**Chapter I: Introduction**

“The struggle of man against power is the struggle of memory against forgetting”

― Milan Kundera, The Book of Laughter and Forgetting (Kundera, 1999)

On June 3, 1947, the British Prime Minister Attlee informed the House of Commons of diving up the Indian empire into two new nations states. At 7pm Indian Standard Time, the announcement was relayed across the Indian empire’s 1.8 million square miles, twenty times the size of Britain itself (Khan, 2008). It marked the end of almost two centuries of colonial rule giving South Asia two new nation states—India and Pakistan. The borders of the new states were divided largely along religious lines (Jalal, 1985) because by 1945, rivalries between two major religious groups-Hindus and Muslims-dominated Indian politics thus Religion appeared to have been the determinant of national identity making Pakistan a “Home for Muslims” and India for Hindus. Unimaginable violence escalated particularly in contested regions like Punjab and Bengal. Killings were frequently accompanied by “disfiguration, dismemberment and the rape of women from one community by men from another.” (Khan, 2008). Half a million to one million men, women, and children died (Khan, 2008); and some 20 million people were displaced, making it one of the largest displacements of people in human since Second World War (Zamindar, 2007).

The story of the partition did not stop in 1947. In less than 25 years, the basis of the partition, “two-nation theory”[[1]](#footnote-1) was challenged when Pakistan’s East wing separated as Bangladesh. Unfortunately, the partition discourse has been mainly overlooked in East Bengal’s official history and in its collective memories particularly after the war in 1971. The official narrative of Bangladesh rarely acknowledges the role of the 1947 partition. The memory of the partition is non-existent in public discourse as well. For example, there is no museums or public commemoration recognizing the 1947 partition. There are, nevertheless, fictional works that represent the trauma of the partition, most of which were written before the 1971 liberation war of Bangladesh.

This thesis will examine the relationship between the official[[2]](#footnote-2) narrative and the collective memory of the 1947 partition in Bangladesh by exploring partition related themes in fictional works in Bengali. It argues that in the absence of 1947 partition in Bangladesh history in the official narrative, memories of the partition depicted in the fictional works create a counter-narrative. The study further explores any generational gaps in the fictional works as the nationalist movements ascended in pre-independence as well as in post-independence of Bangladesh. The discussion is followed by how the collective memories illustrated in the literature have facilitated or challenged the collective identity narratives in post independent Bangladesh. It focuses particularly on the continuous struggle between “Bangladeshi” and “Bengali” identities, which has resulted in an identity crisis in recent decades. Thus, this study aims to answer the following questions:

*A) What is the official narrative of the 1947 partition in Bangladesh? What is the narrative of the partition in Bangladeshi literature?*

*B) How have the memories transformed among the pre-independence and post-independence literary response?*

*C) How does the collective memory of the partition in fiction facilitate or challenge the collective identity narratives in Bangladesh?*

Perhaps the sheer magnitude of catastrophic experiences and the consequential nature of the partition are enough to justify this study. Nevertheless, it expects to have at least three contributions. First, it will be an addition to the partition literature. The study will have a unique contribution because of its focus on Bangladesh and Bengali literature, a region that have largely been ignored in the growing partition discourse. Second, it will enlarge the politics of memory discourse because of the study’s both regional and thematic focus. Third, rarely anyone has examined the identity question in Bangladesh in light of the partition memory. By trying to disentangle the identity crisis of Bangladesh, it will contribute to the growing Bangladesh studies.

The thesis starts with a brief history of the partition and discuss the theoretical framework of collective memories. How the collective memory theories offer a better understanding of the partition memories and questions of identities in Bangladesh is discussed as well. The following chapter reviews the available literature and their limitations. Chapter three analyzes the selected primary sources and respond to the first two research questions by focusing on the construction and the transformation of the partition history and memories in Bangladesh. The last chapter examines how the partition related themes in the selected fictional works challenge the narratives of collective identity in the country.

**Theoretical Framework**

In investigating the memories of the 1947 partition in Bangladesh, I am primarily interested in not what happened in history but how we remember it. Why does memories of the past matter at all? In the most basic sense, the memories of past shape the present. According to Andy Markovits and Simon Reich (1997), collective memory “is the lens through which past is viewed,” in which “both masses and elites interpret the present and decide on policy.” The construction of collective memory legitimizes the process that creates, sustains and reproduces an “imagined community” by providing them with a “sense of history, place and belonging” (Anderson, 1981). In short, collective memory plays an important role in producing concepts of the “nation” and national identity based on a complex political implication of the issues and the dominating ideology. Closely related to the ideas of collective memory and interchangeably used in this study is politics of memory. Politics of memory is “a subjective experience of a social group that essentially sustains a relationship of power” thus, the politics of memory engages the questions of “who wants whom to remember what, and why” (Confino, 1997). However, history and memories are inseparable. Schwartz (2008) sees history as an adjunct of memory. He writes,

The primary vehicles of collective memory are *history*—the establishing and propagating of facts about the past through research monographs, textbooks, museums, and mass media—and *commemoration*: the process of selecting from the historical record those facts most relevant to society’s ideals and symbolizing them by iconography, monuments, shrines, place-names, and ritual observance (p. 76).

The relationships between history and memory is complex. Theories of collective memories tries to explain the construction of a shared narrative. They aim to understand the politics of memory whereby individual memories become a shared history and vice versa through the material and immaterial culture associated with such narratives. The shared memory of the past or the rejection of the past provides groups with a sense of community that can be used to mobilize or influence politics.

As people’s social and political actions are guided by what is inherited from yesterday, theories of collective memory and the politics related to it would provide a better understanding of the silence around the 1947 partition in Bangladesh. Gramsci’s *Selections from the Prison Notebooks* considers the ways that ruling elites tend to construct the ethos and values of society to secure their vested sociopolitical interests, and he suggests that political civil society ‘hegemonies’ nationalistic values in support of ruling objectives (Gramsci, 1971). Following from this argument, the silence around the memories of 1947 partition is prompted by the hegemons in order to sustain and advance the exclusionary identity meta-narratives.[[3]](#footnote-3) The Bangladeshi ruling elites have constructed both ‘Bengali nationalist’ and ‘Bangladeshi nationalist’ identities in support of their own ruling objectives over the years, but with little reference at all to the history the 1947 partition. However, through the discussion of selected literary materials, I highlight the problems of such narratives.

**Chapter II: Theories of the Partition**

**When and Why:**

The announcement of that burning hot summer’s evening in June 1947 did not address the fundamental questions about the partition; were Muslims of India or the Hindus of Pakistan expected to move even if they did not want to? What about the people who followed religions other than Islam and Hinduism? Was citizenship be underpinned by a shared religious faith, or was it a right guaranteed by the state that promised to uphold equality and freedom for all? However, the most important question to ask is that was the Indian partition in 1947 inevitable? If yes, how did it come to be so? The official history of the partition subscribed to the “two-nation” theory arguing the inevitability of the partition. The agreement to divide colonial India into two separate states, one with a Hindu majority and the other with a Muslim majority, is commonly seen as the natural outcome of religious difference. The argument is that India “contained two seeds of two nations” and Indian Muslims were “separate and identifiable” with their own “distinctive traditions” (Jalal, 1985). This argument is passionately put forth in *The Indus Saga and Making of Pakistan* by Aitzaz Ahsan. Ahsan (1996) argued that Indus and Indic are two separate civilizations and “Indus has been one large, independent, politico-economic zone for the past countless centuries (…) [It has had] a rich and glorious cultural heritage of its own (…) [and is] a distinct and separate nation’ (18).”

Nationalist historians claim that the “divide and rule” strategy of the British Empire for separating the two communities which had centuries of shared history and traditions. Blaming Imperialism, this perspective concludes that the colonial master turned the Hindus and Muslims against each other as a political strategy. The partition of the subcontinent was the logical conclusion of the “divide and rule” policy by the British Empire. Some of the Indian historians such as A.K. Banerjee (1985), Sumit Sarkar (1983) and Bipan Chandra (2000) asserted that the policy of “divide and rule” was put into place at the time of the Partition of Bengal in 1905[[4]](#footnote-4) and was rigorously pursued until the partition of India in 1947. On the other hand, imperialist British prided themselves on their ability to unify the subcontinent under British rule and placed the blamed on the Indians for the division and bloodshed that marked the last days of the Raj (Roy, 2010).

The state or official history of India and Pakistan perpetuated the “great-man-of-history” approach championing the roles of Nehru, Ghandi, and Jinnah’s role in the freedom struggle (Talbot, 2000) and has constructed meta-narratives favorable to their nationalist agendas. Denouncing each other as “the enemy” these theories of the partition have been propounded as part and parcel of the ideology of post-colonial nation states. They have been reproduced through media, literature, the Internet and so on and served as political tools to boost nationalist narratives in both in India and Pakistan. Even though they have had wide popular support, neither Nationalist or “community histories” of India and “romanticized” emergence of Pakistani identity (Talbot, 2000) adequately explain the central event of the Partition in modern South Asian history. In fact, the demand for “two nations” did not surface until at the All-India Muslim League’s Lahore session in March 1940, when “Indian Muslims were decidedly revolting against minoritarianism, caricatured as 'religious communalism’” (Jalal, 2000). Jinnah, the “founder of Pakistan” and his politics are popularly associated with, and sometimes blamed for, the creation of Pakistan. The popular assumption is that Jinnah and the Muslim League, the political party he led, demanded a separate state for Indian Muslims thus leading to the partition of the subcontinent.

This narrative has been challenged most notably by Ayesha Jalal in her book *The Sole Spokesman: Jinnah, the Muslim League and the Demand for Pakistan* (1985). Jalal argues that the demand for a separate state by the Muslim League and Jinnah was a bargain strategy because Pakistan was a goal that Jinnah "in fact did not really want" (p. 57). She draws out three demands of Jinnah throughout his political career: a) to consider himself as the official mandate at the center for all Muslims in India, b) provincial autonomy in the Muslim majority regions and safeguarding of interests of Muslims in non-majority Muslim regions and c) defiance of ‘minority status’ to Muslims in India (Jalal, 1985). Jalal emphasizes that Jinnah was in favor of autonomy of Pakistan instead of a sovereign Pakistan (p. 21-22). Jalal’s account of the partition and the revisionist history of Jinnah’s role in it provides an alternative to the dominant narratives of the event. Related to the question of *why* the partition happened, a better question to ask is not *who* was responsible for it but *how* it came to be and *why* it happened when it did.

A number of external and internal factors have contributed to the Indian partition. In the post-World War II world order, ideas of self-determination became popular in the Middle East, Asia, Africa, and more. In some of these environments, colonial powers such as Britain found that leaving the fate of their former holdings in the hands of their indigenous populations was a quick and easy solution. The partition in India and the creation of Israel state were two of the most devastating cases due to the magnitude of violence and wars in both cases (Klune, 2014). Along with the trend of global decolonization, internal politics in Britain and global politics played significant roles. The announcement of the Indian partition came soon after the victory of the Labor Party in the British general election in July 1945, amid the realization that the British state, devastated by the Second World War, could no longer afford to hold on to its largest empire (Bates, 2011). Moreover, drawing important connections between India’s partition and oil politics in the Middle East, Narendra Singh Sarila (2005) theorized the role of global politics. Sarila claimed that the British fearing the India’s post-independence government led by the Congress Party would not join them to play the Great Game against the Soviet Union, it settled for those willing to do so i.e. the Muslim League (2005). Playing one against the other, the British manipulated the idealist South Asian leader to fulfill their ultimate territorial goal of accessing Middle East oilfields and warm water ports (Sarila, 2005). However, the theories that focus only on the external factors of the Partition ignore the internal developments in political landscape of the Indian subcontinent leading to the partition. The rise of various forms of nationalism within the society led to a moment of rapture marked by unimaginable violence in 1947.

