ISSN. 0972 - 8406
The NEHU Journal, Vol XII, No. 1, January - June 2014, pp. 1-16

Pangs of Being 'Un-Homed'[1]: Engagements with 'Displacement' and 'Relocation' in Select Partition Narratives from Bengal

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Abstract

Partition of Indian subcontinent in 1947 witnessed millions of people move across borders towards their newly formed respective homelands, India and Pakistan. That was a time of trial and turbulence for many displaced people who sought shelter in transit camps and squatter colonies. Their lives were fraught with massive struggles and hardships. These refugees often became unwitting victims of politicised state policies and strategic rehabilitation measures. Literary narratives on Partition are replete with tales of dislocation trauma and concomitant hazards. This paper explicates diverse nuances of refugee lives and experiences as reflected in two seminal Bangla novels, Narayan Sanyal's Bakultala P.L. Camp and Sunil Gangopadhyay's Arjun. Through a detailed examination of these narratives, this paper unfolds the spheres of exploitations and sufferings the displaced people had to withstand in the wake of Partition.

Keywords: Partition, Bengal, Displacement, Relocation, Violence.

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'*Panchhi, Nadi, Pawanke Jhonke/Koi Sarhad na inhe roke'....*

(The bird, the river, and rustles of the winds/ No border dare stop them'[2]) - Javed Akhtar

'this bubbling blood/this breathless sky/this demented air only a poor man's household is being shattered/ what's so poor about it.'[3] - Nabaneeta Dev Sen

Partition continues to remain as an open chapter in the journey of this independent but divided subcontinent. The multiple traces and resonances

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it carries within its frame of references are phenomenal. Any form of insular, myopic reading of this seminal episode generates an incomplete understanding of its politics and poetics. No single deduction can claim to hold the key to grasping its dynamics. Partition reverberates across the socio-political and cultural discourses through its experiential legacy. This recurrence holds true not only for discourses that deliberate on the position of religion in India but also "for historical interpretation of justice and minority belonging and for the tension-ridden struggle over the production of secular national culture in the subcontinent" (Daiya, 2). Even today seminars, conferences, panel discussions, workshops, chat shows are being conducted in different colleges, universities, research institutes and television channels to reflect on long term consequences of the Partition in the sphere of public life in the subcontinent. Each new analysis, each fresh insight opens up another engaging track of research. Different narratives have been vying for primacy in controlling the explanation of partition violence. In this context literary representations have brought to Partition an unusual power of human vision and understanding. Writers have endeavoured in different ways to reckon with the pain of Partition and concomitant violence across generations. In more ways than one literature and films continue to be the arena in which the most sustained engagement with the human dimension of Partition gets staged.

The traumatic process of displacement contains within it the destruction of lived space, cultural practice and social ties. The question of survival struggles and the concomitant violence with respect to refugee conditions raise some important issues pertaining to politicised state policies and strategic rehabilitation programmes. The construction of the sharp borders that was/is inviolable for the partitioned communities in both emotional and material dimensions heightens the gravity of displacement and resettlement. Clearly these spatial divisions carried with them the violence of human separation and the shocking emergence of an extremely struggling life for the displaced.[4] Concurrently Partition also initiated the drawing of cognitive maps that informed who were included and excluded. The task of inhabiting a devastated landscape and consequent processes of demographic transformations after the redrawing of boundaries became the defining core of Partition legacy. In the late forties and fifties, Indian cities of Delhi, Calcutta and Bombay[5] were not merely the nerve centres of political, cultural and commercial activities;

rather they were transformed into primary destinations for many million migrant refugees. Partition narratives are replete with representations of varied treatments given to refugees. Paradoxical modes of assimilation, resistance, oppression, exploitation, loss and alienation have got articulated in these narratives. Partition migrants were not integrated in their misfortunes as they are assumed to be. Ravinder Kaur in "The Last Journey: Exploring Social Class in the 1947 Partition Migration" points to this note of variance with regard to the different experiences of the displaced group.

