

Beyond the Mapmaking Gaze: Colonies, Narratives, and the 'Nation' in Making

Mohona Chatterjee

Assistant Professor
Department of English, Amity Institute of English Studies and Research, Amity University,
Kolkata, West Bengal

&

Sagnik Banerjee

Assistant Professor
Department of English, Sundarban Hazi Desarat College, South 24 Parganas, West Bengal

Abstract

The beginning of India's journey into the idea of 'nationhood' correlated with its tryst with colonial modernity. The idea coalesced and transformed through historical exigencies after the Independence to embody a fixity of space and its conjoint identities that enumerated a definable cartographic entity, often foregrounding some aspects of identity formation, while others operated mostly as an undercurrent in this journey of the nation-space and its historiography of self-determination. Part of this writing of spatial history, though recounting the vivisections and geo-political transitions that have characterised the sub-continent, the spectre of Partition, particularly in the seventy-fifth year of its remembrance accords a unique opportunity to delve a necessary glance beyond the macroscopic history and tread into the spaces of 'impalpable' realities that characterised the experience of a post-partition refugee. So, while, on the one hand, in the nascent period of the journey of Independent India, the nation-space was signposted with fixated metaphors of nationalistic terms, on the other the realities of partition would incorporate through the experience of the post-partition refugee and their spatial negotiation, identities of different terms, where the space would be marked by its very absence. The journey into creating this spatial identity operates by realizing the 'un-remembered histories' through the trauma of violence and its interconnections with memory. The paper focuses on Bhaswati Ghosh's *Victory Colony* (1950) which, as a novel, offers an interesting scope to trace the experiential realities of the refugee situation in the camps and later, the colonies in post-partition Bengal, and attempts to trace the process of nation formation viewed through the lens of a 'refugee', fashioned by memory, nostalgia, and the legacy of loss.

Keywords: Partition, Nation-space, refugee, Colony, memory, Bijoynagar

Give. A piece of land,
A corner of green grass,
A sliver of a courtyard.
Because he could build no home,
No home with a roof overhead,
He's been living in the forests,
He's been deprived for so long...¹

The journey into the independence of the British Indian Empire in 1947 was to be done through the vivisection of not only a large geographical territory but also a political mass, who would forever be chaperoned by the historical exigencies that were brought upon them. India's journey into the growth of a 'national' consciousness would forever carry as a spectral reminder, the silent experiences of those who were, to quote Rushdie, 'handcuffed to history' (Rushdie, *Midnight's Children* 1) as the nation(s) just born were not just transgressing temporal borders towards the epoch of political self-determinacy and its subsequent euphoria, but also across the 'Radcliffe Line',² the full impact of which 'was not anticipated by the political and administrative heads of India, Pakistan and the United Kingdom' (Chakravarty, *Boundaries and Belonging* 1). Incidentally both Nehru, and Jinnah, the two heads of the newly born 'nations' would in their opening speeches carry, as Sipra Mukherjee had rightly pointed out, religious connotations (Mukherjee 56), and the 'birth of a nation', despite its political and historical underpinnings is not a secular affair and its materiality does not constitute the complete narrative. (Mukherjee 57). She further goes on to elaborate on the very idea of the 'nation' that was imported to India in the nineteenth century with, ironically its colonial modernity and its accompanying connotations, have over time, borne marks of the processes of its indigenisation. However, the slipperiness of the very concept and its context remains an important aspect of consideration, with the idea of the nation, embodying in some respects the essentialities of the fixity of space, a definable cartographic region, that often undercut what Mukherjee, notes as the 'impalpable and elusive' (ibid.) aspects of nation formation, which remain forever there, not in the foreground, but mostly as an undercurrent. India's tryst with the historiography of nation-formation and its conclusion operates till the appointed hour of India's freedom, notes Ramachandra Guha (Chakravarty *Boundaries and Belonging* 1) and though in the seventy-fifth year of its commemoration, the historiography of the Indian nation has grown and accommodated various aspects of one of the greatest mass exodus in human history, which occurred with the Partition of India 1947³, where despite scholarships on its macroscopic manifestations, the 'impalpable' aspects have often remained elusive and under the radar of most scholarships focussing on the Partition. The massive displacement of 'refugees'⁴, saw spaces, which in the early years, were formulated in terms of a fixated national discourse, were made to re-align to the newer historical circumstances and the partition experience, which altered inextricably not only the contours of spatial metaphors in the newly formed nation(s) but also individual and social identities. The exploration of these historical and experiential parameters is therefore an essential metaphor in the assessment of not only the germination of the concept of the Indian nation but also re-assessing the historical event of partition, looking back through the unheard stories of the post-partition experience, which remains the focus of this paper. This essay follows on the notion that the