The reformist movements in nineteenth century in both Hinduism and Islam contributed to a consolidation of distinct social consciousness and identities. Nationalism, religion, and class intersected right from the outset of the nationalist movement in colonial India. For example, the early narratives of “Indian nation” were realized by the middle-class Hindu *Bhadrolok* (gentlemen) in Calcutta. Hindu social reformers like Rammohan Roy (1772-1833), Bengali Hindu novelist Bankim Chattopadhyay, and poet-philosopher Rabindranath Tagore are some of the pioneers of “modernist Indian nationalist thoughts.” Defining nationalism in terms of a renewal of religious tradition (Reetz, 1993), they led the “Bengal Renaissance” marking the rise of a cultural consciousness and institutionalizing the notion of a “single Indian nation” (Riaz, 2016). The genesis of the *Bhadrolok* class traced back to the ‘Minute in Indian Education’ of 1835, which aimed to create “interpreters” between the master and its colonial subjects (Riaz, 2016).

Nonetheless, this strand of nationalist imagination was limited to educated Hindu urban middle class that not only barred Muslim middle class but also created “a sub-hegemonic structure to subsume other subordinate classes” (Riaz, 2016). Unlike this form of nationalism, in which the political goal was to collaborate with the colonial state, the subaltern imagination of the nation was ingrained in their economic struggle (Riaz, 2016). In the subaltern history[[5]](#footnote-5) of the partition, however, the anti-colonial sentiment was evident in the peasant uprising Bengal including the Indigo Cultivators Strike in 1860 and the Peasant Movement in Pabna in 1872-3 (Riaz, 2016). Until recently, the elitist historians considered the Hindu nationalist imagination of India as the “only nationalist movement.” However, as the Hindu cultural and intellectual consciousness evolved, the Muslim historical awareness and Muslim consciousness were also on the rise.

The loss of political power to the British in 1757 and the introduction of representative institutions along communal lines in 1981 raised the possibility that Hindus would rule one-day rule Muslims (Talbot, 2000). The Muslim elites responded by institutionalizing a “rich variety of cultural and religious ideas” (Talbot, 2000) resulting in a new sense of community comprised of Muslim consciousness and identity. The first element of the Muslim nationalism was the memories of past Muslim glory and the need to restore that glory. The religious approach corresponded to Muslim nationalism that mainly took its roots from the *Aligarh* movement by Sayed Ahmad Khan (1817-98). Syed Ahmad Khan and the Aligarh movement had his intellectual roots deep in the traditions of the Muslim revival. He emphasized on the need for Muslims to receive Western education along with religious learnings in order to assume leadership positions in the colonial government. Alumni of Aligarh formed the All-India Muslim League in 1906, which fought for separate electorates and special privileges for Muslims in the Indian Councils Act 1909 (Robinson, 1998). Similarly, other associations such as the Bengali Muslim Associations, Punjab Muslim Association, Deoband movement, Barelvi movement and others provided “a sense of identity based in participation rather than birth” and “mobilized public opinion in favor of a more homogenized religious and cultural practice” (Talbot, 2000).

The second element of the Muslim consciousness was its strong sense of shared history with the worldwide community of believers. Along with reformist Sayed Ahmed Khan, poet-philosopher Muhammad Iqbal (1877-1938) championed this sense of community. Iqbal[[6]](#footnote-6) remarked that 'the construction of a polity on Indian national lines, if it means a displacement of the Islamic principle of solidarity, is simply unthinkable to a Muslim'" (Reetz, 1993). It is important to note that the Muslim identity was not unitary. The Wahabi, Farzai and Tarika-e-Mohammad movements such as those represented by Titu Mir and Haji Shariatullah helped to give a distinct identity to Bengali Muslims (Reetz, 1993). Some scholars argue that this Bengali Muslim consciousness has roots as far back as the thirteenth century, with the conquest of Mohammad Bakthiyar (Osmany, 1992). In fact, the emergence of Bangladesh on December 16, 1971 was the culmination of Bengali nationalist struggle, launched in early twentieth century, to establish a separate identity. This was an identity not only distinct from the Hindu majority of the province, but also distinct from their co-religionists in other regions of India (Haston, 1994).

There were various expressions of nationalism in pre-partitioned Indian society based on class, religions, and ethnicity. Some scholars suggest that for the peasantry of East Bengal, Pakistan promised a ‘Peasant Utopia’ and a ‘Land of Eternal Eid.’[[7]](#footnote-7) In this view, the new nation was not so much a homeland for the subcontinent’s Muslims as it was a new start, for Pakistan promised the dismantling of economic oppression as well as the end of religious and social discrimination. However, no single imagination of the nation emerged as hegemonic. The colonial structure weakened by WWII was longer capable of accommodating the changes in the society it ruled for almost two centuries. The partition was a horrific incident in making and 1947 was a spectacular moment when everything collided. It resulted in “bloody division of land as well as the rupturing of shared histories, cultures, and memories between Muslim, on the one hand, and Hindus and Sikhs on the other” (Singh, Iyer, & Gairola, 2016). The summer of the 1947 brought long cherished freedom for South Asians with overwhelming amount of the “dead, mutilated, raped, or forcibly converted” (Singh, Iyer, & Gairola, 2016).

The Partition was neither an instantaneous incident nor did it end with the declaration of two nations states. The creation of West Pakistan and East Pakistan and subsequently Bangladesh has permanently altered South Asian geopolitics. It has given rise to unresolved border disputes, most notably in the case of Kashmir and the Line of Control (LoC) between India and Pakistan, which continue to linger almost seventy years after the event of Partition. Vazira Fazila-Yacoobali Zamindar (2007) characterized this ongoing impact as “the Long Partition” and urges that partition studies needs to move beyond that events of 1947 and examine “the continuing cultural, political, economic, and psychological effects of 1947.” The partition continues to inspire non-fictional work such as books, memoirs, and scholarly articles as well as literature including novels, short stories, films, comics, museum projects, oral history projects and others.

**The State of Partition Discourse:**

The partition of Indian in 1947 has generated extensive literatures ranging from scholarly works, historical monographs, memoirs, novels, bestsellers which consider “the complex political mosaic of a pluralistic society, the growth and acceleration of the nationalist struggle” (Sengupta, 2015). The historiography of the partition took a new turn in mid-1980s. The publication of the Transfer of Power documents,[[8]](#footnote-8) Maulana Azad’s unexpurgated memoir,[[9]](#footnote-9) and Ayesha Jalal’s book[[10]](#footnote-10) about Jinnah and the Muslim League prompted a critical debate about “who wanted partition and why” (Chatterji, 2009). A substantial body of non-partisan form of history writing as well as narratives from people’s experiences has reconfigured the partition narratives and the sufferings it caused. These works can be categorized as the “revisionist history” in which the focus of Indian historiography shifted from studies of nationalist independence movement to critical examination of the partition. Ayesha Jalal (1985, 2001, 2004), Mushirul Hasan (1993, 2001), Gyanendra Pandey (2001), Ian Talbot (2000), Yasmin Khan (2007), and Vazira Zamindar (2007) and collections of essays edited by Amritjit Singh, Nalini Iyer and Rahul K Gairola (2016) among others have been useful to constitute important new perspectives.[[11]](#footnote-11) These revisionist history looks at the “unfinished agenda” of the partition Pakistan dismembered into two nations.

These studies compelled us to reconsider the “multi-casual dimensions” of the partition instead of the nationalist narratives of the partition focusing on “high politics” and the role of Ghandi, Nehru, and Jinnah (Saint, 2010). Moreover, anthropological accounts of the partition based on memories of survivors, especially but not only by women, by Urvashi Butalia (2000), Ritu Menon and Kamla Basin (1998), Veena Das (1995),and others have provided multiple windows through which to view the most appalling historical event in South Asian history.[[12]](#footnote-12) These studies have reinterpreted the partition history through the lenses of those who were “marginalized and silenced” in the nationalist narratives of the event. In doing so, they have shifted the focus from “great-man-of-history” to people’s history. They unfolded the complexities of the partition through multi-layered stories of the partition based on gender, caste, and class. These important revisionist research insisted on the need to voice the forgotten stories which lay under the shadow of the Grand Narratives—“the dominant, often state-sponsored, patriarchal and sanitized version of the events” (Harrington, 2016). A similar revival of partition memories emerged in fictional works.[[13]](#footnote-13) In some cases, historians agreed that literature represented the Partition better. For example, Ayesha Jalal and Sugata Bose writes, “The colossal human tragedy of the partition and its continuing aftermath has been better conveyed by the more sensitive creative writers and artists – for example in Saadat Hasan Manto’s short stories and Ritwik Ghatak’s films – than by historians” (2004: 164).

However, even within these revisionist histories, the research on Partition is “overwhelmingly Indian Punjab-centric” (Harrington, 2016) known as the “Punjab-bias” (Roy, 2010). For example, some of the well-known scholars of Partition who made major contributions to literary, historical, political and sociological research focused entirely on the Western side, with perhaps no more than a passing reference to the Eastern side (Harrington, 2016). The underrepresentation of Bengal is evident in the absence of Bengali literary work in the discourse as well. For example, the two-volume anthology *India Partitioned: The Other Face of Freedom* (1995) edited by Mushirul Hasan consist of stories, poems, diaries, eye-witness accounts and excerpts from novels and autobiographies written in English, Hindi, and Urdu (Akther 2013); *Writings on India’s Partition* (1976) edited by Ramesh Mathur and Mahendra Kulasrestha consist of English translations of Hindi, Urdu, and Punjabi short stories, poems, an excerpt from a play, and two critical essays on literary texts.

Addressing the absence of Bengal in partition discourse, Roy writes, “equally in history and in literature, both the documentation and the representation of the Partition are tilted to the Punjab side, in the sense that both historians and novelists appear to be more concerned with and interested in the events that took place in Punjab in 1947” (2010 p. 23). One may argue that their focus is perhaps explained by where these scholars are from, the languages they speak or their research interests. However, the “Punjab bias” has its basis on the difference in attitude and perception of the administration regarding the crisis in these regions. The crisis in Punjab was considered a “national emergency” and the government felt “a moral responsibility” to strategically handle the refugee situation in this important defense position on the western frontier of India (Roy 2010). On the other hand, the central government of India perceived that the magnitude and scale of the communal violence in the Eastern front were less significant, which resulted in the “striking difference in its per capita expenditure on refugees in the west and the east” (Roy 2010).

In order to fill the gap, there are scholars, though smaller in number, have been part of a new trend of partition research. This new direction is focused on “regional instead of national politics; and where the primacy of all-India perspectives was replaced by a new importance given to regional and provincial contexts” (Roy, 2010). Partha Chatterjee, Joya Chatterjee, Soumitra De, and Haimanti Roy, among others, have studied Bengal in an attempt to comprehend the local dimension of the partition politics and violence.[[14]](#footnote-14) Within this regional trend, however, a gap continues to emerge. As in the broader partition discourse that has been disproportionally oblivious to Bengal, the Bengal focused research is similarly indifferent to East Bengal particularly after it became Bangladesh. The most prominent of Bengal partition researchers Joya Chatterji’s *Bengal Divided: Hindu Communalism and Partition, 1932-1947* and *The Spoils of Partition: Bengal and India, 1947-1967* focus largely on West Bengal. *Coming Out Of Partition: Refugee Women of Bengal* by Gargi Chakravarttyfocuses on the experiences of women who migrated from East to West Bengal—but not vice versa. Recent years have shown signs of change, however, there have been a number of publications that deal with Partition as a “cross-border and trans-temporal event.”[[15]](#footnote-15) This kind of progressive practice has not been the norm, but it suggests that a methodological shift is on the horizon.

