Homed, Unhomed and Rehomed in Partition Stories of East Bengal/East Pakistan

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Abstract
Taking three translated short stories with specific focus on "home," namely Syed Waliullah's "The Tale of a Tulsi Plant," Abu Rushd's "The Bone" and Ashraf Siddiqui's "A House with a Pond" from Niaz Zaman's edited book, *The Escape and Other Stories of 1947* (2000), this paper will attempt to bring to light both the erasure and the enduring memory of the 1947 Partition of Bengal. We interpret "home" as a symbol of uprooting and enrooting for people crossing from the West to East Bengal within a volatile world of insecurity, loss and fear. While the stories do not directly engage with the grand and populist discourses of the 1947 riots, they represent an uncanny world-in-transition for Muslims trying to cross into East Bengal/East Pakistan to start a new life. We analyse the stories' indissoluble relation between materiality and memory, necessary for the identity of the region's collective posterity. In doing so, we employ Ananya Jahanara Kabir's terms such as "postmemory" and "post-amnesia" to argue that the essay is our attempt to reclaim the literary memories of 1947, which shape the intergenerational identities of Bangladeshis.

Keywords
Home, partition, East Bengal/East Pakistan, Muslims, migration, memory

Introduction
In 1947, when the British left India and divided it into two countries, India and Pakistan, it saw the world's largest mass migration of humans and, in consequence, communal violence of unprecedented levels (Dube 55). Since then, it has been a vital part of defining Indian and Pakistani nationhood and this has

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been constantly reinforced through the historical and literary works of both countries. These works, developed over the last seven decades, can be divided into three categories: first with an "uber-nationalist tone" focusing on either Indian or Pakistani nationalism, second with "a challenge from the subaltern studies group in the early 1980s," with a specific concentration on Punjab, and finally, when Bengal was brought to attention (Riaz and Zaman 45-46). This paper focuses on the last category by studying three narratives of migration to East Bengal/East Pakistan – Syed Waliullah's "The Tale of a Tulsi Plant," Abu Rushd's "The Bone" and Ashraf Siddiqui's "A House with a Pond" – all taken from Zaman's edited volume, *The Escape and Other Stories of 1947* (2000). The paper concentrates on short stories for a number of reasons. Though there have been iconic novels such as Khushwant Singh's *Train to Pakistan* (1956), the "paradigmatic literary response to the violence and upheaval of Partition is to be found in the genre of the short story," as exemplified by Saadat Hasan Manto's "Toba Tek Singh" published in 1955 (Dube 74). Short stories further symbolise the open-endedness of Partition as a phenomenon that can have an impact on future generations to engage with this fundamental historical event of the subcontinent as the authors of this article have done.

The selected stories allow us to look at the movement of people from "West" to "East" Bengal, away from the dominant representation of migration from "East" to "West."[3] While the Partition of 1947 caused religious-identity based mass movement in different parts of the subcontinent, the nature and pattern of these movements were distinct from one another. It has been noted by critics and scholars that Partition happened differently in Bengal and Punjab – the two provinces most affected by mass movement:

> … it is well-documented that the communal violence on the Eastern side was more protracted than the frenetic massacres in the state of Punjab on the Western side, which began as the rumours of division spread before the official announcement of Partition on August 17th 1947. That is to say, communal violence on the Eastern side was more episodic, beginning with the Kolkata and Noakhali riots in 1946, while in comparison, the Western side experienced intense and frantic rioting leading to widespread massacres from 1947 to 1950. Additionally, there were years of prolonged migration and displacement on the Eastern side in contrast to the sudden and urgent migration of columns of people, or *kafilas*, across the Western side, which can be attributed to the more militarized and rigid border on the Western side as

[3] The idea of "West" and "East" of Bengal has existed since 1905 when Bengal was first divided by the Viceroy of India, Lord Curzon, with western Bengal, Bihar and Orissa to be called West Bengal, or simply Bengal, and eastern Bengal, northern Bengal and Assam making East Bengal. In 1911, Bengal was reunited temporarily, only to be divided again in the 1947 Partition, following the Radcliffe Line, with West Bengal, predominantly made up of Hindu Bengalis, in India, and East Bengal, consisting predominantly of Muslim Bengalis, in Pakistan.