sense of belonging to a nation is born as much out of the secular details such as the Constitution, the laws, the government-issued ration or voter's cards, as out of emotions, beliefs and faiths that exist in people's minds (Mukherjee 57)

that influence their experience and how they, in turn, influence their immediate spatial surrounding; and attempts to re-read Bhaswati Ghosh's novel *Victory Colony 1950* (2020) and explore the post Partition experience in Bengal conjugatively with contemporary periodical accounts to assess the modes of spatial negotiation underwent through experiences of loss, longing, recovery, and resilience through a realistic portrayal of Calcutta's city-space in the 1950s (Mukhopadhyay 155) delving into the question of identity, space, and the role of the statist gaze and glean from it, questions of spatial, as well as caste identities and the very process of the formation of a nation observable from the individual's perspective carrying the dubious identity of a 'refugee'. This paper also attempts to argue that memory, remains the essential vehicle to explore through nostalgia, the loss and hence the re-assessment of spatial metaphors, otherwise absent in the structured gaze of the state.

The novel, set against the Partition, deals with the experience of Amala, a refugee of the Bengal Partition of 1947 and narrates her post-Partition experiences through the political and social climate that had existed in the Calcutta of the 1950s, thereby creating a narrative voice that emanates from the microscopic life of an individual to deal with the trauma and 'everyday' negotiations that was part of the refugee-lives. The novel predictably begins at the Sealdah Railway Station, the veritable entry point of the Partition refugees to Calcutta, especially the lower strata of the society, as Anindita Ghoshal notes—

The lower strata were in a real miserable condition; they took shelter at Sealdah railway platform and at transit and colony camps. They were solely dependent on government initiatives and other social political organizations, for protection and refuge (Ghoshal, *Refugees, Borders* 93).

The protagonist Amala Manna arrives at Sealdah station along with many others, having lost her parents to the communal violence that ensued as a fallout of the Partition. She arrives with her brother Kartik and in the wake of the situation, as they 'are engulfed in a crowd of refugees' (Mukhopadhyay 155) the brother and sister get separated and 'Amala is rescued by a group of volunteers led by Manas Dutta and the narrative shifts its focus to the trials and tribulations of living in the refugee camp' (ibid.). What follows is not just a narrative about a personal journal but also an exposition about the questions of space, place, and the myriad metaphors they entailed in a fledgling national cartographic imagination and how questions of identity are intertwined with the spatial metaphors and the larger concerns of 'Border' and 'Rehabilitation'. Manas Dutta, the novel's first-person narrator, forwards a touching question that remains at the core of the conceptual reinforcements of the refugee experience, in his diary entry; dated September 1950—

How symptomatic is that of the lives of the people whose stories these pages contain. Lives gnawed and spat out, stories erased without remorse, memories shredded with disdain. If there's any consolation, it is that at least these stories were told. For the people I am working with even that possibility seems remote. Who is going to write their stories when no one even cares whether they exist or not? (Ghosh 77)

The experiences of these individuals, the 'refugees' were mediated by their sense of place and how space was equated through their mediation with memory, as Ghosh points out quite early in the novel,

Before landing here, melas were the only places where she had seen so many people at once. But Sealdah station was no boisterous fair at her village. None of the loud cackle of her friends' laughter or hawkers bellowing their throats out to attract customers. Instead, there was swirling chaos—people boarding off trains, passengers pushing each other to catch trains, porters elbowing the crowds as they ferried luggage (Ghosh 1).

In a political climate where these people, were for the government, 'not just pests...but also the potential carriers of pests (Ghosh 4) the first association and negotiation with a newer space was through, a dissociation, a looking back to the past and viewing the present in contrast, where the identity and belonging remained associated with memory and nostalgia. Doreen Massey in her book *Space, Place and Gender* (1994) is seen to strive for the argument that associates 'a sense of place' with the more localised ideas of memory; where 'Place', 'was necessarily an essentialist concept' (Massey 119) that held within it the purported comfort of 'Being' instead of 'forging ahead with the (assumed progressive) project of Becoming' (ibid.); thereby implying both, in this case to be mutually exclusive and contradictory perspectives. However, for the refugees of Partition and the process of their settlement, memory, was the tool, through which both the self, the 'being' as Massey notes it was exemplified and I argue, it was also through the memory of the 'being' that the process of 'becoming' was initiated, hence creating a new meaning of place and space.

The process of 'becoming' in a nation-space is played out firstly, at the Gariahat Refugee Camp, a physical site, imbued with the official identity status that these individuals remain handcuffed to for the rest of their existence.