One may think that in independent Bangladesh, partition (s) would be an important issue of public discourse. Yet, as in Indian history or dominant partition discourse, Bangladesh history is indifferent to the history and memories of 1947 partition in its official history. The contemporary Bangladesh presents a somewhat different picture. Historical-scholarly discourses do not evince much interest in the division of the subcontinent. Nor do the creative ones. Even when Partition is revisited by Bangladeshi historians and scholars, it is not as a human tragedy. The tendency rather is to examine the de/merits of the two-nation theory that Mohammad Ali Jinnah, “backed by the All-India Muslim League, so artfully exploited to mobilize Indian Muslims in favor of the separatist demand for an independent Muslim state to be called Pakistan” (Haque, 2016). Artists and creative writers of present-day Bangladesh also appear to be largely apathetic to Partition. Yet at the end of the day one has to turn to whatever little they occasionally produce, to appreciate Partition in its human dimensions. The partition literature before the 1971 Bangladesh war as well as the indifference of Bangladeshi authors to Partition in contemporary Bangladesh definitely deserves close scrutiny.

In studying partition memories, however, literature becomes an alternative to the official history because a great number of prominent Bangladeshi writers have depicted their personal experiences and memories, loss of home, and tales of migrations through fictional work. The selected partition literature in this research from both pre and post-independence Bangladesh, writers have challenged the dominant hegemonic construction of collective identity that is oblivious to the 1947 partition. They paint a picture of how the “repeated creation, dissolution, and transformation of the boundary” has shaped its traumatic memory as well as the complexities of national identities for people of Bangladesh. Reading literature in a political environment such in Bangladesh becomes “not just an archival retrieval but a way in which the past can be understood to make it signify in the present” (Sengupta, 2015).

These literatures allow study of politics history such as this thesis to comprehend “‘all that is locally contingent and truthfully remembered, capricious and anecdotal, contradictory and mythically given’ and therefore constitute an important means of our self-making’” (Sengupta 2015). In the absence of official history and public testimonials, literature can provide a “micro-historical” and nuanced view of history. The selected literary sources in this research are divided in two broad categories: a) pre-independence and b) post-independence. The sub categories within the pre-dependence Bangladesh include novels written in 1950s and 1960s. It is important to note that majority of the partitions fictional works are written before 1971. Only few well-known published novels after the independence reminisces about the 1947 partition in Bangladesh. Thus, my argument is that the silence around the Indian Partition is due to the ruling elites’ deliberate attempt to obliterate the national memories of 1947 not because a new one did replace an old trauma.

**Chapter III: Representation of the Partition Memories in Bangladeshi Literature**

**Representation in South Asian Literature**

The Partition has been a recurrent theme in the Indian subcontinent fiction, with a new perspective on the event emerging in each succeeding decade. The early literary response to the catastrophe of the partition represented the emotional experiences of the writers particularly in the 1940s and early 1950s (Roy, 2010).[[16]](#footnote-16) For example, Amrita Pritam’s *Pinjar* (1950) serves as a testimony to Punjab's Partition offering an "alternative" voice of history, identity, and the horror of the partition (Datta, 2005). Saadat Hasan Manto’s short stories particularly *Toba Tek Singh* (1955) explore the ‘madness of Partition’ (Chishti, 2012). Khushwant Singh’s *Train to Pakistan* (1956), the first partition novel published in English, depicts possibilities of interaction and integration through the distinctness of each character’s voice and actions (Haque, 2015).

On the other hand, from the late 1950s, the partition became a “phenomenon to be explored and even theorized about as something that informed and defined the social, political, cultural and religious realities on the Indian Subcontinent” (Roy, 2010). This new direction includes, for instance, Bapsi Sidhwa’s *Cracking India* (1988). Originally published as *Ice-Candy-Man*, it puts women are at the center, either as symbols of political and familiar power, bearers of men’s honor, or trophies of war (Mayoral, 2015). It is also arguably the most important and the most representative of the Partition novels written by a Pakistani author. In Salman Rushdie’s *Midnight’s Children* (1981), the protagonist’s personal story becomes interlinked with the three partitioned States of India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh. Amitav Ghosh’s *The Shadow Line*s (1988) shows the absurdity and far-reaching violent consequences of the Partition even two generations after the event through a crucial incident in 1964 in Dhaka (Roy, 2010).

Nevertheless, as in partition history and academic discourse, “Punjab bias” is evident in case of literary representation as well. All but one of the aforementioned celebrated novels deal with the Partition on the Punjab border. The situation in Bengal or the third partition of the subcontinent in 1971 is merely mentioned in partition fictions. Among the celebrated partition fiction written in English, Rushdie deals at length with the Bangladesh war, but only Ghosh in *The Shadow Lines* focuses exclusively on the aftermath of the 1947 partition on the Bengal borders. Likewise, though Punjab and Bengal both produced a substantial body of work in the languages of the respective provinces concerning the partition, they have not been equally available. When translated work started at the time of the Golden Jubilee celebration of Independence in 1997, it was mostly from Hindi and Urdu to English, while Bangla Partition novels and short stories were largely neglected (Roy, 2010). In translation work from Bengali to English, short stories emerged as the preferred genre (Harrington 2011).

For example, Debjani Sengupta’s anthology *Mapmaking: Partition Stories from Two Bengals* (2003) collects several Bengali stories about the partition from both West Bengal and Bangladesh. In Bashabi Fraser’s translated story collections, *Bengal Partition Stories: An Unclosed Chapter* (2006), stories depicted Bengalis resisted communalism even when the partition riots were brewing in Bengal. Equally as short stories, novels in Bengali have engaged with the partition and its aftermath. Jyotirmoyee Devi’s Epar Ganga Opar Ganga [The River Churning: A Partition Novel] (1967) focuses on a “female protagonist and riot victim’s gendered trauma and emotional hurdles” (Banerjee, 2015). Sunil Gangopadhyay’s *East-West [Purbo-Paschim]* (1989) portrays the middle-class Bengali’s reaction to the Partition across time and boundaries. The hardships of the refugees and the human tragedy of the Partition emerged as central concerns in the literature of the post-partition period, which Debjani Sengupta prefers to call “Colony fiction.”[[17]](#footnote-17) However, Sarbani Banerjee (2015) argued that the dominance of Bengali *bhadralok* immigrant’s memory have “propounded elitist truisms to the detriment of the non-*bhadra* refugees’ representations.”[[18]](#footnote-18)

In the Bengal partition literary discourse, writings by Bangladeshi writers is significantly less represented. For example, in *Bengal Partition Sorties* (2008) edited by Bashabi Fraser, three among 31 authors included in the volume were Bangladeshi writers and only four of the 39 stories were written by these Bangladeshi writers. In *Crossing Over: Partition Literature from India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh* (2007) edited by Frank Stewart and Sukrita Paul Kumar, only one author among 19 was Bangladeshi. Subsequently, literary criticism of Bengal partition fictions tend to focus on the “colony fiction” from the West Bengal. Apart from Debjani Sengupta’s recent book *The Partition of Bengal Fragile Border and New Identities*, which studied transformation of identities and borders in both Bengals, experiences of refugees who migrated from the West to East and women’s experiences from the area are absent. For example, Ritu Menon and Kamla Bhasin’s *Borders and Boundaries: Women in India’s Partition* (1998) placed a first-hand accounts of women’s gendered experiences of Partition and the sexual violence they suffered. A groundbreaking feminist history, the book does not deal with the Eastern side.[[19]](#footnote-19) Sarbani Banerjee’s selected novels in her research "More or Less" Refugee?: Bengal Partition in Literature and Cinema” primarily portrayed the accounts of refugee *bhadralok* and Dalits in West Bengal.

The gap is perpetuated in Bangladesh as well. Critical writing on Partition by Bangladeshi critics are difficult to find. In fact, Niaz Zaman’s *Divided Legacy: The Partition in Selected Novels of India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh* (1999) is the only distinguished book length work on the partition literature by a Bangladeshi critic. The scarcity of partition literature form Bangladesh does not demean the existence of a powerful literary response to the horrors of the partition by Bangladeshi writers. The partition literature from Bangladesh differs in a sense that they narrated the Partition of 1947 not as the past but as a continuous struggle. In these narratives, the lives of the refugees and their daily struggle for existence are in a large way a comment on the dismantled promise of the “land of eternal Eid.”[[20]](#footnote-20) Though, Niaz Zaman in her book *The Divided Legacy* (1999) noted optimism and possibilities in the stories about the partition. She writes,

The East Pakistani writers differs from both the writers who emerged in Bangladesh after 1971 and from West Bengali writers. On the one hand, a writer like Abul Fazl in *Ranga Prabhat* (1957) stresses the need for socialism in this new land and also stresses that Islam is socialistic in essence. On the other hand, a writer like Abu Rushd in *Nongor* (1967) can criticize the shortcoming of this new land and depict the growing conflict between East and West Pakistan, but also suggest that, even while not denying their past, East Pakistanis needed the partition to establish their separate identity.

Bangladesh's Partition literature deserves to be considered alongside similar works from other parts of the subcontinent. But more important than literary criticism is die task of transcending the conflicts that have given rise to the literature.

**Bangladeshi Literary Reponses to the Partition: Before and After 1971**

Sayed Waliullah’s (1922-1971) short stories “The Escape” and “The Story of A Tusli Plant” are among the earliest fictional treatment of the partition by a Bangladeshi writer. "The Escape," written in English and included in the Pakistan PEN *Miscellany* in 1950 looks at the partition from a Pakistani/North Indian perspective, although it could be on either side of the newly drawn border as the locale is unspecified in the story. The story takes place in a train compartment full of refugees, perhaps the “iconic emblem of hope and horror” (Haq, 2016) of the Partition. Apart from the "white, but slightly soiled, embroidered cap" which an old man is wearing — suggesting that he is a Muslim—there is nothing to indicate the ethnic and religious affiliation of the passengers. There are no references to the direction in which the train is travelling but a young man’s memories of the riots and killings form the background as an anonymous corpse lying on a station platform at which the train stops on crossing the border. The young man, the focal point of the story, imagines that the little girl sitting alone in the compartment is a refugee who lost everyone.

The man tries to befriend the little girl by telling a story but he gets lost in his memories of death and destruction. The girl is not interested in hearing the story and described him as a madman. The girl continues to shout about a madman, and he, not realizing that she is referring to him, looks earnestly everywhere for him. Finally, he opens the door of the compartment and steps out of the running train. The story of the young man, who is “neither a Prophet Mohammed, nor a Jesus Christ, nor a Gautam Buddha, neither a voodoo priest” remains unfinished. The young man only has terrible memories of massacres and killings; who has seen dogs eating human flesh, who has seen a man shot to death because he was seeking the safety of a country across the border. Like Manto, the celebrated writer of partition short stories who produced heart wrenching firsthand experiences of the partition, Waliullah offers a witness to a tragedy like the partition. Waliullah too had direct knowledge of Partition horrors in Kolkata, where he lived in his youth. He moved back after Partition to East Bengal, where his family came from.

Another story of his subtly captures the inner turmoil produced by Partition on those who had become uprooted. "Ekti Tulsi Gacher Kahini" ("The Tale of a Tulsi Plant", 1965).[[21]](#footnote-21) The story is set in East Pakistan and features a group of refugees from India who break into and occupy an abandoned home. One day the refugees discovered a dying tulsi[[22]](#footnote-22) plant indicating that the previous owner of the house was Hindu. “It has to be torn out. While we are in this house, no Hindu symbols can be tolerated” one of the refugee states. Another refugee, who has caught a cold, points out its medicinal value in treating coughs and colds, and the plant is spared. They think of the woman who must have tended the plant every evening. One of the refugee who was a railway employee, imagines the women sitting at a train window, remembering the house and the tulsi plant she had left behind. Someone quietly tends the plant and it begins to thrive again. Though the man who had first discovered it does try to slash it down with a bamboo rod, he only brushes the top of the plant, and the tulsi is unharmed. The readers never learns who tended the plant. The story ends with the government evicting the refugee form the house and the officials never looked after the plant. The tulsi plant becomes a symbol of a common fate faced by both the refugees who occupied the house and the owners who left it behind.