A geographical space encapsulates within its fold linguistic, cultural, ethnic commonalities which remain intrinsic to that place. Partition displacement violently ruptured that socio-cultural fabric which in turn created an unredeemable sense of loss and angst. The Partition induced displacement and subsequent relocation in Bengal are marked by a distinct set of features and peculiarities. The gruesome episodes of Dandakaranya enterprise[6] and Marichjhanpi massacre[7] attest to the volatile terrain of relocation issue in Bengal. The course of transition from 'dyash' to 'desh'[8] has been fraught with a great degree of shock, disbelief and anxiety. It has turned out be a continuing process and it is very much an overarching problem till date. Jasodhara Bagchi and Subhoranjan Dasgupta have commented on this aspect:

> Compared to the nature of border and boundary in the West where political, strategic and military considerations have converted the entire region into two rigid divisions, the dividing line in the East is porous and flexible. (Bagchi and Dasgupta Vol 1, 3)

The question of accommodating the huge mass of constantly arriving refugees became a critical issue for the partitioned India. The enduring sense of pain, loss and betrayal experienced by the East Bengali refugees in the wake of 1947 Partition and their reception within a nation that was nominally theirs have been investigated from various academic perspectives. The narratives representing the victimhood of East Bengali migrants struggling to cope with an entirely new set of challenges and constraints are viewed as important archives in recording the far reaching consequences of Partition. This titanic task of rebuilding lives, rearranging priorities was fraught with multitude of problems and difficulties. Debates generated in the Constituent Assembly and other public forums exposed profusely the inadequacies in various rehabilitation policies. It is interesting

to note that a striking feature of the representation of refugees in both political and cultural sphere was that a refugee was not merely seen only as a hapless victim but also as a potential agent capable of inducing violence. This ambivalent representation of refugees complicates the discourse of victimhood and denial which so often characterises refugee tales. However, keeping in mind the duality of discourse it is possible to discern the modes of assimilation, resistance, denial and implicit violence which mark the process of relocation and reconstitution of uprooted lives. Creative texts like *Bakultala P.L. Camp*, *Arjun*, *Purbo-Paschim*, and many short stories have taken up this critical issue of refugee rehabilitation and associated socio-cultural transformations initiated by this violent belonging. Through a nuanced study of novels like *Bakultala P.L. Camp* and *Arjun* this paper seeks to uncover how Partition migration and consequent phase of relocation have transformed socio-cultural make up of Bengal and have inserted newer modes of cultural belonging fraught with a sense of embedded violence.

The condition of being *bastuhara* and then being rendered as *sharanarthi* / *udvastu*[9] generates a gigantic scale of insecurity and anxiety, both physical and psychological. *Vastu* which is endowed with a sense of sacred gravity and permanence becomes a thing of the past for these people. Their quest for a *basha* as opposed to *bari*[10] becomes a search for a new belonging and identity. Partition narratives are replete with the tales of such tragic quest. Spurred by this shattered loss of roots the refugees had to engage themselves in a fierce struggle for survival and possession. Naturally the course of competition is qualified by its own ethics of violence. Their recounting of the immediacy of displacement violence is seen as a potential threat for inciting ethnic violence again and again. Kavita Daiya in her study on refugee status notes:

> Refugees and their oral testimony in this period come to be seen as powerful enough to generate mass political violence. Narratives that bear witness to refugees' experiences "their suffering" are denigrated as "tales" that become "more lurid" in their re-telling. (Daiya, 110)

Naturally, the conceptualisation of victimhood gains a different dimension keeping in view this other contention. Prafulla Chakraborty in *The Marginal Men* mentions two important reasons behind the discriminatory attitude of the government towards the refugees in the east. Firstly, the geographical proximity between west and Delhi prompted

government to take immediate action. Secondly, large number of Punjabis in defence sectors propelled them to initiate steps.