To queue in front of the Relief and Rehabilitation Office—to receive her official stamping. The label that would mark her 'Refugee' and entitle her to accommodation in a relief centre (Ghosh 5).

Ghosh's image of the rehabilitation process and the condition of the camp itself highlight the historical realities faced by the newly vivisected states, where West Bengal and particularly Calcutta witnessed a large influx of refugees. Joya Chatterji refers to P.N. Luthra's *Rehabilitation* (1972) and notes,

No one knows precisely how many refugees went to India from East Bengal during this phase. The official and improbably conservative, estimate for the period of eighteen years from 1946-1964 places the total at just under 5 million...The vast majority—three in four families—went to West Bengal (Chatterji, *Spoils of Partition* 105-06).

The period of migration, among the time frame Chatterji mentions, aligns to, as the titular year implies, the second phase of migration⁵ when, for the residents of East Pakistan, the communal riots,

...proved to be the last nail in the coffin...This category of migrants primarily included the lower classes—agricultural labourers, rural craftsmen/artisans, fishermen, the urban poor. They had stayed in East Pakistan sensing it would be

difficult to re-establish them in a new land. They were not interested in 'high politics'⁶ and, therefore, the change of guard meant little or nothing to them as long as they were able to make ends meet on an everyday basis (Chakravarty, *Boundaries and Belonging* 30-31).

Amala's migration and subsequent evisceration into the identity of refugeehood, like many of her compatriots, gets played out in such camps as Ghosh explores, where the only connection with any expression or articulation of the past, of home is through a denial and a silence. During her stay at the camp, Amala's silence in her conversations with Manas, as he wishes to glean more information about her is one such example. She simply, as the narrator puts forward, 'turned into an automaton' (Ghosh 8), a robotic figure between belonging and becoming, severed, and yet framed by history. When asked about her home, she retorts back, the perennial reminder of the space lessness of despair and the trauma that remains unheard,

What village, *ha?* ... 'Do I have any village, Babu? What stories do you want to hear? Why? To see if my mouth bleeds when I tell them? Or so you can feel happy it's not your story?' (Ghosh 13)

She negotiates the place of her 'belonging' with the absence of recollection which might be seen as a manifestation of her trauma that was a by-product and eventual trigger of her exodus and is now her only link with her past, that is present in her denial, as she attempts to forge out her identity in an alien space. In this perhaps she shares a close affinity with Jyotirmoyee Devi's protagonist Sutra, in her novel *Epar Ganga Opar Ganga* (1967)⁷, where both the women share a deep bond as refugee women, undergoing the processes of reformation of identities as refugees who had settled in an alien country without any support.

The novel equates the two distinct spaces in the palpable nature, as Amala sees it, both corresponding to the new national space that she would be inhabiting. The text moves beyond a fixated spatial identity borne by a nationalist consciousness, to create the emblem of a fluid construct, to imagine space as Lefebvre outlined as being created by social formulation (Lefebvre 300), where the first among the two is the Gariahat Refugee Camp. Lefebvre in his triadic articulation of space, outlines the concept of the 'Representations of Space' (Lefebvre 33) and the existence and production of the Refugee Camps embody specifically the conceptualized space, 'the space of scientists, planners, urbanists, technocratic subdividers, and social engineers' (Lefebvre 38) for whom, the lived space and the conceived space are one (ibid.). The Refugee Camps by nature, remain manifestations of the conceived space, which embodies the hierarchical and authoritarian spatial oversight of the State. It is the space whereby the relationship between the nation-State and the refugees is in a state of constant observation and planning. The space of the Camp embodies the space of a power relation whereby the state's supremacy over the refugees is always maintained, through oversight carried on by instruments of the State, like 'the refugee card' that provides identity and the economic rationing that along with certain social aids, keep these places running till they are converted in the tags of 'PL' or 'Permanent Liability'. Bhaswati Ghosh's image of the camp records this relationship between the State and the refugees, whilst the physical space, with its scarcity of space, supplies, miasma, and arrangement of the camp. Swati Sengupta Chatterjee observes the same that Bhaswati Ghosh relates –

All the camps were marked with some distinctive features lie scarcity of water, mismanagement of sanitation system, inadequacy of ration supply and total lack of privacy. The inmates were confined in the camps almost like captives (Chatterjee, *West Bengal Camp Refugees* 59).