Both the occupants and the owners of the house suffered loss and uncertainties in an unknown place due to the partition. Niaz Zaman writes, “For the Hindu housewife tending the plant might have been a religious duty, for the refugee who tends it, it is a reminder of their common humanity, of the need for roots, for the ordinary rhythms of life which political events and upheavals disrupt.” Like the tulsi plant, Waliullah suggests, as far as the partition is concerned people are only victims of the political decisions that indifferent to the human consequences. Despite religious and political differences as well as different reasons to tend the tulsi plant, it also becomes a symbol of common humanity underneath the differences. The Tale of a Tulsi Plant becomes a story of human feelings and small kindnesses. Waliullah’s stories do not stress the inevitability of partition nor the euphoria of achieving a new homeland for Muslim. He simply states the humane consequences of the political decision. Hasan Azizul Huq’s (1939) short story *Khancha* (The Cage 1967) and Hasan Hafizur Rahman’s (1932-1983) *Aro Duti Mrityu* (Two More Deaths 1970) also take a fresh look at how partition has thrown shadow on the inhabitants of the region.

Hasan Azizul Huq’s short story *Khancha* (The Cage 1967) is about a lower middle-class, upper-caste Hindu family living in a small village in East Bengal, tom between attachment and desire. The members of the family dream of an exchange of property that will enable them to leave and move to West Bengal. The dysfunctional times is reflected in this dysfunctional family that look forward to and at the same time dread the prospect of migration to India. The husband and wife feel so strongly attached to home(land) that they can never fully reconcile themselves to the prospect of leaving (East) Bengal/Pakistan. The husband keeps deferring the question of migration resorting to one excuse or another, while wife keeps asking her husband to ensure that in exchanging property they do not lose much. Two events in the family—a young son's death by snake bite and a paralytic stroke that the patriarch of the family suffers—foil their plans to migrate.

The deep love the characters shows for their home appears as nostalgia in the essays of those Hindus who for some reason or other had to leave East Pakistan in reality. "The Hindu Bengali refugees who wrote these essays," writes the subaltern historian Dipesh Chakrabarty (1996) in his insightful discussion of the essays, had set themselves the task "of creating in print something of the sentimental and the nostalgic about the lost home in the villages of East Bengal." Unlike "many if not most of the Muslims of East Pakistan," the Hindus of East Bengal/Pakistan who had to leave homeland) saw the Partition of India not as an achievement of "freedom" and the things it implies, but as an act of expulsion” from the familiar worlds of their childhood. The metaphoric cage that the family inhabits is the case of helplessness, of anxiety, and failing to understand the forces of history that so remorselessly share their lives (Sengupta, 2015). Like Waliullah, both Hasan Azizul Huq and Hasan Hafizur Rahman portrayed heartbreaking stories of the ordinary people. Despite the character’s religious differences, what binds them together is stories of hope and loss.

Likewise, Hasan Hafizur Rahman’s *Aro Duti Mrityu* (Two More Deaths 1970) is a tale of flight and death. The narrator, a middle aged Muslim doctor, is travelling by train from Dhaka to Bahadurabad, West Bengal when he notices a Hindu man entering the compartment with a women and a child, obviously fleeing to a safer place. Being a doctor, he notices the women, pregnant and in labor. Every jerk of the train convulse her body. The narrator waits with breathless anxiety unable to do anything. The narrator wonder why the family would undertake such a journey at this stage but quickly reminds himself that it is perhaps their only way out. The pregnant woman’s life seem to be precariously balanced between life and death which was the fate of many refugees. Agonizing moments pass till the women crawls to the toilet. The narrator waits to hear the wail of a new born. The hopes of a new beginning is shatters a deathly silent greets his ears. Although Rahman’s story depicts a Hindu family’s journey to West Bengal, it reinforces the narrative of 1947 not as a past or victory but as a continuous struggle.

Although some writers depicted an optimistic view of the new beginning, few writers were inspired by the two-nation theory. In his novel *Lalsalu* (Tree Without Roots) written in Bengali in 1948[[23]](#footnote-23), Sayed Waliullah pointed out the “fraudulence and hypocrisy behind the façade of religion” (Zaman, 1999). In *Lalsalu*, a rough-looking Mullah named Majid arrives quietly at a remote Bengali village and begins to restore an old, isolated grave he claims contains the remains of a Muslim saint. Majid begins to fool the villagers with breadth and scope of his studies in all things Muslim thus paving the way for the conman to live a life of relative luxury at the expense of the villagers. The book examines the fake holy man’s rise and fall from power. Through the character of Majid, Waliullah suggests how religion can be used to fool innocent people and serve personal interests. Although it is not a partition novel per se, in the context of the partition, the book raises the questions if the religious differences were the reason behind the partition. Or, they were “sued, magnified even, to serve a political purpose” (Zaman, 1999).

A similar critical approach concerning the use of religion during the partition is found in *Ranga Prabhat* (Radiant Dawn, 1957) by Abul Fazl (1903-1983). One of the earliest Bangladeshi novels dealing with the partition, the novels depicts optimism about the Pakistani identity and the possibilities in a new country. The novel takes place entirely in East Pakistan. The novel portrays two families, a Hindu and a Muslim family, linked by bond of friendship. Suggesting the close ties that existed between Hindus and Muslims in East Bengal before independence brought about partition and the division of the land and people. At first, the killings and riots are treated as imaginary. Kamal serves as a casual witness to these killings until Charu Babu, a close friend of Kamal’s grandfather, is killed by an unknown assassin.[[24]](#footnote-24)

Despite the killing and growing communal violence, according to Niaz Zaman, *Ranga Prabhat* is perhaps the only novel that allows a Hindu-Muslim romance to come to a happy conclusion when the daughter of Charu Babu, Maya, returns to Kamal whom she loves. The Romance between Kamal and Maya is nourished, rather than destroyed by the partition. Their union promises a new dawn for the new nation. Advancing this optimism, Abul Fazl also suggest that it is not in India but in Pakistan that a new sun will dawn. Because unlike Islam, the caste system in Hinduism is inherently opposed to equality premised and promised by socialism (Zaman, 1999).

Though there are moments in the book when Abul Fazl shows that Hindus and Muslims were prejudiced against each other, he also stresses that these prejudices and suspicions were not inherent and ingrained, but had been artificially created. He shows how Hindus often translated hadith and has Charu Babu stressed that it is more important to be a good person than a good Hindu. Abul Fazl does not quite add that it is better to be a good person than a good Muslim, but he does suggest through a Quranic verse, the translation of which is given by Kamal's grandfather, that Islam was broadminded enough to proclaim that religion was a person's individual affair. "To you your religion, to me mine." To be a good Muslim, in other words, is to be a good person. It is only when Islam is used for political purposes that Islam no longer remains Islam, and people are no longer good Muslims (Zaman, 1999).

Unlike *Ranga Prabhat*, *Nongor* (1967) by Abu Rushd (1919-2010) conveys a sense of frustration. *Nongor* provides a valuable perspective on Muslim middle-class Bengalis in the early fifties who left Calcutta in the wake of Partition. Middle-class educated Bengalis who were working in the government in Calcutta faced the choice of working for India or for Pakistan. While some remained behind, many more opted for Pakistan, with Bengali Muslims, choosing to migrate to East Pakistan. *Nongor* opens in Calcutta with the protagonist, Kamal, thinking about Lord Mountbatten’s announcement of the partition on June 3. As partition looms, Kamal increasingly feels alienated from his native city and announced his decision to migrate to Pakistan. His father approves his decision but refuses to accompany, as he feels too old to contribute to building a new nation. Kamal’s brother also refuses leave citing the lack of resources in East Bengal.

*Nongor* like the general trend in East Pakistani partition literature, avoids depicting communal violence, though everyone in it must be aware of its occurrence. Kamal's budding romance with a Hindu girl in Calcutta is aborted. He comes to Dhaka but immediately finds himself disappointed. As the book proceeds, the writer goes into greater detail of the inadequacies, inefficiencies and corruption that Kamal finds in Dhaka. In fact, Kamal's feelings on migration are dominated by disappointment rather than nostalgia. Kamal is dissatisfied with the city’s dirt, coal, and potholes. The city is plagued by mosquitoes. One night when it rains, Kamal thinks he hears a rat nibbling at a file. "And this was once Jahangimagar.[[25]](#footnote-25) This is our Pakistan. God help me," Kamal says to himself (70). Kamal is equally disappointed in the working atmosphere in the Income Tax office.

Immigrants like Kamal had been inspired by the possibilities a new nation offered, but Kamal is soon disabused. The promise of Pakistan, “the land of eternal Eid” soon proves to be an illusion. While Abu Rushd describes the sense of letdown felt by Bengalis Muslim after independence, he also stresses the excitement that the idea of Pakistan had inspired in young Muslims. Although Dhaka continues to disappoint Kamal, and though Kamal is critical of corruptions in the new nation, there was no going back. Calcutta can no longer be called home. From now on, Dhaka was home. However, the signs of growing conflicts among the different ethnic groups in the stories indicate the future that is to separate the two wings of Pakistan. This combination of disappointment and excitement of an identity later led to the independence of Bangladesh.

Published two years earlier than *Nongor,* Shahidullah Kaiser’s *Sangshaptak* (The Crusader) is a far more involved novel than *Nongor* or *Ranga Prabhat.* Instead of a single protagonist like *Nongor,* or two families and ties of friendship and romance between them as in *Ranga Prabhat, Sangshaptak* has a variety of characters. Shahidullah Kaiser (1927-1971) was committed to an egalitarian society and a card-carrying Communist Party member, his story, therefore, gives voices to the marginalized of the society. Unlike, *Nongor* or *Ranga Prabhat*, *Sangshaptak* is tale not that of the middle-class Bengali Muslims but of proletariats. Kaiser views Partition as a historical accident within the broad dialectical play of social forces (Huq, 2016). The conflicts that led to Partition give way to other conflicts, while the inherent class conflicts continue to impact on people's lives. The novel begins in a village in East Bengal, and then moves on to the region's two major cities. Niaz Zaman comments that it was "perhaps the first Bengal novel that told the tale of two cities, Calcutta and Dhaka."

The book begins with Hurmati and her suffering for bearing an illegitimate child, but soon, the book moves on to other social problems: the relation of a village landlord to his tenants and to the moneylender from whom he borrows money; the rise of profiteers and extortionists to high places in society; the protagonist Zehad’s transformation from a passionate Muslim Leaguer into a unionist/nationalist and then into a communist; the change in fortunes of a young village boy, a little too fond of the *jatra*,[[26]](#footnote-26) into as he turns an acclaimed singer. Kaiser condemns the differences between rich and poor particularly in the village structure where power hierarchy is more deeply entrenched than in the city. The hypocrisy associated with organized religion and hierarchical society victimized both lower class and women in upper class. Rabu, a young upper middle class woman, is married to an old, religious man chosen by her father.

Hurmati appears in a number of other scenes, once as the mistress of an Englishman, and then, towards the end, ill and impecunious, but her fate interests Kaiser less than does that of Zahed, the political activist, first Muslim Leaguer and then "Unionist." Towards the end of the book, when all the characters get together once more in the village, Hurmati cooks for them, apparently reversing once more to her gendered, lower-class role of servant. Though Ramzan has profiteered from his predatory nature by taking a cut from every, deal and from black marketeering during the war, Hurmati remains where she was. The protagonist Zehad, like the writer himself, belongs to the upper class but gradually commits himself to the progressive cause of socialism.

