and Raheen noticed, "He didn't just cut the appellation 'Uncle' from his form of address; he cut every tie to his past relationship with my father" (206). While she tries to fathom what has gone wrong, Karim calls her father a coward and says he is no different from Sonia's father-in-law: "'Is it, Zaf? Will you, Zaf, when you see him, Zaf, hold your arms open, Zaf, and say, 'Welcome, brother, welcome to the club?' The break-a-heart-too-good-for-you-you-cowardly-bastard club" (206). Anguished at Zafar, Karim accuses him of being hypocritical. Thereafter, Zafar is prompted to explain what happened in 1971 so that Karim and Raheen do not misunderstand him.

Zafar recaptures the incidents including Shafiq's verbally assaulting him after the death of his brother (Bilal) in East Pakistan. Moreover, as fellow West Pakistanis launched a collective assault against him, and the insults were getting unbearable, Raheen's father decided to part with Maheen. Raheen becomes sympathetic to his father's confessions: "For the first time I really wondered what it had been like for Aba to be engaged to a Bengali in those days" (209). Her erstwhile inquiry after discovering the "Z+M" sign in the tree bark now yields result, as Raheen concludes their parents did not simply swap partners, but circumstances associated with Bangladesh's creation leads to her father's separation from Maheen.

Raheen begins to learn more about West Pakistani mistreatment of Maheen contributing to her marginalization and realizes the decision her father had taken in 1971 continues to impact Karim. To empathize with him, she tries to reinvent Karim's love for Karachi and his longing for maps. While the violence in the city had unsettled her in the past, she finds peace in front of the sea at Zia's beach residence (288; 213). Discovering tranquility at the beach, after being

anguished by her father's revelations, she rethinks violence in Karachi, her longing for Karim, and his 1971 war attached emotions: "I closed my eyes to try to think of Karim's face as it must have been when someone told him why his mother broke off her engagement with my father" (214). Upon visualizing "Karim's face," she realizes why he was angry at his father.

Raheen also thinks about Maheen by empathizing with her helplessness because her father marooned Aunt Maheen to marry her mother, Yasmin: "Aunty Maheen. Young, beautiful and in love, but with a heart that was daily further cleft by emotions more complicated than anything conjured up by the words 'politics,' 'patriotism,' 'loyalty'" (214). Raheen's acknowledgment of Maheen's estrangement enables her to get closer to Karim.

If she had found Karim obtuse in the past – with his fascination for maps and fragmented identities – she begins to align more with him now. In the past if she had wondered, "Why *did* I keep harping on about maps? How did they become the symbol of everything that had gone so wrong, so inexplicably, in my relationship with Karim," she now reconciles with the cosmopolitan viewpoint of the young man of her adoration (163). She realizes he had much earlier figured out the tenuousness of maps and thus learned to love despite the limitations imposed over a place or a region by politics. Therefore, despite the violence, Karim had tightly embraced the insignias of Karachi.

Raheen realizes she must learn to see Karachi through Karim's eyes. Her realization sets in when she had a conversation with Karim by the beach right after Zafar mentions in front of his daughter as well as others the reasons behind his deserting Maheen. While Raheen felt despondent by the occasion, and left for the beach, Karim later joined her for company.

As they began to talk, they recalled April 1987, when they last visited the beach together (215). Later, their conversation turns serious. Wondering if Karim wanted her to hate her father,

Karim's response is a reminder of his cosmopolitan commitment to other identities: "I didn't want you to hate him, Raheen. I wanted you to stop being him" (219). To Karim, Zafar failed to see beyond the fault-lines of history, thus, he had mistreated Maheen, and later, discarded her. He though Raheen's father had accepted the verdict of those his "self" could identify with. Therefore, he participated in Maheen's "othering" by rejecting her.

Karim implores with Raheen not to fall into the trap of parochial belonging: "And you're the same. You're the same, Raheen. The city is falling apart and you're the same. That's why I sent you those maps. Because I wanted you to find a way to see beyond the tiny circle you live in" (219). If Raheen had refused to see the political violence overtaking Karachi, Karim kept sending her "maps," so she is reminded of her links to the city. In the past, she had a close encounter with the ragtag politics of the city, but she may not had realized Karachi's present circumstances bore signs of the past symbolized by the break-up of East Pakistan.

The incident happened when Zia's car – with Raheen, Sonia and Karim as passengers – was stuck in Mehmoodabad. Raheen recalls the moment thinking how she was very conscious of her privilege at that time: "I got out also and stood beside them, despite the internal voice that sounded a lot like Sonia warning me I'd only call attention to myself, and who knows what strange types were wandering around the deserted streets at this hour, and perhaps I should at least cover my bare arms with my dupatta" (158). Exposed to an unfamiliar environment, Raheen becomes worried and confused about her responsibilities.