Narayan Sanyal's *Bakultala P.L. Camp*[11] gives a graphic account of living in government provided relief camps and various planes of violence constituted within this system of rehabilitation. Numerous accounts of camp life in reminiscences, interviews, oral testimonies have been generated in the recent past in various anthologies.[12] Most of these documentations point to the politics of discrimination and practices of corruption rampantly prevalent in such camp lives. The lives depicted in rehabilitation centres like Coopers Camp, Chandmari Camp, Jirat Camp are often full of details connected with exploitative schemes and unfulfilled demands. In the novel, camp life emerges as a space where specific identities and subjectivities are contested and forged in skirmishes of everyday life. Talking about the genesis of vast number of camps in West Bengal, Anusua Basu Raychaudhury in "Living Another Life: Un-Homed in the Camp" states:

> In fact, different types of camps in West Bengal were set up to deal with an unprecedented refugee influx in the state. The government mainly set up three types of camps, namely, women's camps, worksite camps and Permanent Liability (PL) camps. (Basu Raychaudhury, *Citizens,*13)

As the name suggests *Permanent Liability Camps* (emphasis mine) are meant for those refugees who are considered unfit for any kind of beneficial employment with which they could be rehabilitated. The refugees residing there are old, infirm, invalid and orphans. Bakultala P.L.Camp is such a permanent liability camp. This camp situated somewhere in Bihar Bengal border was initially constructed as military camp during the war period. After the Partition this abandoned military camp is recast as a refugee camp.

This P.L. Camp is transformed into a thriving space for playing out exploitative strategies by the government contractors, various forms of deceits manoeuvred by the powerful and also internal conflicts amongst the camp refugees. The narrative records how Writobrata Bose, the officer in charge of the camp becomes witness to a series of untoward incidents in the camp and how he is gradually pulled into the whirlwind of nasty politics and power tussle enacted during his tenure. A grant of

a generous sum of money by the government for renovation of the camp area is viewed as the decisive moment for generating group politics and unpleasant factions. Neelanjana Chatterjee makes a very important study on East Bengal refugees within the discursive framework of interrogating victimhood. In her illuminating essay on this issue Chatterjee shows how East Bengali refugees' construction of the image of Partition victimhood - the self-conscious insistence on the historicity of their predicament as patriots and subjects of communal persecution challenged their marginalization after Partition and legitimized their demand for restitution. In the novel too Sanyal takes on a wide spectrum of refugee issues and he categorically shows how at times refugees are equally culpable in inflaming a situation unnecessarily. On the one hand he depicts some of these refugees as weak, hapless victims languishing in the camp without any hope for a better future, on the other he shows some of them as trouble makers working in league with other corrupt, wicked people in the vicinity.

Sanyal's projection of a divided world in the camp is considerably in conformity with the representations of camp life as documented in various interviews and memoirs. Jogendranath Roy in his article "Coopers Camp e Chhelebela" ("My Childhood in Coopers Camp") talks about growing up amidst such a hostile environment during his childhood. He says that though there were kind, co-operative families around who would help them on various occasions, yet there were some families who would behave in wild manners just to assert their presence. It remains true that since the families which took refuge in such camps were not homogeneous caste groups, there prevailed considerable measure of divisive caste politics even though they lived under such degrading circumstances. Many camp narratives reveal an interesting axis of identity politics and resettlement agendas. Joya Chatterji makes a similar observation in her analysis of camp life, she notes that the refugees understandably sought to establish relationships of friendship and mutual support with others of their own kind from their own parts of East Bengal and, quite reasonably, they wanted to foster these connections in their new homes. In the case of *Bakultala P.L. Camp* a different kind of identity rhetoric is cast to suggest how most of these camp dwellers remain as prisoners of the past. The deranged old man who bursts into a frenzied Greek expression in response to the haughty officer's comment is actually a highly educated retired school

headmaster. This tragic plight of a veteran school teacher represents how Partition can be viewed as an 'epistemic rupture'[13], as total destruction of language. His apparent nonsensical eruption heightens the enunciative disorder of the times.