> against the rather "porous and flexible" dividing line on the Eastern side. (Bagchi and Dasgupta qtd. in Harrington 3)

This caused different kinds of experiences on the two sides and consequently different images in the fictions of Punjab and Bengal. Literary works from Punjab have been characterised by a focus on communal riots and massacres (e.g., Singh's *Train to Pakistan* and Sidhwa's *Ice-Candy Man* [1988]) whereas in Bengal they have been marked by a concentration on identity crisis and settlement concerns in the new nation-states (e.g., Devi's *The River Churning* [1995] and Gangopadhyay's *East-West* [2000]). Punjab has drawn more research interest due to its acute experience of violence and trauma – characteristics that have become emblematic of the Partition (e.g., Menon and Bhasin's *Borders and Boundaries* [1998] and Butalia's *The Other Side of Silence* [1998]). Despite the dominance of Punjab narratives, historians such as Joya Chatterji have tried to bring the Partition of Bengal to attention.[4] Even when the focus is on Bengal, most of the works concentrate on Hindus migrating from East to West Bengal, and the refugee crisis that afflicted cities such as Calcutta. Annu Jalais notes:

> Most, if not all, of the studies on Bengali migration have focused on Hindus leaving East Pakistan and later Bangladesh for India, and never the other way around. This is because between 1947 and 1971, for every three Hindus leaving East Pakistan about one Muslim was leaving eastern India…. (30)

However, because people migrated over time in groups of various sizes, it is difficult to come up with exact figures. In addition, documents and data about East Pakistan were destroyed by officials during the Bangladesh Liberation War of 1971; yet from 1947 to 1964, "conservative (and admittedly crude) estimates… suggest that perhaps 1.5 million Muslims migrated from West Bengal to Eastern Pakistan" (Chatterji, *The Spoils of Partition* 166). Despite this huge number of Muslims migrating to East Bengal/East Pakistan, there has been very little said about them and, recently, Ananya Jahanara Kabir addressed this gap in the scholarly discourse on Partition, arguing that "Pakistan is examined far less than India, and Bangladesh has, until very recently, been virtually absent" (29).

In an attempt to fill this gap, we turn to the literature of the post-Partition period in East Bengal/East Pakistan. In doing so, the name that readily comes to mind is Niaz Zaman, who has devoted herself to the preservation of creative works by East Pakistani and later Bangladeshi writers on Partition. Among his efforts is the priceless collection *The Escape and Other Stories of 1947*. The anthology contains twelve stories of Muslim Bengalis who migrate from West Bengal to

[4] Aside from Joya Chatterji's *Bengal Divided* (1994) and *The Spoils of Partition* (2007), the works of Jasodhara Bagchi and Subhoranjan Dasgupta are among the leading research outputs on Partition of Bengal.

East Bengal during and after Partition. While all the stories can be examined to look at the predicaments of these migrants, we have chosen only three stories for their thematic resemblance – the search for a home. "The Tale of a Tulsi Plant" appeared in Bengali as "Ekti Tulsi Gachher Kahini" in the anthology *Dui Teer* (1964) and was later translated into English by the author Syed Waliullah himself. Abu Rushd's "The Bone" was published as "Har" in the anthology *Sari, Bari, Gari* (1963). Ashraf Siddiqui's "A House with a Pond" appeared in the volume *Rabeya Apa* in 1955. Arifa Ghani translated Rushd's story and Niaz Zaman, Siddiqui's. The common thread binding all the three stories is the search for a home in the new country, that is, East Pakistan. Home, being intrinsically associated with land, is always a treasured object of geopolitical contest in wars and conflicts. It was no different in the case of Partition, when the homes of millions were lost. The stories demonstrate how these uprooted people try to find and build new homes on the other side of the border. Through a textual analysis, the paper will examine the struggles of displacement associated with this search for a home in the context of East Bengal/East Pakistan. In doing so, it will examine the interrelations between the homes of migrants and the identity of migrants which fall into a flux in the aftermath of Partition. It will also explore how this complexity is inherited by succeeding generations who are not directly associated with Partition but may suffer from an uncanny sense of absent-presence.

The paper is divided into six parts, including this Introduction. The next three parts – Homed, Unhomed and Rehomed – are based on content and interpretation. They will be followed by a section on the Bangladesh Liberation War of 1971 and the gaps in memory of Partition and, finally, the Conclusion that rounds off our arguments. The inclusion of the 1971 Liberation War is helpful and, to some extent, inevitable in Partition studies especially concerning East Bengal/East Pakistan. Harrington remarks how the 1971 war "should be regarded as a not-unconnected event, especially in the broader memory of what constitutes the long shadow of Partition" since by including it "the local impact and aftermath of Partition on the Eastern side can more readily be taken into account" (2). However, before we move further, it is perhaps necessary to provide brief outlines of the short stories. In "The Tale of a Tulsi Plant," the migrants are initially troubled by the tulsi plant because it is a symbol of worship for Hindus, but they quickly become settled or "homed" in the nourishing atmosphere of an unnamed village in East Bengal/East Pakistan. The story ends with the group becoming homeless again as they are evicted from that property. In "The Bone" we see the protagonist, Begum Shaheba, having no trouble residing in her new home in Dhaka except for an eerie feeling of unpleasantness that is caused by the discovery of a bone. Thus, Begum Shaheba becomes estranged or "unhomed" in her new home. This idea of "unhomeliness" is inspired from Bhabha who describes it as being different from being homeless;

this will be further discussed later in the paper. Finally, in "A House with a Pond," a couple live in several run-down places around Dhaka before owning a house of their own. In this house, they restart their lives with the birth of their baby which brings new hopes and thus they are what we are calling "rehomed." These categorisations will be further elucidated in the following sections.