A little later, a man walks by asking Zia and Karim if they need help. As they discuss anti-theft device, the stranger says, "I wanted to join the civil service. I'm an educated, literate person, you know. I sat for the exam, and I did all right. I mean, not top marks, but decent, good marks. But I sat the exams from Karachi. It's not enough to be just good" (160). The man's

perspective manifested anger against the recruitment system. But, Raheen had clearly missed his expression.

Besides disregarding his frustrations, she also utters a naïve comment: "'We're Karachiwallahs, too,' I said, the word stumbling on my tongue. It just seemed a bad idea to use the more Anglicized 'Karachiite'" (160). Failing to identify with the man's concerns, and more importantly with what Karim had pointed out to be "the quota system," which imposed limitations on the many lives in her city, Raheen had simplistically captured belongings and identities in Pakistan (160). The omniscient narrative voice of Raheen, who now knew about Maheen and her father's role in her abandonment during the 1971 war, regards her oversight more seriously.

If the familial was comforting to her, Karim wanted her to see beyond the confined borders of privilege: "Privilege erased the day-to-day struggles of ethnic politics, and however Karim might want me to feel about the matter I couldn't pretend I was sorry that I had been born on 'this side of Clifton Bridge' where class bound everyone together in an enveloping, suffocating embrace, with ethnicity only a secondary or a tertiary concern" (160). If "ethnic politics" existed in Karachi, in never touched her life "on 'this side of Clifton Bridge' where class bound everyone together in an enveloping, suffocating embrace," as if the "other" did not exist.

Recalling Karim's advice to see the fragments of the familiar Karachi map, the omniscient narrative voice of Raheen remembers Karim's capacity to identify with the man's complaints. If "You're Muhajir," Karim had told the man, he was "Bengali," being more confident in his embrace of "his mother's ethnicity rather than his father's," while reaching out to the man (161). The muhajir also relays Karim's trust by saying, "We didn't learn anything, did

we? From ’71,” to which Karim responded, “We learned to forget” (161). Karim, Raheen now realizes, went beyond their familiar comfort to empathize with the perils of “other” people, and therefore, had learned to appreciate the mystery of maps – responsible for the misery of peoples living in the margins.

Later, when she goes to the United States to study, Raheen also comes to reconcile with his father’s actions in 1971. In the cosmopolitan milieu of Boston, she meets the now immigrant Aunt Maheen, who had reconciled with Zafar’s decision to leave her and understood his predicament. To Raheen, she mentions, if she was marginalized, Zafar was also the target of the nationalist sentiment that “othered” the Bengalis, as West Pakistanis called him “a Bingo-lover” to humiliate him (276). She then produces a letter that she thought would give Raheen some closure: “This may help; it may not” (277).

Zafar’s letter to Aunt Maheen is interpreted by Raheen as her father’s abnegation of his Pakistani “self,” as he reached out to express solidarity with Maheen’s Bengali identity. If the atrocities the Pakistan army had committed exacerbated the consequence of West Pakistani racist attitudes, and thereby defined Maheen as the “other,” her father’s letter appeared to Raheen to be some form of declaration: “‘How can Pakistan still be when the whole is gone and we are left with a part?’” (279). He seems to argue, since the Bengalis were “othered,” Pakistan became void as an entity. Aunt Maheen had preserved the letter of her father, which Raheen conjectures as a sign of her reconciliation between her father and Karim’s mother.

If Karachi had taught Karim to value the “other” coexisting in the “self,” Raheen had learned to view the world through the fragments of the maps Karim wanted her to see. Her father’s letter to Aunt Maheen was such a fragment that gave her peace, as it had suggested to

her that his father have denounced the nationalized Pakistani "self" that turned Maheen into an "other" in 1971.

**Conclusion**

I began this comparative analysis of the Bangladeshi Anglophone novel, Zia Haider Rahman's *In the Light of What We Know*, and, Pakistani English-language literature, Kamila Shamsie's *Kartography*, by invoking the strong reactions elicited against the film *Meherjaan* that depicts romance between a young Bengali woman and a Baloch soldier who has deserted the Pakistan army. If the national space has not been able to ensure a more robust discussion of the problems of the war, the international front with regards to discussion the war is also mired by controversy.