The 'spatial practice' (Lefebvre 33) that embodied the life and everydayness in the camp, not only exemplifies the production of the spatial relations but also undercuts with individual nuances and stories which becomes the essential mark of the refugee narrative, that often capture the erasures from the macrocosmic histories of the Partition event. According to Udit Sen, the "split image of the Bengali refugee as both victim and victor obscures the complex nature of refugee agency" (Sen "The Myths Refugees Live By" 37). The exploration of the refugee remembrances portrays the historical silences which delineate the structural myths and experiences conducive to their constructive cultural identities. The novel traces the experience of Amala, who carries with her the wrenching pain of separation from her brother, Kartik. The pain and the yearning for search lead her to look closely at the face of every new male refugee who ended up at the Sealdah station. Her adapting to her "restless anger" (Ghosh 18) and getting used to the "camp routine" (Ibid.) made her in the words of Udit Sen both the 'victim' and the 'victor'. The labour regime incorporated by the refugee officer involved cleaning the premises, washing utensils, filling up buckets of water from hand pumps and other sundry chores. This came to Amala as a blessing as she felt relieved to find herself "useful" (Ghosh 19) and it allowed her "more to do, the less time to think" (Ibid.) Amala's preoccupation with Urmila's baby a responsibility bestowed to her by Manas and the team of volunteers was a dichotomy on her end as mothering the son of ailing Urmila was like fostering her lost brother. Migration and displacement bring about the pivot for the reconsideration of structures that help in the edifice and the reconstruction of notions of home. The Camp to her is the place of her confinement where she had to get scared of being expelled for failing camp duties. Thus, we notice the altering charts of private, domestic, and ethnic identity that made the other female characters like Urmila, Malati, Tara, and others in the truest sense of the term - refugees. Their journeys due to Partition of Bengal, 1947 and its aftermath had fetched into the front a disjointed nation and here Bhaswati Ghosh identifies with filmmaker Ritwik Ghatak's⁸ narratives and identifies us with the yearning and memory – the suffering of enforced migration, separating one's family and a recognized penetrating realm. The author plans and points out the narrative of the novel by skilfully coalescing the camp's past and present.

The next aspect of the refugee narrative and its spatial manifestation, equates with the creation of Bijoynagar or the Victory Colony as the title suggests, developing the process of a spatial-becoming, of creating an agency, a self-hood and an emblem of the struggle. In the novel, the notion was defined as a "bombshell" (Ghosh 90). The narration went as,

...they had set up a new colony by occupying a large tract of unused land some twenty kilometers away, near Shibpur. The land reportedly belonged to Niranjana Chowdhury, a local zamindar (Ibid.)

The colony, obtained through armed struggle by the refugees against the guards of the zamindar, would be a scope of identity, confidence and hope for the refugees, Amala, the protagonist was filled with renewed hope (Ghosh 102) as the forging of new relationships and existence gives a semblance of hope and dignity (Ghosh 111-112), and even an occasion of marriage ideates the creation of a self-same community (Ghosh 140-

142), and it's ironic that illness of the inmates at the camp finds its recuperation at the gates of the colony (Ghosh 178-179). Now the point of concern remains, how the space of Bijoyagar can be equated in the spectrum of a postcolonial national space. Udit Sen provides a detailed picture of the period,

a declining law and order situation became the hallmarks of refugee presence in Calcutta, during the late forties and fifties. This was also the time when frustrated refugees took matters into their own hands and launched a veritable movement of squatting in empty buildings and fallow land in and around Calcutta. By 1950, there were 149 illegal refugee settlements or jabardakhal colonies awaiting regularisation and by the late sixties, the list had grown to 604. This massive influx of refugees into Calcutta in the decades after Partition altered the political landscape and social geography of Calcutta in profound ways. The string of refugee colonies in the southern and northern suburbs of Calcutta were instrumental in the rapid extension of Calcutta's urban sprawl, as the city outgrew its old boundaries to emerge as greater Calcutta (Sen, "Building Bijaygarh" 408).

The reality depicted in Sen's exposition while studying Bijoyagar, the refugee colony in South Calcutta, is perhaps aptly understood in the reality of Bijoyagar. The argument that can be put forward in the exploration of a space like Bijoyagar, is the creation of this cartographic place acts as a manifestation of a differing paradigm of space embodying an alternate perception of spatiality that was brought about through the struggle of the refugees; a space that lay beyond the scope of the Refugee Camps and the popular parlance. Interestingly, Manas Dutta's diary entry in March 1951, highlights how the popular perception of the refugees, verges on the ideation of almost parasitic. Manas notes,

On trams and buses, in marketplaces, why even in my own house, I keep hearing about the refugees' lack of industry...But get to know them a little more closely and they smack a slap on your face. The ones who grabbed land and built entire colonies surely didn't lack industry? And those women in the PL camp? Fatherless, husband-less, without anybody to call their own. Who would have thought they could take charge of their future? (Ghosh 132).