A number of empirical studies reveal that camp dwellers took resort to various forms of resistance to lodge protest against the shoddy and offhand implementation of various grant schemes. Antara Dutta in her book *Refugees and Borders in South Asia: The Great Exodus of 1971* cites the case of noted writer Maitreyi Devi who went to the village of Bogra, 22 miles away from Bongaon and few minutes from the border found that medical supplies were almost non-existent and needed to be replaced every few days as many refugees were injured. Dutta notes, "Her account of the refugee camp provides us with an insight into the early days of the relief operation-well-meaning, chaotic and susceptible to a complete breakdown if the numbers continued to rise." (Dutta,133) Numerous protest committees were launched to raise voices against injustice and depravity. Interestingly the evil nexus of contractors, some government employees working in the camp and also some camp dwellers are seen to be actively involved in various dubious activities including women trafficking and shady handling of government grants. The depiction of a character like 'borokhoka'[14] creates an atmosphere of intimidation in the camp at times. But overall camp activism and resistance against failed dispersal of government policies is sparsely staged in the novel, the basic focus remains on the wicked people's hegemony over most of these silent, voiceless camp dwellers. The narrative privileges such a perspective perhaps because of the fact that the chief actor in the novel is an honest government official who takes up the task of protesting against the corrupt system. The canvas of discontent and denial is mainly highlighted by Writobrata's attempt to bring about a change in camp life. As he receives applications of complaints with regard to negligence of camp repairing tasks he becomes increasingly aware of the gap between apparent success of schemes and reality. There is one instance in the novel when after news get circulated about proposal for total resettlement of some camp families, these families lodge a protest against this move. Taking advantage of this situation, some youths involved with camp welfare organisations intrude into the matter and try to mobilise them. It becomes clear from the narrative that Sanyal critiques the unnecessary politicisation of camp

issues and he attaches primacy to bring out the discrepancy between government policies and their actual implementation on ground. As a creative writer Sanyal is not keen on showing charts or statistics of discontent and betrayal, rather his focus is on the emotional dimension of such experiences. In the case of female characters like Kusum and Kamala[15], a different form of violence traumatises them, violence which is directed against women, violence which is gendered and which reinforces subversive patriarchal norms. The threats posed by wicked Ramsharan, dirty, manipulative ploys implemented by Dr Sadhucharan represent the insidious levels of exploitation and unspoken violence affecting the lives of the camp refugees.

Sunil Gangopadhyay's novella *Arjun*[16] highlights an altogether different dimension of rehabilitation experience. In the novel Gangopadhyay emblematizes the discontent surrounding relocation and gives an engaging account of violence entrenched in reconstitution of scattered, broken lives. The elements of politics and concomitant violence which are inextricably linked up with refugee rehabilitation, formation of squatters' colonies become the primary concerns of narration in *Arjun*. The novel expresses an ambivalent sympathy for the refugees as it constructs them as subjects of misery and suffering, and then projects some of them as agents and organisers of violence. In many ways the tale of the settlement diverges from that of *Bakultala P.L. Camp*. The politico-social category of the refugee and its Bengali synonym *sharanarthi* were initially the topics of intense debate. Cartoons and illustrations appeared in many daily newspapers like the *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, the *Ananda Bazar* and the likes revealing serious public anxiety over the amount of expenditure and assistance borne by the government to shelter the huge mass of refugees. Countering the debate there emerged another discourse proclaiming the permissible rights of the refugees. This argument posited collectively refugees as sacrificial victims of Indian independence and sought to invest a sense of dignity and respectability with regard to the usage of the term refugee. In "Interrogating Victimhood", Neelanjana Chatterjee notes:

> Rehabilitation with dignity was not to be seen as an act of charity but as the repayment of a national debt to the East Bengali Hindus represented in this passage as historic agents--freedom-fighters and victims of Partition which consigned them to minorityhood and therefore subordination in a Muslim majority state. (Chatterjee, 8)

This reflection on refugee status is partially worked out in the novella *Arjun*.