Few years ago, Sharmila Bose published *Dead Reckoning: Memories of the 1971 Bangladesh War* (2011) that kickstarted a fresh round of controversy surrounding the war. Bose argued that the gravity of Pakistan army's war crimes is far less serious than is projected in Bangladesh. Cultural and political reactions to her work have been equally severe in Bangladesh, as had been the case with the film, prompting scholars and writers to investigate the wounds that is associated with 1971.[77] Much attention has been paid to the contradictory official counts of the war-time casualties; in Bangladesh it is estimated that around 3 million people lost their lives, while Pakistan has maintained that only 26,000 lives have been lost and a majority of those perished were Urdu speaking non-Bengali Muslims.[78] Moreover, Bangladesh has termed the army atrocities as "genocide" and in 2009 began the legal recourse to punish local collaborators of the Pakistan army. Domestic political equations have further blighted the possibility of a

[77] Naeem Mohaiemen's "Flying Blind: Waiting for a Real Reckoning of 1971" undertakes the task of arguing against Bose's line of argument that failed to fully explicate the genocidal agenda of the Pakistan army.
[78] The Report of the Hamoodur Rehman Commission of Inquiry Into the 1971 War has also downplayed the issue of civilian casualties in the war.

broader understanding of 1971. While the ruling Awami League government has officially made stricter demands from Pakistan as compensation for the war, the right-wing Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), whose political agenda is motivated by the two-nation theory, has been keen to develop relations with Pakistan, and in certain circumstances has been softer in its approach to address the Pakistan army's role in 1971.[79]

The legacy of fraught Bangladesh-Pakistan relationship impinges on our discussion of the novels that engage the war by overlapping the "self" and the "other." In fact, a cosmopolitan sense of empathizing with the "other" is foregrounded in both the novels. If in Rahman's novel the Pakistani narrator feels compelled to delineate Zafar's transformative role in his life including being able to realize the significance of his father's dissent against the Pakistani state, he confesses to his betraying his Bangladesh's friend's desire for a child to compensate for the unfortunate circumstances of his birth. Shamsie in *Kartography* presents a fictionalized critique of the national silence in Pakistan regarding the military's genocidal role in 1971, as the novel's protagonist discovers her father's role in perpetuating the marginalization of Maheen, his betrothed of Bengali origin. The discovery enables her to empathize with Karim more, whose cosmopolitan fascination with maps, she discovers, was a strategy to cope with the silence regarding her mother's vulnerability in 1971.

Both the novels therefore suggest literature provides a very active space for engaging fraught questions that are linked to the contradictory narratives of 1971 in the two countries. Going beyond the complex regional contours of the political differences, they regard the Pakistan

[79] Cara Cilano (2011) invokes the half-hearted apology delivered by President Parvez Musharraf in 2002 to argue that it went "beyond various Bangladeshi politicians' rejection of the gesture and then prime minister Khaleda Zia's quick 'welcome[ing of] the move on behalf of her government" to reemerge as a significant political issue when the International War Crimes Trial began in Bangladesh (5). During the Shahbag Protest in 2013 the political cleavage in the Bangladesh society became more visible, as Pakistan also became involved in the internal political squabble as the parliament passed a resolution in favor of the Islamist politician who was sentenced by a Bangladeshi court.

army's role in the war as impinging on the possibility of explored shared notions of identity. The novels illustrate, if the two nations were to correspond bilaterally, acknowledgment of the military genocidal brutalities committed during the conflict is a must, as it is necessary to address the voices of those marginalized during and after the war.

## Chapter 5: Coda: Bangladesh and its Literatures in the World

*Two Partitions* is an exploration of a protracted decolonial struggle integral to the liberation of Bangladesh. I delineate the dynamic effects of multiple, ever shifting identities on the nation's creation through the 1947 Partition, the East Pakistan experience (1947-1970), and the war of 1971. This project simultaneously considers Bengali and Anglophone novels of wide-ranging characteristics, as it seeks to interlink the Partition-era discourses on nation formation, the complex dynamics of the East Pakistan-West Pakistan double-bind and the Bengali struggle for international legitimacy actualized through the 1971 war. My exploration of Bangladesh's emergence story generates intra-South Asian dialogue between the following literary cultures: the Bengali vernaculars, and the canonical and emergent South Asian postcolonial, Global Anglophone novels, as well as its subset the Bangladeshi Anglophone novel.

I have defined these three sets of literatures as "contested narrations," since their fictionalization of the historic complexities, including the fissures, gaps, absences, "othered" identities, and oppressed voices contribute to a dialogic understanding of Bangladesh. While nationalist discourses dominate our understanding of nation-formation, nationality, and the ethnic and religious minorities within the nation, these narratives delineate intricate stories critical to the production of a plural discourse of the specific historical shifts informing Bangladesh's emergence. My analysis of these narratives from a comparative perspective foregrounds distinct historical moments – rendered marginalized in the nationalist historiography – critical to the understanding of Bangladesh.