Homed

"The Tale of a Tulsi Plant" begins with the description of a large desolate house in an unnamed area that we assume to be in East Bengal/East Pakistan since the refugees are all Muslims from Calcutta (Kolkata). The emptiness signifies the untold story of the original occupants – their uprootedness. This empty house soon becomes the home of the refugees as they start settling in. Now, what is the difference between a house and a home? The two words are often used interchangeably but there is a difference. The former refers to a physical space with material features such as walls, roofs, doors, etc., while the latter is both a physical and psychological space that goes beyond the variable materiality of existence. A home is an affective place; it includes the people, culture and values that shape an individual. For example, in this story, we see the Muslim Bengalis feeling distressed by the discovery of the tulsi plant in the yard since it is a symbol associated with Hindus who perform their morning prayers around it. The realisation that their new beautiful home once belonged to Hindus is distressing to them but, gradually, they start accepting the tulsi plant as part of their home and one of them, no one knows who, even secretly starts tending it. Critical theorists on refugee studies such as Bose highlight how "refugee diasporas may indeed be a group of people forced by conflict or persecution to flee lands and homes to which they have long-standing political, economic, and cultural ties – but it is more often 'homes' that are left behind, rather than 'nations'" (60). In the same way, Waliullah focuses on home rather than state in the story; the characters are less concerned about losing a nation than losing a home that can give them a sense of existence. In "The Tale of a Tulsi Plant," the refugees, who have been forced to leave their actual homes in West Bengal, are desperate to make a new home in a different country despite various obstacles.

The process of migration is often associated with loss, for it means leaving one's home and sometimes losing possessions and loved ones; but here we see that these Muslim refugees rather gain from it. While in Calcutta, they lived in the small, smelly quarters of Mcleod Street, Khansama Lane and Blockman Lane; now they have this big house with bright light and gentle breezes to enjoy and, "[t]he radiance of health and prosperity would light their faces, as it lights the faces of those who earn a few thousand rupees" (Waliullah 20). Home is described as the territorial core providing three essential features of human existence – identity, security and stimulation (Porteous 383). It tells us who we are by informing us where we belong; next, it protects us from dangers both

natural and man-made and, finally, it drives us to live and even fight for those two claims. In doing so, home acts simultaneously at a micro level for securing family and friends, as well as at a macro level for establishing nationality, religiosity, etc. Thus, they are "metaphorical gateways to geopolitical contestation that may simultaneously signify the nation, the neighbourhood or just one's streets" (Blunt and Dowling qtd. in Brickell 575). Home and the nation are intertwined; therefore, the former is always associated with the latter. But here we see that the migrants miss their immediate physical space such as streets and neighbourhoods more than an ideological space which is the nation. The streets of Calcutta were home for these Bengalis, but their religious orientation has caused them to seek new national identities and with that also new homes. Thus, with the passing of time, they start accepting their new home as their new identity. Waliullah writes, "Now they began to believe that they had really left behind the life of McLeod Street, Khansama Lane and Blockman Lane and had begun a new life with abundant light and air" (23). In the abundance of natural beauty, this new home translates into a profitable change for these refugees, quite contrary to what is expected from tales of migration. This gain, however, is short-lived as the government has requisitioned the house and they are asked to leave.

In contrast to this material gain, the emotional loss of migration is reflected in one of the refugees, Matin's, imaginings about the sorrowful woman of the house who left behind her home and the tulsi plant. We see Matin recalling his job as a railway worker and imagining how the woman, the homemaker, might have taken a journey by train to the other side:

> Now the picture of many railway colonies passed before his eyes. Possibly that woman had found refuge with a relative in a railway colony… she would remember the spot under the tulsi plant and her eyes would fill with tears. (Waliullah 22)

The word "remember" here is significant for it adds to the idea of memory in relation to migration. When people move away from places, they carry memories with them. As people migrated from one side of Bengal to another, they were uprooted from their ancestral homes and close kin but the memories of those people and places remained with them long after Partition. Here too, Matin's recollection of his job in Calcutta and the woman's imagined reminiscences of her tulsi plant tell us how people cross borders, leaving behind traces of themselves through the simplest of objects which in turn trigger the memory of others. Matin's personal memory blends with the collective memory of Partition and its displacement.