Bijoyagar in this sense, as a spatial metaphor, subverts the expectations and perceptions that are projected on the Refugee population, and through their innate strivings, the colony remains a metaphor not just for a palpable spatial agency, but also for an agency of the formation of identity, which is intrinsically linked to the migration itself.

History has been continuously characterised by migration or population movements. However, in recent years, massive waves of population displacement and a variety of circumstances have occurred around the world. Migration and refugee difficulties have recently come to light due to 'several histories of rehabilitation' (Udit Sen, *Citizen Refugees* 172). With the shocking and disruptive experiences of forced migration, the refugees are portrayed as 'uprooted' from their sturdy survival. The refugees lose the identities that were created, maintained, and reproduced by their former and familiar environment after leaving or being driven out of it. The question of identity has always been one of the most prominent topics of contemporary literature because the space of the literary is highly contested. The literary narrative of the refugees, define and forge

community identities based on a shared meaning of life and cultures. The space of the literary not only represents existing dynamics of identity constructions but also indicates the possibilities of identities that are yet to be constructed. The interface between literature and identity construction invites an intersectional analysis because of the complexities involved in mirroring contemporary realities of identity claims and controversies in literary space. Identity tropes such as gender, class, caste, and geographical location have defined and redefined literary productions in the genre of Indian Writing in English. The identity of a refugee is an identity in difference. The novel in this sense is a revelatory study of how refugees could not escape humiliation and subordination after they were dislocated to West Bengal. Pallavi Chakravarty in her doctoral thesis mentions –

The 'Partition refugees' saw themselves as distinct from the conventional definition of the term 'refugee'. They were not 'fleeing' from one country and seeking refuge in the other; it was the country that had been divided, and as a result their homes had fallen on the wrong side of the Radcliffe line. Therefore, they had to migrate to the side where they were assured safety of their lives (Chakravarty, *Post Partition* 189).

In being uprooted and feeling no longer safe in one's home, the refugees felt a strong and unspoken psychological pain for the homeland they left behind. They entered more dubious areas of complex exploitation. The novel raises the question of testimony in textualizing the history of the life of the refugees. The tragedy of History is valid as well for more ordinary life histories and these life stories of the refugees must be heard as their plight for long had remained a closed chapter. After 'The Partition', Bengal witnessed the settlement of the refugees, who coalesced into creating a hybrid space, particularly in Calcutta and accepted a distinct spatial identity in the city, and a reading of the transformations of spatial practices of the refugees stood essential in reading the transformation in urban space. As a literary interpretation of Diaspora, the narratives are central to the issue of a bifurcated existence, nostalgia, experience of exile, crumbling of the self, assimilation, and negotiation. The responses of the refugees towards the hostile urban environment make it of vital importance to reclaim their collective belonging. The individual experiences are replete with their broken selves with increasing despair. Sense of home plays a significant role in the refugees' construction of their identity, as they struggle to represent the eternally indistinct understanding of borders even as it becomes a moving tale of compassionate humanity. Their self-alienation, and displacement, accompanied by pain, form the root of their suffering and it lays the foundation for their never heard storytelling. In their narrative, the refugees' failure to locate their passages in life is represented by the failure of their language to find a route to clear meaning. Their anguish is inescapably conditioned by their inability to comprehend the terms of their physical existence.

The plea of the old ones and their adaptation to their new homes are the very issues that state much of their lives. They use their old space but through resilience create a new space for themselves in the new land thereby commenting on the essential fluidity of identity that this entails. Pippa Virde in the book *From the Ashes of 1947: Reimagining Punjab* (2018), notes, how the globalised world is a witness to the widespread impact of migration. The refugees had to struggle to find ways of preserving histories and memories in their 'new' homes. With the fractured past, they thrived with the lack of

closure or any official recognition of the 'loss' post-partition (Virde 230-231). In the different interpretations of the same word 'home', two concepts are common. These are – home is a place which might not be physical, but with which one is familiar and has an enclosure for comfortable habitation. Home may be a structure, made of either concrete walls or abstract ideas, but a structure, nonetheless. It is something that accommodates one, entertains his/her needs and asks for his/her attachment, empathy, and responsibility. Home is a fixed space, and it develops one's mental construction with a sense of belonging. Leaving one's own home and going to a different location may create a sense of insecurity as well as a loss for some. But for the others, it may create a new sense of belonging. The shift of home creates a sense of dislocation, immigration, and identity crisis. In political and public discourses, refugees are often portrayed as 'uprooted' or 'homeless', based on the assumption that individuals are born into a fixed nationality, identity, and culture, to which they belong, and into which forced migrants to seek to return after they have been made homeless. 'Refugee Ness' is conceived as traumatic, leading to a so-called 'identity-crises' and a general sense of homelessness, making refugees fall outside of clear national borders and categories while 'Rootedness' presumes that before becoming refugees, they were coherent, homogeneous communities with a single social, cultural, and national identity and localised roots' (Hoellerer 136).