They include the influence of communalism on the Bengali peasants at the height of Bengal's Partition in 1947, when the idea of Pakistan swayed East Bengal's Muslim majority peasants to accentuate their difference from their Hindu counterparts, the minority question in

East Pakistan during the region's socio-cultural and political transformation from 1947 to 1970, the multidimensionality of the political insurgency in East Pakistan, and the interconnections between war-time hypermasculine nationalism and the problematic of the birangona in post-1971 Bangladesh. I also draw from the intra-South Asian feud between Bangladesh and Pakistan to reimagine the origins of present-day conflict with the contours of the 1971 war. The cultural iterations I draw from the distinctive the South Asian literary archives illuminate a rich story of socio-political complexity, unlike the monolithic war story presented in the Bengali literatures consecrated as national culture in Bangladesh. In my attempt to inform a nuanced literary and cultural history of Bangladesh's emergence through the partitions of 1947 and 1971, I must therefore explain the hostilities between two cultural frontiers – namely, the Bengali vernacular, and the Bangladeshi Anglophone – of present-day Bangladesh.

According to the prominent Bangladeshi literary critic and translator Fakrul Alam (2015), "Bangladeshi writing in English" is yet to emerge "in full bloom" because the nation's literary culture is vicariously shaped by "the role Bengali-language nationalism played in the country's history." The Bengali vernaculars dominate the local readership so much so that some of them may also be unaware of the existence of a Bangladeshi Anglophone literary tradition that is equally attuned to the socio-political and cultural realities of the country. Even to this day the annual "Ekushey Boimela" – an annual Dhaka-based book-fair signifying the national memorialization of the language martyrs of the East Pakistan era – continues to attract thousands of literary enthusiasts. The event ensures a continuous discussion and debate of the poems, plays, short story collections, creative non-fiction, travelogues, and novels published primarily in Bengali. Social media also plays a key role in the dissemination of new literatures in Bengali published in the "Ekushey Boimela," and with the parallel bookfairs organized in places like

New York and London, the Bengali vernaculars continue to dominate the nation's cultural landscape.

However, the growing Anglophone literary tradition, illustrative of the cultural globalization of Bangladesh's literature, now draws strength from a steady increase in creative writers having a Bangladeshi background. The much older pattern of migration to the United Kingdom has an imprint on this culture too, as is reflected in the recent successes of British Bangladeshi writers Monica Ali and Zia Haider Rahman. A Bangladesh based local Anglophone tradition is now growing due to the increasing interest of the globally reputed publishing houses in South Asian writing in English. The number of home-grown Anglophone writers have grown steadily in the recent years with the likes of the late Numair Atif Choudhury, Shazia Omar, Arif Anwar and Nadeem Zaman receiving the attention of international publishing houses. Indeed, some of them have produced excellent works of literature in English including Choudhury's *Babu Bangladesh!* (2019) garnering critical appraise.

And yet, Bangladeshi Anglophone literature in comparison to Indian Writing in English, or the contemporary Pakistani Anglophone literary culture, has failed to gain a formidable literary readership both in the country and in the world. In both India and Pakistan, the Anglophone literature has wider recognition because the "elites and segments of the middle classes rely more and more on English as a marker of their identity and place in society in the postcolonial decades" (Mufti *Forget English!* 159). English's global dominance as a language has come to shape a robust creative writing culture in the Indian and Pakistani contexts too.

In contradiction, the vernacular intelligentsia, ideologically invested in the continuity of linguistic nationalism, exercises greater influence over the Bangladeshi middle-class readership. Championing the cause of vernacular literature, this intelligentsia is contemptuous of the

growing Anglophone literary culture. Moreover, with the popularization of the *Dhaka Lit Fest* among the aspiring middle class in the recent years, bickering between the vernacular and the Anglophone camps has become a regularity. In fact, the Bangladeshi predicament is akin to the earlier debates around literature and language in the postcolonial societies. While Ngugi wa Thiong'o (1981) and Chinua Achebe (1997) had debated each other to determine their choice of language for African literature, the debate's South Asian version was championed by Aijaz Ahmad (1992), who brandished postcolonial writers as opportunist immigrants with disregard for the rich literary traditions of the major Indian languages.

On the other side of the spectrum, there also exists condescension towards vernacular literature. Aamir Mufti in *Forget English! Orientalisms and World Literatures* (2016) cites Salman Rushdie's disregard for the South Asian vernacular literary cultures.[80] By referring to Rushdie's opinion that "the only contemporary Indian literature of significant worth was being written in English," Mufti says that Rushdie may not have been "unaware" of the literary cultures in the dozen vernaculars (155). What Rushdie is doing, Mufti argues, is reproducing the same Anglicist logic that Macaulay used to prioritize European language literatures. For Rushdie, Anglophone literature should be the "*authenticating* literature of India," and as the dominant cultural front, it must adjudicate "the literariness of the 'vernacular' languages" (156). His perspective is an example of the tension existing between the distinct literary traditions in the South Asian context, whereby the vernacular and the Anglophone are "the [opposing] sites of a fraught politics of language" (Mufti 154-158). Moreover, the contemporary Anglophone

[80] Mufti (2016) argues that the global hegemony of the contemporary South Asian Anglophone novel has peripheralized the vernacular literary tradition, and this outcome is linked to the larger societal shifts that began in the colonial times. I am providing a counterexample to frame the Bangladeshi context. The discussants of *Wasafiri* and *World Literature Today* advocating in favor of Bangladeshi literature's globalization does not present their case with contempt akin to that of Rushdie's.

tradition of the Indian subcontinent also enjoys a hegemonic position due to the existence of an English-speaking middle-class intelligentsia. Their globalizing rhetoric is in conversation with the metropolitan literary establishment.