Arjun reinvents the story of the dispossessed and underscores the multilayered struggles of a refugee community to assert its existence while negotiating with all dispossessions and handicaps. The year of publication of the text is very crucial; it got published in 1971, the year of Bangladesh liberation. The author dedicates the novella to the *muktasainiks*[17] of Bangladesh. The narrative frame captures the growing politicization of the struggles of Deshapran squatters' colony in the face of transitional socio-cultural set up of the time. Like establishment of many squatters' colony in and around Calcutta just after Partition, Deshapran Colony was also developed and organised to shelter a group of homeless families. Arjun, the protagonist of the narrative is named after the illustrious hero of the epic the *Mahabharata*. He is a resident of Deshapran colony. The novel charts his individual struggle to combat the forces working to evict the people from Deshapran colony. He is projected as an educated, sensitive character who can see through the impending threats directed towards the vulnerable, helpless colony dwellers. Arjun recollects those days when Biraj Thakur, the leader of the refugee group had spotted some abandoned houses and plots in and around Dum Dum and helped them in building some haphazard colonies. Biraj Thakur had mobilised them to grab lands for themselves instead of living on government doles and charity. Later on when Arjun reads Che Guevera's life journey, he is instantly reminded of Biraj Thakur, "Afterwards when I read Che Guevera's biography, I don't know why I was repeatedly reminded of Biraj Thakur." (48) Nilima Dutta, a resident of a refugee colony, in an article "Udvastu Colony" gives a similar account of colony formation in Jessore Road. She gives a description of how every detail was taken care of while building a full-fledged colony out of almost nothing. Conflict intensifies in the colony when Kewal Singh, a Punjabi plywood factory owner strives to hire the local unemployed youths to work under him. He is shown to be a ruthless businessman who has mastered the skill of expanding his business empire. Most of the migrant families have remained as squatters; they have failed to bring any degree of security in their lives. For the refugees it is hand to mouth struggle on an everyday basis. Kewal Singh needs a portion of colony's land to extend his factory building and he can fulfil his business agenda by evacuating five-six families from the colony. Time and again

the families gather to lodge resistance against Kewal Singh's manoeuvres but eventually the atmosphere changes for the worst. Young people like Dibya, Sukhen who had initially protested against Singh's moves turn into his hired assistants in an ironical twist. Singh lures them into joining his camp and devises ways to make them his own agents to serve his needs. This transformation proves to be a very critical moment in the narrative.

The possibility of raising an effective opposition against the coercive measures adopted by Kewal Singh turns more challenging. Singh's collaboration with the original owners of the land, the Dattas turns the picture all the more menacing. These dubious measures adopted by Singh reinforce the formidable manifestations of systemic violence operating within the very basic structures of society. The rising power of capitalist community threatens to subdue any attempts of retaliation put up by these bare lives. It is quite obvious from the narrative tone that they do not have any government support to fall back on. Joya Chattterji in "Dispersal and the Failure of Rehabilitation: Refugee Camp-Dwellers and Squatters in West Bengal" contends that in early 1950's Dr B.C.Roy's government had drafted legislation in secret giving immense powers to the government to evict squatters and protect the right to private property. However, when the news came out in public it triggered off a sustained campaign against the intended bill. The government was compelled to backtrack. The Act when passed included a pledge that a 'Displaced Person' in unauthorised occupation of land would not be evicted 'until the Government provides for him other land or house in an area which enables the person to carry on such occupation as he may be engaged in for earning his livelihood at the time of the order. Therefore, the complicity of the police in Kewal Singh's insidious attempt to forcibly vacate the plot does not come across as a surprise. Ironically posed against the rich and powerful community is the culturally elite community of Abaneesh Mukherjee and his likes. In the narrative Abaneesh, projected as a respectable scholarly person who acts as Arjun's mentor, plays an instrumental role in Arjun's life. Abaneesh exercises his own influence and mobilises press to cover this ruckus between Arjun's group and that of Kewal Singh. The government is forced to pay response because of Abaneesh's intervention and the squatters are recognized as Indian citizens. Arjun's education, social mobility, intellectual predilection place him way above the other residents of the colony. Very often through the first person narration it is suggested that he experiences a sense of alienation from the other people. The

narrative also hints at the possibility of Arjun leaving Deshapran colony. Arjun is no radical leader or activist yet his involvement with his community (colony dwellers) happens owing to a sense of responsibility for their collective plight. He is pulled into action and his participation and subsequent physical injuries caused to him bring about a solution to the ongoing row over forced eviction of the colony dwellers.

Arjun's encounter with the rival group is suggestive of a delirious circumstance where he takes on some of his old mates who have joined Kewal Singh's band. Like Arjuna of *The Mahabharata* it is a battle which he fights partially against his kin. His own childhood memories as a boy in a tea shop and a past life shaped by incessant struggles draw him to resist the wicked moves of the enemy camp. His own ambition to explore better possibilities of life gets overpowered by his immediate desire to save his community. Talking about the parallel correspondence between Arjuna in *The Mahabharata* and Arjun Roy Choudhury, Debali Mookerjea-Leonard notes:

> In the epic the hero Arjuna is essentially what he was at its beginning-there is no shift in his consciousness. He is an embodiment of certain virtues of the community, and this is so even when he is on his solitary journeys gathering divine weapons and royal allies. This is because Arjun undergoes no 'education'. In re-situating the epic in the present, Gangopadhyay tracks how modernity has altered man's relationship with the community and thus reconstituted the structure of humanity.(Roy and Bhatia,51)

Though Arjun experiences self-distancing from his colony neighbours, his involvement in that power tussle re-contextualizes the epic narrative against the present backdrop which is replete with acts of violence against community and brotherhood.