What is noteworthy here is that the Muslim refugees who have gained materially from this migration are all men in this story and the only female mentioned is the one constantly associated with emotional loss. Waliullah

repeatedly uses phrases such as "tearfilled eyes" to describe the woman (25). Her emotional loss seems to translate into their material gain in the form of the house. However, this advantage is temporary since the men are evicted from the house at the end of the story. Also, this woman appears only in Matin's imagination and the author makes no effort to substantiate if his imagination is real excepting the presence of the tulsi plant which could have belonged to anyone. This plant, however, worshipped and violated at the same time, metaphorically represents woman and, metonymically, motherland. Therefore, the gain and loss of migration is symbolically divided by gender; and, as absent-present, the unnamed woman symbolises the inevitable violence against women that takes place in a war or a zone of ethnic cleansing. This brings to mind oral histories captured by Urvashi Butalia, in her landmark work *The Other Side of Silence*, on the Women in Partition. Though her work is based on Punjab, it changed the face of South Asian historiography by bringing to the surface the women who were neglected in Partition history till then. Butalia confesses her limitation in not being able to accommodate the women in Bengal due to constraints of language and unfamiliarity with the region (22). Though she speaks of Punjab, she sheds light on the complex relation between all abducted women and their homes in the aftermath of Partition when the governments of both India and Pakistan decided that "women living with men of the other religion had to be brought back, if necessary by force, to their 'own' homes – in other words, the place of their religion" (139). This accentuates the connection between one's home and the broader notions of religion and nation that were discussed earlier. Butalia's words show a variation in the concept of home for men and women in Partition. While for men it was double-layered in their struggles of fleeing home and searching for a new one, for some women it was triple-layered, with being abducted from home, being settled in a new home and then brought back to the old home. However, as stories situated in Bengal represent less violence, we do not see such cases of abduction; rather we see an absence of the female voice in "The Tale of a Tulsi Plant" and this absence is further highlighted through the passing thoughts of Matin regarding the lady of the house. This absent-presence is what the situation of women was like in Partition studies, till the likes of Butalia's works that have made their voices heard at last.

Unhomed

Abu Rushd's "The Bone" revolves around one particular Muslim family that migrates from Calcutta to Dhaka after the demise of their father, Iftekhar Shaheb, who worked for the Railway. The misfortune happened when Iftekhar Shaheb went to Dhaka on some official duty and there he was killed by "goondas of the opposite sect" amidst communal riots; worst of all, his family did not even find his dead body to bury, and "[h]ow he died, where his body was thrown, remained a matter of conjecture" (Rushd 58). The protagonist of the story, however, is not

Iftekhar Shaheb but his wife, Begum Shaheba, who, though saddened by her husband's death, is not completely shattered, for the man has left behind a great deal of wealth and property. This suggests that in their marriage love was absent or secondary to the social contract drawn between Begum Shaheba and her husband, which is why economic security easily overrides emotional loss.

Communal tension soon starts to loom over Begum Shaheba's peaceful luxurious life in Calcutta as one by one all her relatives start to migrate to Dhaka. Also, her two sons and daughters-in-law become anxious about their staying back, "[e]specially for them, in the last riot, these two brothers had maimed at least twenty Hindus" (Rushd 59). Of the three stories, this is the only one with explicit indication of violence in the background and that too prompted by Muslim Bengalis. The author makes no compromise with the propensity of violence from his own community during Partition. Instead of blaming any one group, Rushd points out that if the Muslim Bengalis decided to migrate because of communal tension then they were just as responsible for it as the Hindus, but these ordinary men and women were mere puppets in the hands of political parties. This part of Rushd's fictional story brings to mind the actual events of 16 August 1946, also known as Direct Action Day or Great Calcutta Killings. Speaking of himself and his friends in the Muslim League, Sheikh Mujib in his memoirs explains how things went out of control on that ill-fated day:

> We focused entirely on our demand for Pakistan. We emphasised that we were not against Hindus but against the British…. But we were no match for the propaganda campaign launched by the Hindu Mahasabha and the Congress. They managed to convince the Hindus that we were really against them. (66)

This misunderstanding resulted in massive riots which spread to other regions of Bengal such as Noakhali and Bihar, causing many deaths and much destruction in both Muslim and Hindu communities. In the story, it is not specified in which riots Begum Shaheba's sons are involved but it is mentioned that they occured after Partition. Therefore, Rushd is not referring to the riots of 1946 but similar clashes which followed in the aftermath of Partition, so thinking of Direct Action Day here is not far-fetched.