Despite Kaiser’s criticism of the Muslim League, he suggests that many socialists, like his character Sekander, worked for the party in the 1940s not because they were Muslim, but, as suggested by Abul Fazl in *Ranga Prabhat*, because they believed that true Islam was not opposed to equal rights and social justice. Zahed’s transformation from Muslim Leaguer to Communist suggests parallels with many Bengali Muslims who had actively supported Muslim League because it promised freedom from the tyranny of Hindu moneylenders and landlords only to become disillusioned afterwards. Economic exploitation had not ended; the exploiters alone had changed. In *Ranga Prabhat,* as well, Abul Fazl stressed that Islam is a socialistic religion. However, when Pakistan came into being, through the middle class benefited, the ordinary Muslims who had hoped for change was disappointed.

Rather, one should say, the educated middle-class who took it upon themselves to speak for the disadvantaged classes saw that independence had not brought social and economic changes for the poor in its wake. This was perhaps the leading reason why the Muslim Bengali in the fifties and sixties was so heavily inclined socialism. In the sixties, these intellectuals suffered imprisonment; in 1971, like Kaiser, they were hand-picked and killed. The novel ends with the arrest of Zahed for his socialist' sympathies. The novelist gives no reasons for this arrest, nor does he provide any hope that Zahed will be soon freed. The struggle had not ended and the progressive intellectual, like the communist, could only vow to carry on the fight. The incompletion of the narrative and the lack of closure reflect the writer's views on his contemporary political situation.

Kaiser’s attitude to Partition is different from that of Abu Rushd in *Nongor* and Abu Fazl in *Ranga Prabhat* because of his focuses on the poor and their economic struggle instead of educated Bengali middle class. Kaiser is more similar to Syed Waliullah in *Lalsalu* in terms of their characters’ social background. Although they criticize religious bigotry and condemns the communal violence to one extend or another, none of these authors question the creation of Pakistan. Only Syed Waliullah points out the weakness of two nation theory. Yet, all of them are silent about reasons of the massive migrations. Kaiser, unlike Rushd and Fazl, does not justify the need for Pakistan. *Sangshaptak* is similar to Alauddin Al Azad's *Kshudha O Asha* (Hunger and Hope, 1964), which deals with the struggle of the downtrodden for sheer survival and Sardar Jainuddin's *Anek Suryer Asha* (Hoping for Sunrise, 1966), which goes back to the thirties to portray colonialism as capitalist exploitation and forward to the tensions that would beset Pakistan. All three of them are about a struggle yet to end.

Alauddin Al Azad’s novel *Kshudha O Asha* (Hunger and Hope) was published in 1964. It is not strictly a partition novel because it ends before the partition but it raises the issue of partition and discusses the communal conflict that resulted in this division and the communal harmony that was disrupted by the division. It shows the hope people saw in independence and in creation of a new nation as well as the struggles and issues that had been left unresolved with independence. Azad depicts the dire poverty suffered by the villagers Fatema, Hanif and hteir children Zoha and Zohu. The family move to the city, but instead of getting relief from their grinding poverty, they face an even more dire situation. Intermittently at this stage there are glimpses of the well-to-do mainly around the political-student activist Mohammad Ali.

Azad shows a sharp contrast between classes in *Kshudha O Asha* as it is split into two stories: the story of the poor and their struggle to survive, and the story of educated middle class and their struggle for independence. The stories collide when Zoha meet Mohammad Ali and other young people struggle for independence. All though the first half of book shows the struggle of the poor, the latter portion of the book concentrates on the tension between Hindus and Muslims. The struggle for independence overshows the struggle of the poor. However, one of the significant themes becomes the Hindu-Muslim romance, which, as in the case of other writers- is used to depict the close friendships between the two communities before Partition disrupted this unity. Though the friendship between Fatema and Ranibala and the love between Ali and Sujata, Azad also shows how friendships and romances cross religious barriers.

*Kshudha O Asha* takes place with the backdrop of Bengal famine[[27]](#footnote-27) in 1943 when the movement for Partition was gaining momentum. The novel ends when Zoha meets a refugee pregnant woman. Zoha tries to get her to the hospital but fails and under the open sky the woman gives birth. He cradles the child as he waits for morning to break. Although Zoha’s caring the child and waiting for morning suggests a new beginning, Azad refuses to give a comfortable ending. Zoha’s sister Zohu becomes a prostitute after being raped. She cannot go back to her family even if she knows where to find them. For people like Zoha and Zohu, the struggle is not over. Azad’s story stops before independence foreshadowing the partition and its aftermath. But, though the metaphor of childbirth, Azad does not rule out the prospect that lay in independence.

Sardar Jainuddin’s *Anek Suryer Asha* (1966), like *Kshudha O Asha*, goes back to the late thirties and is about class struggles of lower middle class. Jainuddin’s characters are poor but this class differs from Azad’s in being educated and trying to get a job even if it means in the army. Whereas Azad deals with people too poor, and too uneducated to do anything but work as domestics, Jainuddin's people enter factories, dockyards, or the army. Like Kaiser, Jainuddin is committed to Marxist ideas and critical of imperial masters. But, Rahmat, the protagonist is not who fights for their rights. Rahmat is a loyalist serving the British army. Hayat Khan is who leads the dock workers in Calcutta in their demand for better working condition and dies in Dhaka leading another workers’ demonstration.

The narratives of *Anek Suryer Asha* begin in Dhaka in 1930s when Rahmat learns that Hayat Khan is killed in a police clash. The mention of Kayat Khan’s name takes Rahmat back to the past when he occupied the same mess with Hayat Khan in Calcutta. The rest of the narrative is concerned with Rahmat’s life in pre-partitioned India and end with his departure from India for Pakistan. Much of narrative focuses on Rahmat’s experiences in the army. Rahmat meets a Punjabi soldier and Jainuddin uses their acquaintance to voice the conflict between Bengali and the Punjabi that became evident in the sixties and led to the growing alienation of the East Pakistani. Rahmat calls the Punjabi, Fazlul Karim, *"bhari* communal," very communal, that is, very prejudiced against people of other religious communities. Fazlul Karim is surprised when he comes to learn that Rahmat is a Muslim.

"What is this? You are Bengali as well as a Muslim. How is this?" Fazlul Karim asks Rahmat. Rahmat tries to explain—as many Bengalis attempted to explain to their West Pakistani acquaintances; “I am from Bangladesh. Therefore, I am Bengali. I have faith in Islam. I believe in the Prophet, that is why I am a Muslim” (171). But, Fazlul Karim is not convinced, “But Bengalis are Hindus" (171). The growing alienation of the West Pakistani form the East Pakistani led to similar opinions with dire consequences in 1971. As Salman Rushdie notes in Midnight’s Children, the Pakistani soldiers believed they were being sent to fight Hindus in East Pakistan. Rahmat encapsulates the attempt of Bengali Muslims to claim their separate identity. Although the story is set in 1930s, it reflects the concerns of 1960s because it is in 1960s the demands for a Bengali Muslim identity gained a momentum.

*Anek Suryer Asha* ends when Rahmat finds himself in a train with other Muslim evacuees bound for East Pakistan. The end is abrupt and optimistic. The evacuees are all eagerly looking forward to Pakistan. Yet, like *Kshudha O Asha* and *Sangshaptak, Anek Suryer Asha* refuses closure and completion. Niaz Zaman identify this trend as a "strange ‘contemporaneity’, a refusal to end.” These novels were perhaps telling stories that had not ended. Hence, consciously or unconsciously, they were reflecting the history that shaped the aftermath of the partition. Perhaps history is yet to complete its full cycle, an identity is yet to be established. Though each of these writers was talking about a past time, each of them was also talking, about his own present, a present where the struggle was still going on, against a foreign power and for the people’s right (Zaman, 1999). The question of Bengali identity merges with the quest for social justice in theses novels that narrates the past but also reflect the Bengali present of the sixties leading to the creation of Bangladesh. Yet, as 1971 emerged, the memories of 1947 faded both in history and literature.

**Bangladeshi Literary Reponses to the Partition After 1971**

Yet, the literary responses to the partition after 1971 has been declining. As Niaz Zaman (1999) indicated, the "Bengali [creative] writing seems to have elided the issue of Partition." Direct or indirect personal experiences influenced the few Bangladeshi writers who have dealt with the issues of partition. In the few literary works emergence of Bengali nationalism took the spotlight. From the initial celebration of a new nation and attempts to legitimize East Pakistani literature as separate from the literature from India, the events of 1952 and 1971 made the writers talk of an emergence of a Bangladeshi identity. Bangla short story writers like Akhteruzzaman Elias, Hasan, Azizul Huq, Selina Hossain, and Imadadul Haq have depicted the various identities the masses have adorned as a result of the changing political and social scenario of East Pakistan in the wake of these events.

Like in *Nongor* and *Sangshaptak*, the presence of Marxist’s ideology is recurrent in the partition fictions published after 1971. Yet, Akhtaruzzaman Elias, Hasan Azizul Huq, Selina Hossain, and Shawkat Ali are some of the authors whose writings have depicted personal and social history of the catastrophic event. What is interesting in these writings is that they treated the partition more critically than the authors writing immediately after the partition. Unlike the authors who treated creation of Pakistan with hope and as a new beginning such as Abu Fazl, the new writers raised new questions about the two-nation theory and the partition’s long lasting impacts. Akhtaruzzaman Elias (1943-1997) condemned the divisive aspiration of Bengali Muslim middle class, which included his family. He writes (1992),

My father like many other member of the educated Muslim middle class of that time earnestly wanted that Muslim boys and girls should keep pace with their Hindu counterpart, that they live with equal dignity. But, let us not forget, these boys and girls belonged to a particular class, to the Muslim middle class. It is also needs to be underlined that only the progress of this middle class was aspired for. But the movement they unleashed in order to fulfil this aspiration simply cannot be endorsed. The Partition of 1947 was so catastrophic, so deplorable, so heartrending and meaningless that we are realizing it more every day.[[28]](#footnote-28)

To Elias, as it appeared to other protesting leftish intellectual of East Bengal, partition was the product of an orchestrated class collaboration between the Muslim League, on the one hand, and the Congress as well as the Hindu Mahasbha, on the other, and the with the colonial rulers “fomenting the diabolic design” in their own style (Dasgupta, 2012). Against these background of high politics, Elias put rebellious peasant-fighter at the center of his epic novel *Khowabnama*.

*Khowabnama* was published posthumously in 1997. Supriya Chaudhuri in her essay "The Bengali Novel" (2012) describes it as "possibly the greatest modem Bengali novel," a prose epic spanning a vast and diverse timeline and creating a distinctive kind of magic realism drawing on "indigenous traditions of folk narrative, memory and legend, as on subaltern history." The novel is different from both other East Bengali literature as well as other partition literature because no other creative text peasant particularly the communist led Tebhaga[[29]](#footnote-29) movement as an antithesis and in opposition to Partition and its false promises (Dasgupta, 2012). The narrative opens with a mention of the *fakir* rebellion of the late eighteenth century and follows the lives of later generations steeped in legends derived from that age. Munshi Baitu Uah Shah, one of the Fakir leaders, was killed by an East India Company officer.

Shah is regarded as a martyr, and for nearly a couple of centuries has been a potent spiritual presence, a sort of guardian angel, in the wetlands where fisher folk live side by side with agriculturalists. Tamij-er Baap (Tamij’s father), whose name is never reveled in the novel, encounters “extract from certain traditional and syncretic folklore and fables of rural East Bengal” (Ghosh, 2008) in his dreams. The lines between myth and history is blurred as Elias narrates how hundreds of years before Munshi Baitu Uah Shah fought with British soldiers. In inter-weaving of history and myth, the presence of reality is also felt through the description of Hindu-Muslim relationship in the community and the communal riots—that commenced first in Calcutta and afterwards spread throughout all the parts of Bengal.