Joya Chatterji writes that 'refugees were not pawns or passive victims, but rather active and thinking agents in their own rehabilitation.' (Chatterji, *Spoils of Partition* 122) The refugees took shelter in definite areas in West Bengal and 'calculated' their reason for staying. The refugees in many instances settled with their relatives and kin and searched for work simultaneously -

Refugees too had to start from scratch to build a new life for themselves in new places. Their search for a means to sustain themselves was quite as urgent for the refugees as it was for economic migrants. Inevitably, refugees, like economic migrants, went to places where they knew people who were ready to give them a helping hand until they found their feet,⁴³ and to places where they judged they had the best chance of finding appropriate work (ibid.).

The discussions on refugees mostly circle around their economic usefulness and the spatial changes brought on by migration and resettlement. Both apprehensions localise several more general citizenship queries, economic involvement, and geographical fairness. A displaced population's entry necessitates reactions from the governmental apparatus in terms of 'creating' the space for the migrants to live in and to recognize themselves as a group. Considering these two requirements, these refugees frequently find themselves at the forefront of significant changes in both the economic and spatial configurations. In the year 1955, Renuka Roy, the state's rehabilitation minister declared, 'we reached a saturation point whereas we must satisfactorily help to settle them who had come earlier, it is beyond capacity and powers of this state, to provide land for the cultivators and homesteads in urban areas for those who are newcomers' (Chatterjee, *West Bengal Camp Refugees* 126).

Migration and displacement serve as the turning point for re-examining the frameworks that support the formation and reconstruction of ideas of home and other units like nation and culture. Travel brought a fractured nation into view because of immigration, and the stories connect us to the yearning and memory of forced migration, which separates families and creates a known penetrating realm. The refugees struggled to make a living,

and gain economic strength, social status, and cultural acceptance to survive in a hostile environment since they shared a similar memory of their homeland and everyday culture as well as a common experience of hardship and migration. It is a reality that we cannot help but observe the anguish of the refugee's spirit when he or she distances themselves from their native country and fights valiantly to occupy the hybrid space, following dislocations and ruptures. It leads to demographic dislocations and cannot claim the things lost corroborating to the making of 'imaginary homelands' (Rushdie 10). The narratives resulting from the tales of the Bengali refugees take the initiative to contextualise personal experiences within the historic context of Partition and its prelude and aftermath. While reading these narratives we find history crossing its conventional borders and outreaches the fuzzy zone of memories to bring out the experiences of the refugees and their entailed losses of all sorts – human, material, and moral – in different degrees.

This resettlement process can allude to a significant transition, and the refugees in the post-partition era experienced confusion and embarrassment because of being exposed to a new set of values, norms, and ideals throughout the process of adaptation and acculturation. The new socio-cultural context was expected to present challenges to her social and personal identities. People in this scenario either tried to identify with their traditional culture or to locate themselves within both their traditional and host cultures. Nilanjana Chatterjee aptly commented, 'a planned and vicious attack on *dhan* (wealth), *maan* (honour) and *pran* (life) of the community generally explained the decision of the refugees who abandoned their homeland.' (Chatterjee, *West Bengal Camp Refugees* 19). Surviving in the camps and colonies explicate how leaving one's home stood out not only as a saga of pain related to the brutal consequences due to the political divide but also documents the struggles over the identity of the refugees. Writing about exile and homeland, one can capture the temporal and spatial dynamics of the refugees that were lost in the space between their home and the new land, in which only some attempted to break the silence of the many victims and victims-turned-survivors. We must agree with the fact that, while silence may be seen as a sign of defeat, it can also be a sanctuary and an approach where some things can be said without having to be said. The novel along with the narratives together showcases how Partition and its aftermath have shaken Amala and each life of the refugees. This political event cannot be taken merely as an impersonal event and can be articulated perhaps with Raymond Williams's concept of 'structures of feeling' (Williams 133) and his map of the three cultural groups – dominant, residual, and emergent culture. Mapping the emergent culture, the assimilation and adaptation strategies of the refugees like Amala are studied in which is not only about the politics of hatred, killing and destruction, but also about survival and staying on. Settling in a new land for the refugees, therefore, was like existing in the glooms of this long-drawn Partition. Asking for a refuge for the refugees was a matter-of-fact acquisition of space which is emotional raising the identity question – Where do I belong? Staying in a contiguous space led to anxieties affecting the identities of the refugees as it does in the case of Amala. Victory Colony, as well as the post-marital abode of Amala, where she had to stay, includes a compromise. In staying with the ones already settled as labourers, and domestic helps and with the West Bengal natives when Amala is staying with her in-laws, her everydayness is shaped by the nostalgia of her past, her native land, as she attempts to assimilate into the post-marital life at the new location. The interaction of the refugees with these new spaces formulated multiple