Begum Shaheba surrenders to the wishes of her sons and soon moves to Dhaka where they immediately find a beautiful house in Bakshi Bazar. Despite the excitement of settling into a new house, Begum Shaheba "occasionally remembered the house in Calcutta" and she "was as angry with those who had divided the country as with those who had accepted the division" (Rushd 60-61). The word "remembered" accentuates the idea of how memory is strongly associated with home. Begum Shaheba's anger and sorrow are rooted in her lost home in Calcutta. However, in general, Begum Shaheba is content with her move

to Dhaka which is seen as an alternative to Calcutta and described in glorifying words: "Dhaka city was filled with new people…. Everyone was full of enthusiasm. Their faces seemed to burn with the thought that just one step ahead lay prosperity and success" (Rushd 61). The status of Dhaka had changed after Partition. While previously overshadowed by Calcutta, it was now the heart of East Pakistan and, for Bengali Muslims moving eastwards, it gave them hope and confidence for a life away from the domination of Hindus. This again adds to the idea of migration proving profitable for some in Bengal. Begum Shaheba's family migrates more for economic reasons than ethnic or religious conflicts. Thus, the term "economic refugee," meaning economic migrant, is used by Niaz Zaman. Rushd belonged to this category of migrants who were born in Calcutta and moved eastwards for studies or jobs following Partition (Zaman, *Legacy* 134). However, for some of the migrants, Dhaka or East Bengal did not always bear fruit, as will be illustrated by "A House with a Pond." It must also be noted that there was some communal tension, represented by the brutality of Begum Shaheba's sons, which caused the migration but the author mentions the violence more in passing. Instead, he focuses on the socio-economic expectations and realities of finding a new home in a new country after migration. This is in keeping with the trend that we see in the Partition stories of East Bengal/East Pakistan which are more about resettlement and less about violence.

The lack of violence in Partition narratives from Bengal is not unique to these three stories but seems to be a common feature of this tradition. As Niaz Zaman observes:

> Representative Bengali writing does not deal with riots and murders. Instead, in both the Bengals, East and West, the fiction is concerned with displacement rather than with violence and death. Despite riots that occurred in Calcutta and Noakhali, the stories that emerged from Bengal have not been about looting and killing as about leaving and loss or, in the writing of East Bengali writers, either the hope of a new dawn or the search for a new identity. (*Legacy* 21-22)

It is noteworthy that Zaman uses the word "displacement," instead of migration, for the word has negative connotations that come with the prefix "dis" which indicates removal or separation of something. Feldman describes it as "being in the wrong place at the time of Partition" (116). This wrongness is due to separation from the place of origin that gives a sense of belonging and rootedness through an affective association with it. When that connection is severed, as happens with migration, human beings suffer from a crisis of identity and the discomforts of amnesia. As Kabir puts it, "The physical wound, intimately bound up with somatically marked cultural identity, was also deeply psychological," and these cultural identities are expressed through external objects as well as internal

beliefs such as what one wears or eats, how one prays or works, etc. (7). Thus, with the sudden shift in location, their materials of existence, predominantly their homes, become unstable as people try to negotiate between a lost homeland and a new address of living. These materials function on two levels – first as tools of identity formation and second as mediums of memory retention. For the first, they become "political spaces which enable an individual to contest and protest the feeling of otherness which he/she faces in a new place" and, second, they become sources of recollection and nostalgia for the lost homeland (Guhathakurta 109).

Now, one may ask whether post-Partition migration was completely forced or choice had a role to play in it. We find that nobody forced them to move but it became inevitable due to surrounding circumstances, of which religion was at the core and "[a]s with their Hindu counterparts in East Bengal, different Muslims responded in different ways when their lives and property were at risk" (Chatterji, *The Spoils of Partition* 165). The decision about and manner of migration then depended on socio-economic variables such as financial ability, professional skills, address of nearest kin, etc. Sometimes there were gains and sometimes there were losses; and often emotional repercussion became as severe as the economic repercussion of movement as we see at the end of "The Bone." Begum Shaheba one day goes out to the pond in front of her house and there, by the trees, she digs into the ground. To her horror, she finds a human bone. Since the house had belonged to Hindus who burn their dead, Begum Shaheba cannot "ignore the thought that this bone was a part of her dead husband's body" (Rushd 63). This gives the story an eerie ending, reminding us of Freud's definition of the uncanny – "that class of the frightening which leads back to what is known of old and long familiar" (220). The memory of her husband is brought back to Begum Shaheba in the most unpleasant manner through an unusual object. Bhabha stresses Freud's idea of the uncanny in relation to homes by saying how "the intervention of the 'beyond' that establishes a boundary," represented by the bone in this story, "captures something of the estranging sense of the relocation of the home and the world"; he describes this as "unhomeliness," which is not the same as homelessness (13). Being homeless is simply being without a shelter, but being unhomely is to be in one's home and yet feel alienated or threatened by its surroundings. In Begum Shaheba's case, that alienation is coupled with her lack of attachment with other family members. She is in her own world of authority and luxury but that world is fractured by Partition. Thus, "the recesses of [her] domestic space become sites for history's most intricate invasions" (Bhabha 13).