With such an unreal and dream-like time the story opens when due to the Second World War prices of all commodities are going up rapidly and the effects of it are touching even the agrarian village life. Famine and massacre of hundreds of thousands of people are the two common results of that War. Before settling down in a peaceful situation the Tebhaga movement starts. Tamij and many of his fellow men are inspired by this movement but the unfortunate incidents like Hindu-Muslims riot and Separation of India cause meteoric change in their belief and deeds. And thus, true dreams of the common people of this sail again get shattered. Akhtaruzzaman Elias presents the shattering of dreams through his dream-like delineation.

The role of Hindu-Muslim riot deserves immense significant in the novel as many Bangladeshi writers have consciously downplayed the element of violence. The riot first started in August 1946 in Calcutta. The huge killing of Muslim people there by the Hindu miscreants enkindle similar heinous incidents on the Hindus by the Muslim people. Even the remote villages cannot be saved from this flare. The Hindu-Muslim communal harmony for hundreds of years faces an irreparable havoc. Before *Khowabnama*, Bangla novel had a very small number of instances in which the representation of Hindu-Muslim riot and the interpretation could represent the magnitude of the violence. *Khowabnama* might be the only Bengali counterpart to Kushwant Singh’s Train to Pakistan (Das, n.d), which is celebrated for its ability to provide “a human dimension which brings to the event a sense of reality, horror, and believability” (Bobb, 2006).

*Khoabnama* received the Ananda Prize, the most prestigious literary award given in Calcutta, as did *Agunpakhi* (The Phoenix, 2008) by Hasan Azizul Huq (1939-). Unlike Elias, Huq hails from West Bengal. He migrated to Pakistan in a most lackadaisical manner, as a brief interview, anthologized in *The Bangladesh Reader,* reveals. In Burdwan West Bengal, where his family came from, "the Muslims of that area did not experience any real trouble,” he says. His sister's husband was an English teacher in a college in what had become East Pakistan. They asked him to live with them and study, so he went. After completing an MA at Rajshahi University he returned to Burdwan (he had an Indian passport) and took a job as a schoolteacher. After three months, a visiting school inspector questioned his bona fide as an Indian, even though he had an Indian passport, so he came back to Rajshahi and settled there. He persuaded his parents to join him and his brother there, but his uncles and cousins stayed on in India even though they had supported the Pakistan movement*.*

*Agunpakhi* is a first-person account in the dialect of Burdwan of the life of a middle-class Muslim woman who sees the calm and peaceful community into which she had been born shatter under the impact of communal politics. It describes how the narrator and her village change through the events of Second World War, Bengal famine and the division of the country. The story begins with the unnamed narrator known as Meter Bou (the second daughter-in-law) being received by the leading Hindu land-owning family of her husband's village. This is a custom that effectively affirms a social bond between the two communities. Gradually, communal passions disintegrate the social fabric and violence becomes a palpable threat. Partition looms and migration becomes the obvious choice for many. But, when the narrator’s family decides to move to East Pakistan, a country designated for ‘Muslims,’ she refuses to leave her home and land where she belongs.

The novel is distinctive because it puts a female character at the center and provides a gendered understanding of the partition. When the narrator learns about the demand for a separate state for Muslims, she tries to grasp the concept and reality of the Pakistan through her own experiences of motherhood. She says, “What have we done to anybody that one son of a mother will have to be cunt into to?” (216). In doing to so, Meter Bou provides a sharp critique of “masculine politics of aggrandizement and self-serving nationality” (Sengupta, 2015). The narrator also challenges the dominant view of the partition which shamefully obliterated the shared memories of land. ‘Shame! Has everyone forgotten everything? One field, one riverbank, one road, one drought, one monsoon and one harvest that we all share—Alas for a few men on both sides, everything is spoilt!’ (226). Her memories of the place define her sense of self and her identity.

In *Agunpakhi,* the place/space plays a vital and living presence shaping the lives and memories of its inhabitants. They create sense of belonging perhaps, in the process, providing meaning to the self. “To belong to a place is not only to be embedded in its geography but also to be immersed in the linguistic, cultural, and social practices that emerge in relation to the place” (Sengupta, 2015). The narrator’s identity is constructed, reproduced, and negotiated in relation to the place. The village that she describes is not just a place where she lives; it is also where one’s loved child died. And the village is inhabited by both the living as well as the dead. For the narrator to leave the village equals to leave her loved one. Through Meter Bou’s narratorial voice one begins to see how her identity is constructed and negotiated through significant moments of personal and social history. Aziz, through his protagonist, is also one of the few writers who question the creation of Pakistan on the basis of religion. Mater Bou says, “Nobody could explain to me why a separate country has been created though a sleight of hand…Nobody could explain why that country becomes mine because I am Muslim and this country [India] is not” (252).

Not only the basis of two nations theory was “insufficiently imagined,” as Salman Rushdie commented on Pakistan in his novel *Shame*, it was also mistaken to homogenize religious groups. Confessional religious parties like the Jamiat-i-Ulema-i-Hind (JUH), and radical right-wing outfits such as the Majlis-i-Ahrar and the Khaksar Movement were staunchly against the concept of ‘Muslim Nationalism’ being propagated by the Muslim League.[[30]](#footnote-30) Aziz’s protagonist says, “What is the use of thinking about differences between Hindus and Muslim? Religions are different from each other…there are no end of differences between Hindus and Hindus! Aren’t there differences among Muslim? In this world we are all different.” To use this different against each other and kill in the name of it, become inhumane. The social and political impact of this inhumane continues to shape one’s identity and sense of place as depicted in Selina Hossain’s two novels, *Gayetri Shondha* and *Bhumi O Kusum*.

Selina Hossain’s novel “*Gayetri Shondha*” (The Pious Evening) is about a birth in transit: “the birth of a nation followed by the birth of a human child” (146). Like her protagonist Prateek, Hossain was born in 1947. *Gayetri Shondha* tells the story of Prateek’s life vis-a-vis Bangladesh from 1947 to 1975. In the years 1994, 1995 and 1996,[[31]](#footnote-31) three parts of the novel encompass the total politico-social history of the land making it as a historical novel. The first volume starts in 1947 when Pushpita and her husband, Ali Ahmed, who is a teacher of literature, “are fleeing because they were Muslims” (146). Their six years old son Prodeepta is with them. The first volume covers the time from 1947-1958. The journey, in this story, is not in a train alone, but also in a boat over. In her advanced stage of pregnancy, she feels labor pain. Another refugee who is called Khala by Pushpita is with the family among others.

Khala, “the matriarch of their village”, who had lost sixteen members of her family to communal violence, pushes aside her own grief, to help Pushpita up the muddy riverbank, and assist Pushpita during childbirth in the train compartment. This female intervention is absent in the nameless woman’s birthing process in the earlier story by Hasan Hafizur Rehman, which perhaps explains why both the mother and the child die in “Two More Deaths”. The new son, “born to a new life in this country with a new name” is called “Prateek,” which means symbol, symbolic of a personal, familial and national renaissance. The first volume ends in 1958, by then, the language movement has started and making of a Bengali Muslim identity is in full swing. A character named Mofizul participates in the movement as a student of Dhaka University and sacrifices himself on 21st February 1952.

The second volume begins with the story of Prodeepta as a university student and depicts the political development between 1959 to 1969. The story revolves around the strengthening of Bengali nationalism in light of Pakistan’s 1965 war with India over Kashmir, the Six-Point program in 1966,[[32]](#footnote-32) and the 1969 mass upsurge. The characters in the novel including Ali Ahmed, Prodeepta, and Prateek are eyewitness and participants of these historical events. In volume three, Prodeepta is a journalist reporting about the disastrous natural calamity in the coastal areas of Bhola, the conflict between Bengali and Biharies and the first general election in Pakistan in 1970. Prodeepta becomes a *Muktijoddha* and returns home injured. After so much bloodshed and loss, the country becomes independent. But new political crisis emerges. Famine hits the whole country in 1974. And in many dissatisfactory situations Sheikh Mujibur Rahman is killed with which *Gayetri Shondha* concludes.

By consolidating the story of this land starting from 1947 to 1975 Selina Hossain captures history in the fullest details with highest human touch. Its characters highlight the unresolved issues of partition and the crisis it put people through. It begins with the crisis to be a refugee when Ali Ahmad and his family leaves India for Bangladesh and they realize that they do not have a motherland of their own. The continuous Hindu-Muslim riot and the migration of Hindus from East Pakistan to India illustrates the incomplete process of the partition. In in Bengali partition stories including *Gayetri Shondha,* Hasan Hafizur Rahman’s Two More Deaths, Alauddin Al Azad’s novel *Kshudha O Asha,* the process of parturition becomes a parallel of the border-crossing engendered by the Partition.The mixed effect of nostalgia and hope—symbolized by the newborn child – is a recurring feature of Bangladeshi Partition narratives, where the sense of loss is accompanied by the sense of a new future. The irony lies in the fact that while parturition is a natural, eternal process, Partition is a man-made, sudden rupture.

Selina Hossain continues to portray the social and political issues of the land including aftermath of the partition even after 70 years. In her 2010 novel *Bhumi O Kusum* (Land and Flower), Hossain depicts the lives of people in the c*hhitmohol[[33]](#footnote-33)* enclaves between the borders of India and Bangladesh—perhaps the only Bangla novel based on their “divided lives” (Sengupta, 2015). In *Bhumi O Kusum,* state has been a distant entity for the residents of Dohogram. One day, they wake up to the sudden presence of the state everywhere. Both Indian security forces and the Pakistani official who come to carry out a census remind them how marginal their existence may be. The novel revolves around *Barnamala* and the changes in her life. Branamala, whose name means the Bangla alphabet, marries Ajmal, who later dies fighting for an independent Bangladesh. Although Bangladesh becomes independent, the fate of Dohogram does not change. India has to relinquish some territory for it to merge with Bangladesh and the decision is forever postponed.

The inhabitants realize that “they had been prisoners earlier and they remain so. They have not been freed. The country has been freed, the name of it changed, the flag has changed, but…nothing has changed inside the chhit” (399). The novel ends with a change in Barnamala’s consciousness of her sufferings. Imprisoned within the territoriality of the enclave, she tries to enter Bangladesh to pay obeisance to her husband. When she is stopped by the sentries, she cries out, “I want the people of the chhit to be free. You cannot keep us prisoners.” But her cries for freedom is greeted with nothing but silence. Perhaps a metaphor for how the larger events in political history lock into the lives of ordinary people (Sengupta, 2015)—a recurrent theme in the 1947 novels by other Bangladeshi writers. In *Gayetri Shondha,* Selina Hossain deals with the emergence of Bengali Muslim identity through with a focus on national level politics. In *Bhumi o Kusum*, published fifteen years after the last *Gayetri Shondha,* moves ways from national politics. It asks new questions about borderland to show the unresolved issues of nation, identity, and home that reflects the long lasting impacts of the partition.

Another Bangladeshi writer Shawkat Ali’s (1939) writings have constantly revealed his experiences shaped by the partition. Ali was born in West Bengal and moved to the East when he was 16. His family lost their home to illegal occupants. Although the Indian government later decided to compensate, his father never collected it. This experience is reflected in his novel *Warish* (The Successor, 1989). Like the author’s family, the Murshed’s family has to leave their home in West Bengal for Pakistan. When Murshed’s son, Raihan, goes back to his ancestor’s land years after, he is shocked to learn the differences between his father’s memories of the place and what he experiences.

Years later when Raihan’s becomes a political goon, Murhsed realizes that the partitions didn’t bring the desired society for anyone. Murshed and his wife Salma wonders if defining a physical border is more important than tearing apart people’s relationships because to them, those relationships defined who they were. Their identities and relationships became scapegoat of the partition. In his book, he reflected his personal experiences to transcend the partition’s social and political impact. In an interview, Shawkat Ali said, “the intense pain caused by the loss of one’s homeland is indescribable.”[[34]](#footnote-34) Shawkat Ali, like other authors such as Abu Fazl, Abu Rushd, and Shahidullah Kaiser, personal experiences creates a common thread of the narratives.