parameters in the context of class, caste, and gender. In Lefebvre's words, this is essentially an 'unlimited multiplicity or unaccountable set of social spaces which we refer to generically as 'social space'' (Lefebvre 86). The cultural and historical churning that characterised the refugee experience, in their interaction and negotiation of spaces leads in this context to a reformulation of identities.

A reassessment of identities is initiated— a mixture leading to cultural hybridity where refugees get placed in – between. This hybrid state of the refugees brings contradictions in knowledge, practices and appropriated to be read anew which this research caters to. Therefore, the task of the refugees is precarious as they must venture into the unknown and possibly in a dangerous terrain. Writing about exile and homeland, we can capture the temporal and spatial dynamics of the refugees lost in the space between their home and their location. Edward Said questions,

But what if the world has changed so drastically as to allow now for almost the first time a new geographical consciousness of a de-centred or multiply-centred world, a world no longer sealed within watertight compartments of art of culture or history, but mixed, mixed up, varied, complicated by the new difficult mobility of migrations, the new independent states, the newly emergent and burgeoning cultures? (Said 446).

In Said's autobiography *Out of Place* (1999), he narrates how his family was forced to leave their homeland, Palestine, after the Israeli occupation, and take refuge in Egypt. He commented that his own life experience was always conditioned by the circumstance of displacement and alienation with respect to his birthplace. It is a matter of fact that Said wrote about exile paradoxically, invoking it as a metaphor for the intellectual's desired condition of marginality and continuous journey. In this context, it can be elaborated that, to a significant part, leaving one's 'homeland' is a drastic action that results in the dissolution of a bond and an understanding. However, because of this action, a new, independent self might manifest. According to this view, partition could only be treated as an incongruity, a sign of harm and catastrophe. Moreover, being exiled because of this barrier the refugees skulked for places. The peril of identity issues, such as identity distress, crisis, and resolution, is higher for refugees reintegrating into new cultures than for others. However, the re-formation of identity, both individual and spatial amongst refugees and its relationship to the process of acculturation remain an intriguing episode in the history of India.

Notes

¹The epigraph is quoted from Manohar Mouli Biswas' poem "Shatek Shatabdi Pore" (For About a Hundred Centuries), published in his collection *Bibikta Uthone Ghar* (1991). The extract is translated by Sipra Mukherjee in her essay "Other Voices: The Tales of the Namashudra Refugees amidst the Making of a Nation" (2022).

²The Radcliffe Line is the actual border that was drawn for Partition of the Indian Nation in 1947 by Sir Cyril Radcliffe, who was given the chairmanship of the two Boundary Commissions (Chatterji, *Partition's Legacies* 57). Radcliffe

was a rank outsider to India. He had no background in Indian administration, nor any prior experience of adjudicating disputes of this sort. If his appointment to the position of Chairman of the Boundary Commissions did

not generate controversy it was because it was a tradition in British Indian civil administration to confer the most responsible and prestigious jobs upon the “confident amateur” rather than the “narrow technician” (Chatterji, *Partition’s Legacies* 51).

³Hereafter referred to as ‘The Partition’.

⁴The minorities from East Pakistan, who comprised the majority of the ‘Refugee’ population in question, were not a homogeneous group, as Nilanjana Chatterjee points out. She notes,

They were differentiated by period or wave of migration; reason for flight; place of origin and subsequent trajectory; caste, class, occupation; and status *vis-à-vis* the government’s assistance programme (Chatterjee ‘The East Bengal Refugees’ 71).

⁵Pallavi Chakravarty in her recent study, *Boundaries and Belonging: Rehabilitating Refugees in India, 1947-1971* (2022) notes four distinct phases of migration of East Bengal refugees in the wake of the Partition event. The First Phase comprised primarily ‘the bhadralok class who already had a foothold in West Bengal’ who arrived in India just after the violence at Noakhali or just prior to the Partition. The Second Phase saw people, who were victims of the communal riots in 1950, primarily from the lower classes. The Third Phase included the years after 1950, when passports were being introduced, primarily 1952-March 1958. The Fourth Phase included the period of communal violence from 1964 and the subsequent Liberation War in Bangladesh, with the Indira-Mujib pact, that categorically held that any ‘migration after 23rd March 1971 would be considered illegal’ (Chakravarty *Boundaries and Belonging* 29-34).