Upon critical examination, the Bangladeshi context appears to be different. In the case of Bangladeshi literary culture, vernacular Bengali writers who have significantly contributed to the project of national culture are the progenitors of a literary establishment. They circulate widely within the nation-state, and in the Bengali speaking diaspora since these Bangladeshi vernacular writers are invested in popular localized narratives. They creatively engage with the wider socio-political transformations such as the transitioning from the rural to the urban milieus, changing gender expectations, as well as class conflict. Writers also explore the events integral to the 1971 war and the political transformations since the nation's formation. In comparison, the proponents of Bangladeshi Anglophone culture are invested in the promotion of literatures in English on a global scale.

Therefore, Ahsan Akbar and K. Anis Ahmed, the editors of a special issue of *Wasafiri* (2015), introduce Bangladeshi English writing to an international readership as a new product in the literary marketplace. They brand the English language writing as an emergent South Asian literary tradition:

> Bangladesh is very much a late-comer to the Anglophone dialogue of former colonies. But there is another dialogue that has continued unabated, from before the country's independence in 1971 to this day, in the Bangla language. Indeed, given that Bangladesh is possibly that only country whose independence was spurred on by a language movement (1952), there was a time when writing in English could almost be viewed as a

form of disloyalty. The fact that English writing is now received, - and, in fact, nurtured - without anxiety is a testament to a new-born country's growing cultural confidence (1)

Here, the editorial voices make two major claims. The first claim is more of a general observation regarding the absence on the world stage of Bangladeshi English writing. It is premised on the assumption that this absence has been a loss, but as Bangladeshis enter the Anglophone dialogue, what now looks promising will eventually flourish. The editors' second claim assert that there is tension between the historically developed vernacular literatures and the burgeoning Anglophone literary tradition. The editors cite the long-standing hostility towards creative writing in English from the proponents of Bengali linguistic nationalism. They consider English writing as "a form of disloyalty," but there is now a positive reception of writers who have chosen to write in English. This nurturing attitude suggests "a new-born country's growing cultural confidence."

The perspective of the *Wasafiri* editors is echoed in the section "Opening Bangladesh to the World: A Conversation with Four Contemporary Writers" of the 2013 edition of *World Literature Today*. The section highlights David Shook's interview with four Bangladeshi Anglophone writers – K. Anis Ahmed, Tahmima Anam, Farah Ghuznavi and Mahmud Rahman – who also highlight the antagonism between Bangladesh's Bengali literary culture and the Anglophone writing tradition. In response to Shook's inquiry about the belatedness of Bangladeshi Anglophone writing, the interviewees identify the post-1971 national language policy as a major contributing factor to the impoverishment of Anglophone writing. In post-Liberation Bangladesh, the literary culture became insular due to the influence of Bengali ethno-linguistic nationalism,[81] and since then the vernacular culture has been in decline as Bangladeshi

[81] The Bengali ethno-linguistic nationalism has been influenced by the 1952 Language Movement, which in turn influences the vernacular literary culture of Bangladesh. Apart from Badruddin Umar's discussion of the Language

writers have not been attuned to the contemporary developments in world literature (45-48). The Anglophone writers, interviewed by Shook, suggest that the nation's vernacular literary tradition is not in sync with international literature. Therefore, literary events such as the Dhaka Lit Fest – formerly The Hay Festival Dhaka – can facilitate an exchange between Bengali vernacular writers and global writers.

Moreover, the Bangladeshi Anglophone writers have produced measured cultural responses to the 1971 war.[82] For example, Syed Manzu Islam's *The Song of Our Swampland* (2010) is sensitive to the plight of the Urdu speaking non-Bengali migrants, as is evident from the novel's portrayal of the non-Bengali character Kulsum and her struggles in 1971. Similarly, Tahmima Anam's *A Golden Age* (2007) depicts Rehana's love for Urdu literature and culture while she also sides with the Bengali insurgents fighting against the Pakistan army.