**The Defining Elements the Partition Narratives by Bangladeshi Writers**

Partition narratives from the two Bengals are different from narratives from Punjab. The Bengal narratives are “less violent, less pathological” because of the “commonality of language and culture, there is perhaps a great 'leaning on' the other, the self is not monadic” (Sengupta, 2003). Interestingly, the partition writings by Bangladeshi writers differ from their Bengali counterparts in West Bengal. The novelists of West Bengal concentrated on the plight of thousands of refugees who had crossed over from east Bengal to the West and their arduous struggle and rehabilitation (Dasgupta, 2012). In contrast, the novelists writing in East Bengal, though with certain misgivings, greeted partition because it offered a space to claim a separate identity. Nonetheless, the response to the partition by Bangladeshi novelists became more critical as time passed. Between early 1960s to 1980s, the growing sense of a Bengali identity coupled with the resentment at being treated as colonial subjects and second-class citizens and finally the war, the novelists illustrated the false promise of the 1947 Indian partition.

Yet, there are few factors determined the thrust of the partition narratives in Bangladeshi fictions. First, the quest to establish a separate Bengali Muslim identity is noticeable in most partition novels by Bangladeshi writers. Both the writers who greeted the partition and who condemned acknowledged the need of the partition for Bengali Muslims to claim their cultural and religious heritage. Second, the Bangladeshi novelists regarded partition not as event of past but the beginning of something new. For some it was a new nation with new possibilities. For example, Abul Fazl in *Ranga Prabhat* was optimistic that socialism would find its place in Pakistan. In addition, through the metaphor of childbirth, these writers marked a new journey and hoped for better prospects in their new nation. Others represented the present in light of the past as the claim of a separate Bengali Muslim identity is recurring.

For example, although set in 1930s, Abu Rushd's *Nongor* brings in the Bengali-Urdu conflict. Sardar Jainuddin, in a similar manner, includes the West Pakistani-East Pakistani conflict by the simple device of having a Pimjabi soldier in the same regiment as his Bengali protagonist Rahmat. Third, downplay of communal violence in writings by Bangladeshi writers can be read as a rejection of the violence. The writers condemned communal violence by portraying strong relationships between Hindu Muslim and their ability to coexist even when such violence was intensifying in other areas. Such closeness of ties is stressed in most Bengali novels through examples of Hindus and Muslims being close friends or lovers in Abul Fazl’s *Ranga Prabhat*, Hasan AzizulHuq’s *Agunpakhi*, and Alauddin Al Azad’s novel *Kshudha O Asha*. Therefore, Muslims and Hindu identities are blurred, fluid and open in these novels.

**Personal Is Political in Bangladeshi Partition Novels**

Even though some of the books discussed in this study were published after 1971, the writers were born before the war. Their personal memories of the partition as well as, in some cases, political beliefs have shaped their narratives of 1947. For example, Hasan Azizul Huq’s bitter experience in post-partitioned India forced him to move to East Pakistan. However, his protagonist Beter Bou, who refuses to leave her village and question the merits of the Partition, one may safely draw a similar conclusion about the writer’s view of the event. Abu Rushd grew up in Calcutta, the biggest Indian metropolis in an environment where anti-colonial movement was vibrant and an effort for intellectual and cultural refinement was at its peak. His protagonist Kamal in *Nongor*, like him, moved to Dhaka during the partition. Kamal is continuously frustrated in Dhaka and he misses the clean road and the air of Calcutta.

It is not to say if a writer is born before 1971, their memories and writings will be shaped by the partition. Popular writers Humayun Ahmed (1948-2012) and were Imdadul Haq Milan’s (1955-) born around the same time as Aktheruzzaman Elias and Selina Hossain. However, the memories or experiences have not been reflected in Ahmed and Milon’s writing as much as Elias or Hossain. Humayun Ahmed, the most popular and perhaps the only widely read Bangladeshi author, focused largely on the 1971 or other middle class issues in post independent. Only one of his well-known book among 175 books[[35]](#footnote-35) is about the partition named *Moddhano* (Mid-Day, 2008). Another popular writer Imdadul Haq Milan’s short stories, “The Ballad of Sona Bas Baul” (2008) depicts the private exchange of property between individuals on both sides of the border. “The Girl Was Innocent” (2008) describes the death of a young woman who was ‘punished’ for loving a man from another faith in light of the communal violence during the partition.[[36]](#footnote-36)

A cursory look at the presence of Partition in the work of writers born after the Bangladesh liberation war reveals that the 1947 is somewhat referred to only in relation to 1971. Mahmud Rahman's short story collection, *Killing the Water* (2010), includes a few pieces that sketch in the Partition as an unavoidable backdrop. Tahmima Anam's debut novel, *A Golden Age* (2007), links up partition with the 1971 war through the family of "Rehana Ali of Calcutta.'' Mahmud Rahman's "Profit and Loss" is an autobiographical sketch moving from the Partition and the problems that came in its train to the 1971 war. Khademul Islam's "The Exit Plan" narrates the adventure of escaping from would- be incarcerated as undesirable aliens. M. Hasan's "Making of a Poet, Syeda Farhana's "Little Women," and Sanjoy Chakraborty's "An After­ life" delve into facets of the identity crisis in the fractured subcontinent.

An anthology of graphic narratives issued in 2013, *This Side That Side: Restorying Partition,* curated by Vishwajyoti Ghosh, brings together the attempts of writers and artists from Pakistan, India, and Bangladesh to deal with the existential spin-off of the event. Six of the twenty-eight stories are by Bangladeshis. When the book was launched at the Dhaka Hay Festival in November 2013, seventy copies brought over sold out in record time (Haque, 2016). Thus, one can only hope a new consciousness regarding the partition is in making in Bangladesh. Until then, the collective memories of the Indian partition in Bangladeshi politics and literature is deficient. Apart from the writings of Humayun Ahmed and Imdadul Haq Milan, the works of other writings discussed in the thesis are not popularly read in Bangladesh. Therefore, these critically acclaimed works, published both before and after the Bangladesh war, have failed to create a presence of 1947 memories in the society’s popular consciousness. Even when popular writers like Ahmed and Milan somewhat depicted the experiences of 1947, the collective consciousness of the country remains oblivious to it.[[37]](#footnote-37) In the following chapter, it is argued that the obliteration of 1947 memories is a deliberate act of hegemonic politics.

**Chapter IV: The Enduring Quest for a Bengali Muslim Identity**

In 1960s, the growing sense of a Bengali identity, coupled with the resentment at being treated as colonial subjects and second class citizens, would lead to the creation of Bangladesh in 1971. In these novels, there is a clear effort to claim a Bengali Muslim identity that combines the author and their character’s faith and cultural heritage. One may think demand of this separate identity was met when Bangladesh become an independent country in 1971. Unfortunately, not only it was the case, the clash between people’s religious ideology and cultural heritage is divisive more than ever. Since 1980s, political squabbles has led to subtly and insidious ways to an Islamization of society and culture. Starting in 2013, the national identity crisis has been thrown into the spotlight when two distinct and contradictory movements emerged claiming to ‘save’ what they believe should be the basis of Bangladesh’s collective identity.

Shahbag movement and Hefazat-e-Islam adopted a binary and continuously redefined frame in which these two camps construct their exclusive national identities based on their perceived loyalty to “liberation war” or “Islam.” Shahbag movement and Hefazat-e-Islam shaped grand narratives resulted in an “us” vs. “them” account of the past and the present. As these groups were recounting their narratives, they were not only creating a common cognitive framework against each other but also defining “the enemy.” Both movements’ actors and participants framed their versions of the history based on the ideology and identity they adhere to thus identifying a shared social and political understanding and experience of their participants. In doing so, they not only intensified political divisions but also highlighted an economic dissection in the country.

For example, Shahbag movement was supported by mostly middle class urban youth with access to main-stream Bengali and English medium education, which provides better access to social, political, and economic resources. Participants and supporters have regular access to the Internet, which played a major role in bringing about the movement. Followers of Shahbag movement also included members of the civil society, Bangladeshis living and studying in Western countries as well as the political elites. On the other hand, Hefezat-e-Islam was represented by the youth who were predominantly from rural areas where madrassas are the alternative education system for people who cannot afford mainstream education. This education largely results in social, political, and economic exclusion from the mainstream society. It is safe to say that unlike Shahbag movement’s participants, supporters of these movement did not have access to the Internet. However, theses meta-narratives created by both movements were exclusionary in nature.

The Shahbag movement portrayed itself as the “soul” of the nation. This portrayal was exclusive in the sense that it implies a singular soul of the nation, of a singular narrative of history, and a singular imagination of the nation. This narrative of Shahbah movement excludes non-Bengalis such as the Chakma and other tribal peoples found in the Hill Tracts and elsewhere, and non-Bengali ‘Biharis’ left over from Pakistan. On the other hand, in Hefazat-e-Islam’s imagination of the nation, there was no place for non-Muslim community in Bangladesh. It lacks historical perspective or context in a sense that it ignores the thousand years of shared history and cultures. Since then, the perceived mutual exclusivity of people’s religious and cultural identities has reinforced political and social polarization fueled by the two main political parties.

In comprehending the genesis of the clash of identities, one must reflect on Bangladesh’s political history. Even through secularism, socialism, democracy and nationalism were included as the state principles in the country’s first constitution in 1972, the role of religion became palpable in politics. Islamist political parties emerged as kingmakers after the restoration of democracy in 1990s. While the Islamization of politics was under way, the ‘pro-secular’ Awami League (AL) and the center-right Bangladesh National Party (BNP) have been engaged in political squabbles. The acrimonious relationship between these two parties has left the political and ideological spectrum vacant and provided Islamist groups with significant opportunity to mobilize and influence.

The identity struggle turned from a political issue to a social crisis in 2013 when Shahbag movement and Hefazat shed light on the unresolved and politicized issue of national identity. However, one must note that, Hefazat-e-Islam has served as the mouthpiece of Islamist politics energized by the AL and BNP. They only capitalized on the political division created by the ruling elites. They highlighted the continuous struggle between “Bangladeshi” and “Bengali” identities, which has escalated into an identity crisis. They only legitimized undemocratic practices by the ruling party as well as amplified extremism and intolerance towards different opinion and ideas.[[38]](#footnote-38) These conflicting binary groups legitimized intolerance and created a greater division in the already polarized society and fragile democracy. These narratives represented by Shahbag movement and Hefazat-e-Islam is not representative of the shared and inclusive history of the region.

The Bangladesh state came into being challenging the ‘two-nation theory’ that had formed the basis for the creation of Pakistan in 1947. Secularism, socialism, democracy and nationalism were included as the state principles in its first constitution in 1972. A ban on religion based politics was imposed in the constitution as well. However, the aspiration of secularism was short-lived as the regime including the founder leader and first president Sheikh Mujibur Rahman started extensive use of religious rhetoric in his speeches. From 1977 to 1990, the military regimes, headed by Ziaur Rahman and General H.M Ershad, used religious identity as a political tool to seek legitimacy. An amendment in 1977 where the term 'absolute trust and faith in the Almighty Allah' was incorporated instead of the principle of secularism. In June, 1988 another constitutional amendment made Islam the state religion. Interestingly, restoring democracy in 1990 did not change these provisions. In fact, role of religion became palpable in politics, and Islamist political parties emerged as kingmakers while the ‘pro-secular’ Awami League (AL) and the center-right Bangladesh National Party (BNP) have been engaged in political squabbles.