⁶The first phase of migration primarily occurred on the grounds of political and social dissidence amidst the bhadralok Hindu community in East Pakistan.

Issues like the hoisting of the Pakistani national flag, the dissolution of the provincial and district branches of the Congress party, and the migration of most of the political representatives of the minority community from East Pakistan to India, became push factors for the minorities in East Pakistan (Chakravarty, *Boundaries and Belonging* 29).

The Hindu Bhadrakalok, notes Pallavi Chakravarty, feared that they would have to live as an understudy to the Muslim majority population, whom they had considered economically inferior, which prompted their apprehensions (ibid.)

⁷This novel has been translated into English by Enakshi Chatterjee titled *The River Churning: a Partition Novel* (1995).

⁸Ritwik Ghatak was a noted filmmaker from Bengal who had extensively in his films dealt with the theme of Partition of Bengal.

Works Cited

- Chakravarty, Pallavi. *Boundaries and Belonging: Rehabilitating Refugees in India, 1947-1971*. New Delhi: Primus-Ratna Sagar, 2022. Print.
- . *Post Partition Refugee Rehabilitation in India with Special Reference to Bengal 1947-71*. Diss. University of Delhi, 2011. Print.
- Chatterjee, Nilanjana. "The East Bengal Refugees: A Lesson in Survival" *Calcutta the Living City: Volume 2*. Ed. Sukanta Chaudhuri. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1990. 70-77. Print.
- Chatterjee, Swati Sengupta. *West Bengal Camp Refugees: Dispersal and Caste Question 1950-1965*. Kolkata: Sreejoni, 2019. Print.
- Chatterji, Joya. *Spoils of Partition: Bengal and India, 1947-1967*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007. Print.
- . *Partition's Legacies*. Albany: SUNY Press, 2021. Print.
- Chaudhuri, Sukanta. Ed. *Calcutta the Living City: Volume 2*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1990. Print.
- Ghosh, Bhaswati. *Victory Colony 1950*. New Delhi: Yoda Press, 2020. Print.
- Ghoshal, Anindita. *Refugees, Borders and Identities: Rights and Habitat in East and Northeast India*. Oxford: Routledge, 2021. Print.
- . Ed. *Revisiting Partition: Contestation, Narratives and Memories*. New Delhi: Primus-Ratna Sagar, 2022. Print.
- Guha, Ramachandra. *India After Gandhi: The History of the World's Largest Democracy*. London: Macmillan, 2007.
- Hoellerer, Nicole.I.J. "Multiple Belongings in Refugee Resettlement: A Study of Bhutanese Refugees in the UK." *St. Anthony's International Review* 12.2 (2017): 136-156. *JSTOR*. Web. 21 Nov 2020.
- Lefebvre, Henri. *The Production of Space*. Trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1991. Print.
- Massey, Doreen. *Space, Place and Gender*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994. Print.
- Mukherjee, Sipra. "Other Voices: The Tales of the Namasudra Refugees amidst the Making of a Nation." *Revisiting Partition: Contestation, Narratives and Memories*. Ed. Anindita Ghosal. New Delhi: Primus-Ratna Sagar, 2022. Print. 55-75.
- Mukhopadhyay, Sumallya. "Review: Victory Colony, 1950 by Bhaswati Ghosh." *Sanglap: Journal of Literary and Cultural Enquiry* 7.2 (2021): 155-161. Web. 27 May 2022
- Rushdie, Salman. *Midnight's Children*. 1995. London: Vintage, 2013. Print.
- ., *Imaginary Homelands*. London: Vintage, 1991. Print.

- Said, Edward. *Reflections on Exile and Other Essays*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002. Print.
- Sarkar, Tanika & Sekhar Bandopadhyay. Ed. *Calcutta: The Stormy Decades*. Oxford: Routledge, 2018. Print.
- Sen, Udit. "Building Bijaygarh: A Microhistory of Refugee Squatting in Calcutta." *Calcutta: The Stormy Decades*. Ed. Tanika Sarkar & Sekhar Bandyopadhyay. Oxford: Routledge, 2018. 407-433. Print.
- ., *Citizen Refugee: Forging the Indian Nation after Partition*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018. Print.
- ., "The Myths Refugees Live By: Memory and history in the making of Bengali refugee identity." *Modern Asian Studies* 48.1 (2014): 37-76. Print.
- Virde, Pippa. *From the Ashes of 1947: Reimagining Punjab*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018. Print.
- Williams, Raymond. *Marxism and Literature*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977. Print.