Established vernacular writers, on the other hand, tend to impose a sense of national self-aggrandizement in their aestheticization of the war. As purveyors of the political project of Bengali nationalism, they narrativize a glorified version of the 1971 war. Vernacular writers present a "sacralized history" of the 1971 war by framing it as an ideological clash between Bengali ethno-linguistic nationalism and Pakistani nationalism (Mohaiemen "Simulation at Wars' End" 2016). In fact, they have pioneered the literary and cultural imaginaries of post-1971 Bangladesh having lived through the tumultuous 9 months of the conflict.[83] This literature culture operates with a nationalist agenda, as they frequently narrate commonplace and frequent

Movement in his two-volume historical analysis, the Language Movement in East Pakistan has received sparse critical attention.

[82] My article "Transcultural Dilemma in *The Good Muslim*: An Analysis of Bangladesh Through the Competing Visions of Maya and Sohail," included in the Routledge publication *Transcultural Humanities in South Asia: Critical Essays on Literature and Culture* (2022), focuses on the intricate representation of the post-1971 political upheavals in Bangladesh in the Anglophone novel Tahmima Anam's *The Good Muslim* (2011).

[83] Contemporary Bangladeshi novels, plays, short stories, poetry, and films copiously draw from 1971 (Mookherjee 2015). In comparison, the representation of 1971 in Bangladeshi Anglophone literature is more nuanced in comparison to the mainstream vernaculars.

stories of heroic guerillas thumping the modern Pakistani military, soldiers in the Pakistan army committing murderous acts and behaving like lecherous looters with the Bengalis, Islamic clerics indiscriminately murdering the Hindu minority, and they also portray wartime atrocities and suffering. Seeking to establish a nationalist version of history in the cultural arena, these one-dimensional renderings have shaped a monolithic national culture in Bangladesh.[84]

Literary works that narrate the 1971 war and its attendant tensions as a Bengali nationalist glory, or as a triumph of the Bengali nationalist discourse over "the deployment of Islam as the central tenet of Pakistani nationalism" reproduce uncomplicated stories of 1971 (Bose and Jalal *Modern South Asia* 202). Simplistic categorization of the "Liberation War" as a fight between good and evil in the vernacular literary culture reproduce the dominant narratives of the Bengali struggle suited to the project of national culture.[85] The reproduction of dominant nationalist discourses as authentic literary culture is consequential because in Bangladesh there exists a foreboding trend of acknowledging the "history-of-victors," as in the case of the politicians fiddling with "the process of documentation and compilation [of history] – attempting to set up a reward-patronage system for loyal academics, and punishment system (or exile) for those who refuse to toe the party line" (Mohaiemen *Prisoners* 8-9). Literary figures have indeed weaponized 1971 to settle domestic political scores in contemporary Bangladesh.

Writers have also critically examined the post-1947 liberation struggle in East Pakistan and thereafter. They also use new storytelling techniques to incorporate ambivalent and silenced

[84] While the two conflicting narratives of Bangladesh's nationalism have influenced the war narrative in Bangladesh, literary and cultural renditions have internalized the Bengali nationalist ideals. These cultural representations conflate the Pakistan state and its local collaborators' misuse of religion, and the religious orthodoxy of Bengali Muslims. Moreover, the military regimes attempted to stymie the cultural memorialization of the war in the 1980s. They patronized Islamic nationalism as a key component to the nation's identity.

[85] Bengali nationalists have appropriated the cultural narratives of the 1971 war, as in the last two decades they have endeavored to build a populist platform against the war criminals. Naeem Mohaiemen (2016) discusses in detail the bizarre attempt of the nationalists to establish as historical truth the simulated footages of the documentary film *Muktir Gaan* (1995).

voices of the 1971 war, therefore, offering many dimensions to the East Pakistan-West Pakistan conflict. Works such as Akhteruzzaman Elias's *Chilekothar Sepai* (*The Sepoy in the Attic*), Shaheen Akhter's *Taalash* (*The Search*), Shaheedul Zahir's *Jibon O Rajnoitik Bastobota* (*Life and Political Reality: Two Novellas*), Mahmudul Haque's *Jibon Amar Bon*, and Shawkat Ali 's trilogy *Dhakkhinayoner Din* some of the excellent examples of literary works among others that offer counter-narratives to the nationalist understanding of the 1971 war. Moreover, contemporary Bangladeshi visual artists and filmmakers have addressed the war by focusing on its multilayered narratives.[86]

A compelling example of multilayered visual narrative is Tareque Masud and Catherine Masud's short film *The Barbershop* (*Noroshundor* 2009). Set in Old Dhaka – a remnant of pre-colonial Mughal capital of the Bengal province – the film engages three stock categories, an aspiring "mukti" (a freedom fighter of Hindu background), a small group of non-Bengali Urdu speaking men working in a barbershop and an Islamist militia loyal to the occupying army. In the film, the non-Bengali barbers save the Bengali youth from Hindu background despite sensing that he might be the "mukti" the Pakistani army has arrived in their part of the town to capture. Indeed, counter-narratives such as that of *The Barbershop* (2009) engage the heterogeneous sites of the conflict zone that informs East Pakistan's transformation into Bangladesh. The narrative style of *The Barbershop* therefore problematizes the cultural project of the nationalists by emphasizing ordinary people's humanity.