Literary narratives like Narayan Sanyal's *Bakultala P.L. Camp* and Sunil Gangopadhyay's *Arjun* explicated here represent the kind of bitterness and intensity associated with the predicament of being homeless within the fold of nationalist rhetoric. Talking about the sense of being perpetually homeless as experienced by the East Bengali displacement victims, Anusua Basu Raychaudhury comments, "Their *desh* was someplace else and now it is a place of no return. It can only be revisited in memories and nostalgia. It has lost its spatial existence."(Basu

Raychaudhury, "Nostalgia" 56-59) No wonder this angst associated with forced dislocation and subsequent homelessness continues to resonate through multiple contours of contemporary discourses. Writing about Partition, its violence and complexity of individual experiences remain a daunting task for creative writers. In the decades following Partition, time and again literary imagination has striven to capture the essence of fierce struggle for survival, the relentless fight against social exploitation and political depravity. In a way creative writings have unfolded gradually and sensitively the pangs of dislocation and also the crises of relocation amidst a series of oppositions and difficulties. Literary texts like *Bakultala P.L. Camp* and *Arjun* bring forth the different strands of challenges which the displaced people had to encounter after the Partition. Interestingly these creative writings also highlight the resilience and perseverance contained within human spirit to survive and sustain even during the most chaotic of times.

Notes

1 Here I draw upon Anusua Basu Raychaudhury's usage of the term "Un-Homed" in her article "Living another Life: Un-Homed in the Camps" which addresses the struggles of survival of the uprooted people from East Bengal in various camps.

2 This is the lyric of a song featuring in Hindi film *Refugee* (2000) directed by J.P. Dutta. The film deconstructs the validity of border formation and its impact on individual lives through the strand of a love story. The song has been written by Javed Akhtar, renowned poet and lyricist. The translation is mine.

3 These lines are from Nabaneeta Dev Sen's poem "Dharavi (December 1992)" See Tarun Saint (ed) *Bruised Memories: Communal Violence and the Writer*.pp 111-112.

4 In the case of migrants who went to Pakistan it was initially a promising moment because they held the view that Pakistan as a nation would offer them better living, greater opportunities to start anew in life. For the people who came to India, Partition meant loss in terms of land, culture and a familiar society.

5 It is a historical knowledge that topography of cities like Delhi and Calcutta changed drastically after Partition. It is equally true that Partition brought about a major change in the urban cultural life of Bombay. Partition was instrumental in effecting transformation in Hindi film industry as well.

6 Dandakaranya comprises the virgin forests and arid lands in the Koraput (Orissa) and Bastar districts of Madhya Pradesh. Dandakaranya was expected to provide a home for the residuary refugee population in camps or elsewhere for whom there was supposed to be no more room in West Bengal. It remains as a prime example of hostile terrain which had not been made ready before the refugees were forcibly transferred here. Incidentally it has a mythic significance as well. In the *Ramayana* the place is associated with the reality of harsh exile.

7 It is an infamous episode in the history of Partition refugees. It refers to the forced eviction of many refugees from the island of Marichjhhapi in West Bengal through governmental coercion. On January 31, 1979 many refugees had to submit to death in the face of police firing. Till date no proper investigation has been conducted with regard to the case.

8 This transformation in the sphere of language usage signifies that along with a major shift in space of habitation, the displaced people also got vastly appropriated by the dominant cultural stream of West Bengal. While *Dyash* is a Bangal expression used by the East Bengalis, *Desh* represents the more refined and standardised Bengali term.