Though meaningless for an outsider, the bone becomes a reminder of the family's tragedy and, as a whole, of the subcontinent which was strewn with the bones of countless people killed during Partition; "[s]uch indirectness is

characteristic of melancholia, which according to Freudian and post-Freudian psychoanalysis, cannot name the lost object directly for fear of psychic rupture" (Kabir 107). This fear is illustrated in Begum Shaheba's projections on the trees which she thinks look at her in a "lewd manner," and in her silent response to the daughter-in-law's audacious reminder of Muslims being buried in that place (Rushd 63). Also, like Matin's imagination in Waliullah's story, Begum Shaheba and her daughter-in-law imagine the bone to be from the dead body of a Muslim, more specifically, her husband Iftekhar Shaheb. Not a sense of causality, rather an inclination towards arbitrary signification arising from culturally-ingrained meaning-making process drives these characters to impose certain qualities on these objects – the tulsi plant and the bone – which they do not inherently possess. However, these arbitrary connections and concoctions are crucial for our understanding of Partition stories because they make up the realm of absent-presence where characters like Matin's imaginary woman and Iftekhar Shaheb dwell. From a post-structuralist view, absence is one kind of presence and presence always has traces of absence. That is why the tulsi plant and the bone are thought to have a direct connection to a reality or truth that is absent in the stories – that reality is the physical and mental trauma caused by Partition in the lives of thousands in the subcontinent. Thus, without directly drawing upon images of death and destruction commonly associated with Partition, these writers, Waliullah and Rushd, make evocative implications through metaphors and their interplay with the concept of absent-presence.

Rehomed

Unlike the previous two stories, there is no direct issue of religious tension in Ashraf Siddiqui's "A House with a Pond"; rather it focuses more on the socio-economic struggles of migration. The protagonist Anwar, a teacher with a humble salary, and his family move to East Bengal after his father's death. With his mother and wife, Anwar initially stays in a small room of a friend's house in Dhaka. Their next shelter is a shed in the slums where they are robbed by local thieves. A brick thrown by these rogues hits Anwar's mother and she becomes too ill to ever recover. After the mother's death, Anwar finds a good deal with a Hindu man who wants to exchange his house in Dhaka for Anwar's land in Burdwan which is in India now. This was one of the ways in which migration and settlement between the two Bengals were done, relatively smoothly, during Partition, as mentioned by Joya Chatterji:

> In some instances, Muslims who had estates in West Bengal were able to make deals with propertied Hindus from the east by which they exchanged their plots and holdings with each other, whether legally or in less formal ways. (*The Spoils of Partition* 169)

Anwar completes paperwork with the Hindu owner of the coveted house, but still he falls into the trap of legal matters. This house is beautiful with a pond and trees – Anwar and his wife are excited to move in especially because they are expecting a child. However, when the day finally arrives, to his surprise, Anwar finds that another man has requisitioned the house and he is left in tears. Here, the story resembles Waliullah's "The Tale of a Tulsi Plant" in bringing up legal matters and property rights. Shelley Feldman, studying Partition displacement of Hindu Bengalis moving westwards, says how Partition proved the impermanence of nation-states in "draw[ing] our attention to the meanings and experiences of displacement, whether forced or chosen, which, in turn, depend upon complex negotiations with identifications, rights and entitlements" (115). The same is true for Muslim Bengalis moving in the opposite direction as shown in these stories.

Anwar then tries reaching the requisitioning officer but the bureaucratic process makes it impossible for a poor man like him to even get an appointment with the officer. In contrast to the family in Rushd's "The Bone," here we see Anwar and his family struggling hard to settle in Dhaka and so for them it does not translate into a land of promise as in the case of Begum Shaheba; rather he questions vehemently what is the fate of

> those who had left behind their ancestral homes in West Bengal, those who had left forever the playgrounds of their infancy and wrenched themselves away from the loving arms of their relations and finally sought refuge on the soil of East Bengal – what did they have? (Siddiqui 65)