[86] While the representation of the 1971 war is a politically charged matter in Bangladesh, contemporary films, like Rubaiyat Hossain's *Meherjaan* (2011), Zahidur Rahman Anjan's *Meghmallar* (2014) and Tareque Masud's *Matir Moyna* (2002), offer a more complex perspective of the war. I should also note Naeem Mohaiemen's (2016) attestation that within a few years of independence Bangladesh's military dictators began to discourage cinematic representations of the war. "In cinema halls, there was a sharp drop in representations of the war from the late 1970s," to quip Mohaiemen's (2016) association of such "a mysterious disappearance" with the struggling cinema industry of the nation.

In *Two Partitions*, I circumvent the nationalized archive of vernacular literary culture, as I bring together Bengali vernaculars and the South Asian Anglophone novels, both canonical and emergent, to discuss Bangladesh's formation in the intersections of the 1947 Partition, the East Pakistan era (1947-1970), and the 1971 war. In the process, this project moves away from existing interrogations of Bangladesh's creation in literature scholarship. We can notice two distinct approaches in these scholarships. Some scholars highlight the 1947 Partition and Bengali nationalism in their interpretation of the literary cultures influenced by the 1971 war (Mookerjea-Leonard 2017; Das 2017). Others take a postcolonial approach as they engage transnational literatures critical of nationalism (Cilano 2011; Ananya Kabir 2013). My simultaneous examination of the literary cultures of the three distinct periods enables me to put into conversation distinct sets of vernaculars having a transnational agency. In this project, I have also engaged Indian English writing and Bangladeshi Anglophone novels to problematize the political categorization of Hindu-Muslim difference as a criterion for nation formation. My comparative and dialogic vision looks beyond the inscription of the 1971 war in Bangladeshi and Pakistani nationalist discourses to explore the connected lives of the Bangladeshi and Pakistani diaspora.

To shed light on the writers, I have chosen to engage with distinct sets of vernacular writers. Both Mallabarman and Osman, I argue in Chapter 1, were influenced by the short-lived political project of "United Bengal," allude to the disastrous impact of the Partition on the interfaith ties that sustained the rural societies of Bengal. As writers they resist neat national and religious categorizations demanded by Bengal's political climate leading up to the 1947 Partition. While They delineate the sectarian tensions that altered the relation between the Hindu and the Muslim peasantry in Bengal's countryside during the 1940s. Indeed, they are draw

inspiration from a tradition of Bengali culture and literature that survived the catastrophes of 1947 and 1971 to remain undivided.[87] Therefore, they present the syncretic and interfaith folk values as a living tradition momentarily disrupted by the deteriorating Hindu-Muslim relations in rural Bengal.

On a similar vein, both Akhteruzzaman Elias and Shaheen Akhtar go beyond nationalism in their multilayered rendition of the historical shifts of 1947 and 1971. He portrays the politically tumultuous late 1960s East Pakistan in *The Sepoy in the Attic* as a battleground of parallel insurgencies, one drawing from an earlier decolonial struggle we witness in the epochal depiction of East Bengal's peasant insurgencies at the time of the 1947 Partition in *Khoabnama*, and the other highlighting the Bengali nationalist trend challenging the West Pakistani ruling elite. The distinct ideologies also contend against one another in the urban and rural sites to seize the initiative of the anti-Pakistan struggle undergoing in the then East Pakistan. Elias treats these struggles as critical and transformative to shaping of the post-1971 Bangladeshi society. The Bangladeshi feminist writer Shaheen Akhtar's novel *The Search* (*Talaash*) fictionalizes Bangladesh's struggle with the rehabilitation of the birangana due to the sociocultural stigma associated with the sexual identity of the victims in a patriarchal culture. The novel critically examines hypermasculine nationalism in South Asia by delineating the Pakistan army's complicity in the perpetuation of widespread gendered violence as well as the national bourgeoisie's failure to rehabilitate the victimized women in post-liberation, war-affected Bangladesh.

[87] Mufti (2016) has traced the modern Bengali vernacular's birth to 19th Century Calcutta Orientalism. The Bengali vernacular also became the intellectual tradition of the *bhadralok* Hindus but was later recycled by the emergent Bengali Muslim middle-class of the early 20th Century, which also inspired a Bengali Muslim literary renaissance (Bose 2014). Sudipta Kaviraj (2015) has referred to the tradition's pre-colonial Islamic heritage, while Auritro Majumder (2020) explores the influence of radical tendencies on Bengali literature in a global context.