9 *Sharanarthi* literally means someone seeking refuge and protection from a higher power, whereas *Udavastu* means someone who has been extricated from his/her home. In Bengali the word is often combined with the word *bhita* (or bhite), a word connected to the Sanskrit word *bhitti* meaning 'foundation'. The idea of 'foundation' is again associated with the idea of 'male ancestry' so that the combined word *vastuvita* reinforces the association between patriliny and the way in which one's dwelling or home is connected to the conception of foundation. Dipesh Chakrabarty has elaborately discussed this aspect in "Remembered Villages: Representation of Hindu-Bengali Memories in the aftermath of the Partition" *Economic and Political Weekly* 31, 32 (August 10, 1996) p. 2143-2151

10 *Basha* and *Bari* have specific cultural connotations. *Basha* means temporary place of dwelling, it denotes a sense of impermanence, transience. *Bari* refers to home which is rooted, a place where the ancestors have lived through. It generates a sense of rootedness and permanence.

11 This narrative focuses exclusively on the problems and difficulties associated with camp lives as a consequence of large scale displacement during Partition. The narrator Writobroto is shown to be a construction overseer deputed to look after the construction related issues in Bakultala P.L. Camp. It unfolds the layers of shady politics and corruption which were operative surrounding such refugee camps during the time. The novel

examines how Writobroto who was once a distanced onlooker gradually gets entangled in the web of camp politics. On the one hand the narrative records the predicament of a destitute woman like Kusum and the kind of ostracism she has to undergo even from the other camp inmates. Through the gradual unveiling of complexities of camp life the narrative constitutes a poignant documentation of the levels of injustice meted out to these helpless, homeless groups of people. The righteous Writobroto stries hard to fight against prevalent corruption and improve the condition of camp life. In the process he is framed by the group of wicked adversaries. However the novel ends on a note of optimism after Writobroto marries Kamala, an inmate of Bakultala P.L. camp.

12 Some of the notable anthologies include Sandip Bandopadhyay's *Deshbhag: Smriti O Swatta(Partition: Memories and Selves)*, Semonti Ghosh (ed) *Deshbhag: Smriti O Stobdota (Partition: Memories and Silences)*, Madhumoy Paul (ed) *Deshbhag: Binash O Binirman (Partition: Destruction and Reconstruction)*

13 Sukeshi Kamra uses this term in her article "Partition and Post-Partition Acts of Fiction: Narrating Painful Histories" in Anjali Gera Roy, Nandin Bhatia (eds) *Partitioned Lives: Narratives of Home, Displacement and Resettlement.* Kamra uses it to denote the total disruption of meaning and coherence in a partitioned world.

14 In Bengali *Khoka* is an endearing form of addressing son. *Borokhoka* would mean the elder son. Here in the novel *Borokhoka* is not really a loving and responsible son, rather he is one of the camp inmates who resorts to muscle flexing to instil a sense of fear and threat in the camp.

15 Kusum and Kamala are two important female characters in the novel. Their positions in the story give an insight into the hapless conditions of women who were victimised during Partition. Very often women were looked upon as potential targets to execute revenge and destroy the rival community. In the novel Kusum and Kamala represent the various dimensions of vulnerability which women experienced during Partition.

16 This novella by Sunil Gangopadhyay captures the pains and turmoil of refugee existence very effectively. The narrative is set against the backdrop of a refugee colony in Calcutta which was established some years after the Partition. Arjun, the protagonist is a modern delineation of the valiant mythical hero who waged a grand war to protect his community. The author re-situates the epic in the modern context to bring forth the changing dimension of man's relationship with community. Arjun, the young victim of Partition aspires to change his life through his academic achievements,

but finds himself trapped in the conflicts afflicting his colony. When the owner of an adjacent plywood factory conspires with the landowner to evict the colony, the situation worsens and the other refugees turn to Arjun for leadership. This is a critical juncture in the novel because Arjun has to decide whether he would stand up for his marginalised, dispossessed community or he would abandon them for a better life of his own. The novel also conducts a sharp critique of the rising capitalist rhetoric which took society in its gigantic sweep in the post Partition phase. Like the invincible archer of the *Mahabharata,* Arjun in the novel jumps into action finally to proclaim his bond with the colony inhabitants.

17 Muktasainiks refer to the warriors who had fought during Bangladesh Liberation War.

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