The word "refuge" here is noteworthy; it indicates that Anwar considers himself a refugee, someone escaping war or persecution in his country, which is different from being a migrant who makes a conscious choice to leave his home or country for better opportunities. However, Anwar too can be considered an economic refugee or migrant as discussed earlier in regard to Rushd's story, whereas Waliullah leaves no room for confusion by describing his group of movers as "homeless refugees" (18). We have to keep in mind, though, that for some migrants success came quickly, like Begum Shaheba, and for many it never came or took time as in the case of Anwar. As a result, the same Dhaka or East Bengal holds completely opposite meanings for them. Finally, Anwar comes across an old classmate who works in the Secretariat and, after hearing Anwar's sad tale, the friend immediately talks to the officer-in-charge and cancels the requisition. Thus, Anwar and his wife, Selina, are able to move into the house with the pond and it is here that their baby is born. The story ends with the suggestion of how Anwar and Selina, being migrants, are merely foreigners in East Pakistan compared to their child who truly belongs there: "[t]his land was this infant's birthplace. As he grew up he would realize all his rights" (Siddiqui 71). The irony in this statement is that the land remains the same, yet its offerings change

through generations. This particular story touches on a family history of many who, their ancestors caught in the wire of Partition, could hardly accept "this land" as their own, whereas for the generations being born and bred in the land, this country is theirs. This dichotomy between the earlier generation who fall into the category of what Kabir calls "postmemory" and the current generation suffering from "post-amnesia" will be discussed in the next section.

1971 and Post-Amnesia

After 1947, while India and West Pakistan were dealing with the aftermath of Partition, East Pakistan was engaged in its own struggle for independence. Consequently, for the Bengalis of East Pakistan and later Bangladesh, 1971 became the focus of their national identity and subsequently overshadowed the 1947 event. Since historical events shape literary works, there formed a gap in East Bengali literature on Partition from 1947 to 1971 as Bengalis in East Pakistan became occupied with their own nationalistic identity. Niaz Zaman speaks of this gap in the "Introduction" to *The Escape and Other Stories of 1947* pointing out how the Partition has been omitted, or rather neglected, in *History of Bangladesh* (1997) and other archives of the country (1). Along the same line of thought but adding more to it, Mofidul Hoque explains that the gap is not so much in Bangladesh as it has been in East Pakistan; that is, after liberation there has been an urge to revisit Partition by many Bangladeshi writers, including Akhteruzzzaman Ilias (1943-1997), Syed Shamsul Haq (1935-2016), Selina Hossain (1947-) and Taslima Nasrin (1962-) among others (Hoque 12-13). Also, recently, there has been an intellectual reassessment of the historical, cultural and literary impacts of Partition on Bangladesh, then East Bengal/East Pakistan, through the publication of *Star Weekend's* special issue titled *70 Years of Partition: States of Being Divided*[5] (August 25, 2017), which contains some very thought-provoking articles on the subject. In the editor's note, Mahfuz Anam explains how the selected articles seek to reimagine the lost connection of Bangladesh with Partition and the gap in our collective memories (2-3).

This "rememory"[6] is difficult since the "postmemory"[7] of Partition is disappearing as the fourth generation arrives. Most of the people who had seen and lived through Partition are no longer around and, gradually, more are dying as we approach the fourth generation from 1947; further, the lack of narratives has made it more difficult to keep the memories alive from one generation to the next. Kabir remarks how this makes the situation in the subcontinent different

[5] *Star Weekend* is a weekly magazine of *The Daily Star,* one of the leading English newspapers in Bangladesh.

[6] The term "rememory," meaning remembering memories, was coined by Toni Morrsion in her novel *Beloved* (1987).

[7] The term "postmemory" has been used by Marianne Hirsch in her book *The Generation of Postmemory: Writing and Visual Culture after the Holocaust* (2012).

from that of Holocaust survivors whose grandchildren have grown up reading stories of the Holocaust in novels and archives, seeing them in films and documentaries and listening to their forefathers; thus, they live in "postmemory." In contrast to this, the children of South Asia have been deprived of this connection due to lack of narratives mainly caused by political animosities between the two nations, India and Pakistan. This has led to a breach in the collective memory of the people in South Asia, including the Bengali Muslims in East Pakistan. In Bangladesh, the memories are shaped by 1971, and its own contour of movements, violence, memories and material realities. 1947 has turned into a collective amnesia that is at best associated with the birth of India and Pakistan. As Harrington says:

> Therefore it is unsurprising that the memory of Partition on the Eastern side centers on the new era of cultural, political and linguistic repression rather than independence from Britain. This also clarifies why it is possible for the event to become overshadowed in minds and in personal accounts. Partition on the Eastern side does not signify freedom from an oppressive ruler, nor does it celebrate the achievement of a homeland for Muslims, as in West Pakistan, because true liberation for the Bengali Muslims was yet to be achieved. (7)

Since Bangladesh was formed, there has been an urge to revisit Partition but this attempt is shaped by the amnesia in the middle. Distinguishing how memory works in Holocaust and Partition, Kabir writes:

> The postmemory of the Holocaust exemplarily constitutes the memory of memory, coupled with the retelling of its telling; in contrast, the politics of memory regarding 1947 and 1971 are characterized by an inter-generational movement from amnesia to a retrieval of those affective and cultural connections that amnesia denied. This retrieval I term *post-amnesia*: a symptomatic return to explorations of places lost to the immediate post-1947 and post-1971 generations through a combination of psychological and political imperatives. (26)

To illustrate this, Kabir starts with the history of her own family which is spread across India, Bangladesh and Pakistan; such history can be found among other families too. Just as Kabir has illustrated, many families in Bangladesh might have histories of disjoining in the 1947 era. The writers of the paper also recognise that in their own families, there are histories of religion-based and work-based unsettlement and resettlement in East Pakistan, where the fine line between the sense of belonging and unbelonging has been blurred. This negotiation of belonging-unbelonging depends on the absent-presence of certain memories in our unconscious mind. Personal histories of Partition which have been forgotten

are suddenly remembered, the memory jogged, perhaps, by an old photograph or letter from the period of Partition, similar to the tulsi plant and the bone in the stories above. The presence of these objects in homes and surroundings speaks for the absence of narratives between 1947 and 1971 that Kabir calls post-amnesia.

This particular study is not a positivist, objective lens to interpret the textual evidences of Partition. It is, rather, an affective attempt to look back to the past that is always here, but never quite so, a past that life in the pages of biographical fictions. We have read and interpreted the selected narratives as stories of our own, as an opener that will lead us to read more about Partition, about ourselves, and the world that was forcefully divided to change the course of our living experiences. This is keeping in mind that

> literature is always invested with translocal motifs, genres, metaphors, symbols, plots; characters travel across cultural boundaries in order for any local literature to come into being and, hence, to suggest interpretations of a local life world. Literature makes possible a shared understanding of human experience, but it does so by turning it into a memory in a translocal perspective. This process of travelling across cultural boundaries is exploited by all literatures of migration. (Larsen 514)

This overlapping of individual and collective memory has been the focus of many scholars of which Michael Rothberg's concept of "multidirectional memory" comes up repeatedly as he explains how the memory of one tragedy does not eliminate but rather elicits the memory of another by "transcultural borrowing, exchange, and adaptation" (524). That is why, according to Rothberg, too much of Holocaust studies does not mean less focus on colonialism and slavery; rather "public articulation of collective memory by marginalised and oppositional social groups provides resources for other groups to articulate their own claims for recognition and justice" and, with the recent rise in scholarship on war and trauma in South Asia, Partition victims seem one such group (524). Thus, it could be said that the earlier emphasis on Punjab led to the Bengalis becoming aware of their own trauma and, thereby, asking for attention and, this paper too is a part of that awareness.

Conclusion

With considerable distance, traumatic experiences are easier to observe. The years that have passed have created an amnesia, as suggested by Kabir, but in the post-amnesia situation there emerge new and different attempts of approaching the Partition of 1947. With the 70th anniversary of Partition in 2017, there have been countless things said and written about it – some new and some revisions of the old; one is that "an alternative discourse" has been paving its way, and involves

"a shift in focus, the public narratives mov[ing] away from the traditional recounting of the politics of the leaders in the 1940s to the experiences of the common man whose fate was decided" (Mustafa, "Time to Heal"). Not only the discourse, but the method or style has also changed, keeping up with the globalised and technology-driven world. This brings us to two kinds of narratives that have recently been developing, of which the first is documenting oral histories and second producing graphic narratives. An example of the former is Guneeta Singh Bhalla's 1947 Partition Archive[8] that she started in 2011. It is a non-profit organisation that digitally records and shares the experiences of witnesses who were on the verge of losing.

On the other hand, though not exactly a novel like Spiegelman's *Maus* but rather an anthology of 46 graphic stories, is *This Side That Side: Restorying Partition* (2013) that "brings together the attempts of writers and artists from Pakistan, India and Bangladesh to deal with the existential spin-off of the event" (Haq 65). A common ground of this "existential spin-off" seems to be the current generation's confusion of shared identities, and at the same time, an acceptance of and desire to understand those shadow lines.[9] In doing so, while contemporary works are praiseworthy, past contributions must not be forgotten. The three stories – "The Tale of a Tulsi Plant," "The Bone" and "A House with a Pond" – being some of the earliest works from East Bengal/East Pakistan about Muslims moving eastwards, give us the invaluable opportunity to put together the jigsaws of the1947 Partition, through which history, moving beyond the stereotype of linearity, circles our shared past. In this struggle for understanding our past, the importance of home is central.

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[8] 1947 Partition Archive, available at http://www.1947partitionarchive.org/.

[9] This alludes to Amitav Ghosh's novel *The Shadow Lines* (1988), which is set against the backdrop of the Partition.

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