Taken together these oppositional Bengali literary dialogues tell a story of what Deleuze and Guattari (1986) define as a "minor" literature, as they attempt to theorize Kafka's choice to write in the German language. By putting the various Bengali literary cultures in a dialogue with one another, I have highlighted multilayered intricacy of transnational South Asian vernacular literature. With the literatures of the Partition era Bengali writers of East Pakistan and the Indian Bengali writers set in the backdrop of communal violence the marginal status of the Hindu and Muslim minorities in Pakistan and India respectively, contemporary Bangladeshi literature offer as insight into the post-Partition tensions between the entities East Pakistan and West Pakistan, as they also explore the problematic dimensions of the 1971 war.

*Two Partitions* also examines another literary form, the South Asian Anglophone narratives of three subcontinental nations India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh from a comparative cultural perspective. this Anglophone novelistic tradition offer a critical perspective of the national discourses in the region, as novels such as Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* (1980) have introduced the region's postcolonial transformations to the readers of world literature. My strategic reading of contemporary Bangladeshi English language fictions in relation to South Asian Anglophone novels authored by writers with Indian and Pakistani roots generates a transnational study of the 1947 Partition and the 1971 war. My comparative postcolonial lens puts these fictions in conversation with one another, as in Chapter 2 I analyze Amitav Ghosh's *The Shadow Lines* in relation to Dilruba Z. Ara's *Blame* to situate Hindu-Muslim antagonism as an enduring impact of Bengal's 1947 Partition. While religious antagonism played a role in the silencing of East Pakistan's Hindu minority, they were singled out as Pakistan's enemy leading up to the 1971 war and during the war, they faced persecution on a greater scale.

Another site of intraregional South Asian conflict pertains to the separation between the once conjoined entities of East Pakistan and West Pakistan with the former becoming Bangladesh after 1971. By offering a comparative reading of a Pakistani novel and a Bangladeshi diasporic novel, I analyze how the diasporic Anglophone novels illustrate the enduring aftereffect of the break-up of Pakistan in 1971 that significantly transformed South Asia once again after the momentous events of the 1947 Partition.[88]

With the near complete breakdown of communication between the citizens of Bangladesh and Pakistan in the aftermath of the war, the national discourses in the two nations perpetuate a hostile "self" versus "other" binary to frame the events of the 1971 war. As the novels tap into the intricate kinship networks to erase tensions that flared up during the 1971 war, they invoke specific problematics of the conflict, with Rahman's novel examining the consequences of Pakistan army's utilization of war-time rape on the Bengali character Zafar and his family, while Shamsie's novel is about the peripheralization of middle-class Bengalis living in the war-time milieu of West Pakistan.

*Two Partitions*, as a comparative engagement of the Bengali literary narratives, the emergent Bangladeshi Anglophone literary culture, and South Asian novels analyzes the postcolonial formation of Bangladesh by engaging historical identity formation moments that shaped the various dimensions of the transnational political transformations. The project enunciates a complex but rich analysis of the human tragedies of Bengal's partition, as it also discusses the plight of the Hindu minority in East Pakistan and their persecution during the genocidal military campaign orchestrated by the Pakistan army in 1971. I also offer a reading of

[88] Nasia Anam (2018) has said that the Bangladeshi Anglophone and the Pakistani Anglophone novels can converse with one another since no dialogue exists between the Bengali and Urdu cultural establishments. I have set these Anglophone traditions in conversation with the knowledge that their cultural politics is an embodiment of the values of the Anglicized middle-class (Boehmer 2014; Mufti 2016).

the multiple visions of the liberation struggle. Thereby, I offer a critical estimation of the nation's mainstream national culture shaped by the premises of Bengali nationalism. Instead, I recast the divergent Bengali literary voices that are critical of the national discourse. With the robust global circulation in mind, I comparatively engage South Asian Anglophone literatures to generate an analysis of the politically charged moments of two distinct yet interrelated events. They are the problematic of the Hindu minority during the unfolding of the East Pakistan and West Pakistan conflict, and the war's consequences in the post-1971 Bangladeshi and Pakistani societies in the backdrop of the present-day tensions between Bangladesh and Pakistan. Anglophone novels offer a comparative and dialogic readings as they are analyzed in the context of Bangladesh's emergence through the partitions of 1947 and 1971. In conclusion, *Two Partitions* is an endeavor to understand a long process of decolonization and liberation in the Global South, as I illuminate the complex story of Bangladeshi identity with the project's undertaking a comparative study of the Bengali vernacular literary tradition and Anglophone novels representing the three postcolonial nations of the Indian subcontinent.

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