The acrimonious relationship of these two parties has left the political and ideological spectrum vacant and provided Islamist groups with significant opportunity to mobilize and influence. The political use of Islam has been the major contributing elements to the constructions of two distinct identities: the ‘Bengali’ and the ‘Bangladeshi’ identities. The political use of Islam led to the constructions of two identities: the ‘Bengali’ and the ‘Bangladeshi.’ The ‘Bengali’ identity highlights the secularist traditions that were present in the early history of Bengal as well as the Language Movement that arose in the early 1950s that eventually led the creation of Bangladesh. On the other hand, ‘Bangladeshi’ identity emphasizes Islam as the core element of the identity and the territorial nationalism as an effort to differentiate the Bengalis of Bangladesh and Bengalis of West Bengal of India. The two distinct identities, the ‘Bengali’ and the ‘Bangladeshi’, has indicated the failure to resolve historical and political anxieties. Both the ‘Bengali’ and ‘Bangladeshi’ nationalism adhere to selective histories that serve each political party’s unique version of the 1971 and subsequent history. They created linear meta-narratives of the religious and cultural history of the region to serve their political interests.

Yet, interestingly both of these meta-narratives are silent about the partition’s role in creation of Bangladesh. This absence of the recognition of the events of 1947 by these political parties contributed to a lack of public consciousness. The political apathy to the partition is evident in two apparent tendencies. First, the point of departure of Bangladesh’s history is considered to be “the violent clashes on Language Day in 1952, after which Bangladeshi nationalism gradually developed” (Rosser, 2003). The genesis of the event is traced back to 1948 when Jinnah announced that Urdu would be the state language.[[39]](#footnote-39) This trend is visible both in the text books published immediately after independence (Rosser, 2003) and in state sponsored text-books as recent as 2015. The *Bangladesh and Global Studies*text books for 6th to 8th grade considers 1971 as the starting point and barely mention 1947 to indicate that the events in 1947 is not part of “our history.” For example, the 2015 edition of 6th grade *Bangladesh and Global Studies* includes statements such as “We all know that Bangladesh started its journey in 1971” and “the history of Bangladesh started *only[[40]](#footnote-40)* in 1971” (Zaman, 2016).

Second, Bangladesh’s history between 1952 and 1971 is selectively chosen. This selective history narrates that after the “Bhasa Andolon” (language movement in 1952), a nationalist movement arose marked by 1966 (movements for six points demands), 1969 (pro-democracy popular uprising) and 1970 (the election when Mujib led Awami League won 167 seats out of a total 313 making it the single majority party in the Pakistan National Assembly). Rosser (2003) in studying textbooks published immediately after the independence finds a similar story, “War of Independence began after Sheikh Mujib's Awami League won the majority in the parliamentary elections” but “West Pakistan denied the elections, which was followed by the March 25-26 massacres” in 1971 (Rosser, 2003). However, what is interesting is that even though state-sponsored text books are regularly manipulated and rewritten by the two main political parties to serve their political prerogatives,[[41]](#footnote-41) neither version of the history address the 1947 partition or its impact.[[42]](#footnote-42)

Therefore, there is a political and social indifferences to—perhaps almost a denial of—the 1947 partition, which Ananya Jahanara Kabir (2013) called “*Partition's Post-amnesias.”* This silence is unfathomable because not only the geographic area called Bangladesh is a direct result of the 1947 partition but also because Bangladesh fought its liberation war against Pakistan, a state which came into being as a result of the partition. Many tend to argue that the memories of 1947 partition in public discourse were linked to, or perhaps displaced by, the struggles leading to 1971. They suggest 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 thus, it is possible for the events of 1947 to become overshadowed in minds and in personal accounts of Bangladeshi. In addressing the issue, Megha Guhathakurta(2013)states,

Memories of 1947, or Partition, have often been superseded by memories of 1971 (or the movements leading up to 1971), because in the quest for a Bengali identity many Bengali Muslims have had to rethink their positions. As memories of the Partition are revived, they are often either blocked or colored by memories of 1971.

For the proponent of this argument, 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 (Harrington, 2016). Nonetheless, it is argued in this study that the silence around 1947 is not because memories of one violent partition was replaced by another, but because the ruling elites benefits from this silence. Both Awami League and BNP’s construction of nationalist ideologies are based on a monolithic meta-narrative 1971 that adhere to their own political interests particularly regarding the identity crisis between Bengali and Bangladeshi identities.[[43]](#footnote-43)

The view is that discussion on 1947, as an originator to Bangladesh statehood may further unsettle the ‘delicate balance’ of the struggle over national identity as well as challenge the monolithic historiography of the country based on selective history. For example, the proponent of Bengali nationalism, the Awami League, does not signify the Muslim identity of the citizens of Bangladesh. Thus, discussion on 1947 would require acknowledgement of Muslim identity as well as it East Pakistani history. On the other hand, the proponent of Bangladeshi nationalism, BNP, is already accused of being anti-liberation war. Hence, avoiding discourse on 1947 is a better strategy for them as any discussion would reinforce what they are already accused of. The perceived mutual exclusivity of these identities has reinforced political and social polarization fueled by the two main political parties.

Any political, social, or academic discussion on the 1947 partition and its role as an originator to Bangladesh statehood is discouraged in the fear of unsettling the delicate balance of the contested national identities. As the ruling elites deliberately obliterate the memories of 1947, the official history of partition in Bangladesh becomes the absence of a history. In the process, the hegemonic ideology of the partition defined what is remembered and what is forgotten. Therefore, the question raised by Confino (1997) regarding the politics of memory, “who wants whom to remember what, and why” in context of 1947 memories in Bangladesh is clearly answered. The discussed partition literature in Bangladesh challenges the dominant hegemonic construction of collective identity that is oblivious to the 1947 partition, which was the genesis of the nationalist movement that created Bangladesh.[[44]](#footnote-44)

In the absence of public testimonials, literature can provide a “micro-historical” and nuanced view of history. The dominant singular collective identity narratives is Bangladesh is challenged reading literary work, which is “not just an archival retrieval but a way in which the past can be understood to make it signify in the present” (Sengupta, 2015). Literature from Bengal allow historians to comprehend “‘all that is locally contingent and truthfully remembered, capricious and anecdotal, contradictory and mythically given’ and therefore constitute an important means of our self-making’” (Sengupta 2015). Therefore, the discussed Partition literature challenges the singular identity narrative in the country in few ways: First, these novels simply create a counter narrative to the linear identity narratives instituted by the ruling elites and reinforced by the Shahbag movement and Hefzat-e-Islam. For example, at the end of *Norgor*, Abu Rushd suggests the importance of Pakistan for the Muslims of India, while at the same time explaining how the Bengali past must be acknowledged. Rushd—who seems reflected in his protagonist Kamal—stresses that the Muslim Bengali has a past—common to all Bengalis—that is separate from that of his West Pakistani compatriot.

Pakistan was necessary for me to understand that the entire world is mine. In its paddy fields I find my own fragrance. I revivify in the electric violence of its storms. Its fruits and flowers sustain and refresh me. Its breezes will lull my child to sleep. There my being is different, secure, unique. But that does not mean that I will cut myself off from my entire past. My unique identity is inseparably made up of ray past, present and future. After I finish my life on earth perhaps I shall return as a lotus flower, or a cock to wake up people in the morning, or perhaps even a star to shine up above. (265)

The attempt of Bangladesh to arrive at its own cultural identity—which resulted in a clash of indemnities in recent decades—drives from the need to combine its Islamic heritage with its Bengali one. The political squabbles between the ruling parties has prevented people from exploring this multiplicity of their identities. The obliteration of memories and history of 1947 has put these unique aspects of Bengali Muslim identity at war with each other.

Second, the recurrent evidence of the making of a Bengali Muslim identity in these novels reflect that Bengali Muslim identities are not mutually exclusive. Rather, it creates a unique identity in South Asia. In *Anek Suryer* Asha, Sardar Jainuddin’s protagonist, Rahmat, explain his unique identity to a Punjabi soldiers, Fazlul Karim,

Fazlul Karim is surprised when he comes to learn that Rahmat is a Muslim. “What is this?” You are a Bengali as well as a Muslim. How is this?” Rahmat tries to explain—as many Bengalis attempted to explain to their West Pakistani acquaintances: “I am from Bangla desh” Therefore, I am Bengali. I have faith in Islam…I belive in the Prophet that is why I am a Muslim” (171).

It would be *this* difference that would result in the break-up of Pakistan and this uniqueness that would result in Bangladesh.

Third, these novels are important in encapsulating the significance of the partition in the creation of what would become Bangladesh in 1971. While *Kshuda O Asha, Sangshaptak,* and *Anek Suryer Asha* reflect the author’s socialist values and their frustration over social inequalities, *Ranga Prabhat* and *Nongor* offers optimism and sense of possibilities in a new nation. A reading of these novels after 1971, provides “prophetic nature in looking forward to a new Bengali identity which combined the past and the future.” It was necessary, the writers shows, for Partition to have taken place, because, without this separation, Bengali Muslim identity would have remained different than what it is now. Niaz Zaman (1999) states, “The people whose past could not be forgotten who were given a new sense of dignity, and who in the sixties grew conscious of difference and discrimination would [in] a few years…stand up as a new nation in the comity of nations” (129). These novels have rightly recognized the 1947 partition as the genesis of an independent country and its collective identity.

Milan Kundera’s statement regarding memories is worth repeating here “The struggle of man against power is the struggle of memory against forgetting.”

**Conclusion**

Since 1971, Bangladesh has been struggling to define its identity. The intellectuals and the followers of Awami League tend to stress the Bengali side of the Bangladesh nation, whereas the followers of the Bangladesh Nationalist Party stress that the culture of Bangladesh is Muslim. The tribal people of the north and east as well as other ethnic minorities remind us that, though ethnic Bengalis are the majority in Bangladesh, there are significant non-Bengali minorities who might or might not be Muslim. Perhaps, the clash of identities is because the present is yet to engage in an encounter with the past. The silence regarding the 1947 has contributed to the identity crisis in Bangladesh because it does not allow people to acknowledge their shared history. The perceived division between people’s Bengali and Muslim identity benefits no one but the political elites. A public consciousness of the memories of 1947 and its role in the creation of Bangladesh can help untangle this crisis. And the partition literature offers a great resource to do so.

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1. The Two-nation theory the founding principle of the ideology of Pakistan as a separate Muslim nation-state. The theory argued that the Hindus and the Muslims of the Indian subcontinent were fundamentally two distinct nations due to their religions, regardless of ethnic, linguistic, or other commonalities (Canny et. all, 1999). Syed Ahmad Khan (1817-1898) has been described as the architect of the two-nation theory, however, Ziauddin Lahori, an on Syed Ahmad Khan argues otherwise (Firdous & Afzal, 2014). Muhammad Iqbal (1877–1938) provided the philosophical exposition and Muhammad Ali Jinnah (1871–1948) political translated it into the political reality. In a speech in 1944, Jinnah claimed that “Hindus and Muslims belonged to two different religious philosophies, with different social customs and literature, with no intermarriages and based on conflicting ideas and concepts. Their outlook on life and of life was different and despite of 1000 years of history, the relations between the Hindus and Muslims could not attain the level of cordiality” (Firdous & Afzal, 2014). However, Jalal (1985) has challenged mainstream narrative of this theory by arguing that the demand for a separate state was a bargain strategy because Pakistan was a goal that he "in fact did not really want" (p. 57). [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. I use the term interchangeably with “dominant” in the Gramscian understanding of *hegemony* where a dominant idea is projected as “the way of seeing the world so that those who are subordinated by it accept it as 'common sense' and 'natural'” (Chandler, 1995). [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. For a discussion on the construction of these meta-narratives see: Riaz A (2015) Constructing and deconstructing narratives: Shahbag and Islamist politics in Bangladesh. Presented at the 4th International Congress of Bengal Studies, Japan, 12–13 December 2015. Tokyo University Foreign Studies. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. The partition of Bengal in 1905 divided the Bengali Muslim majority population in the west of the state from the Bengali Hindu majority in the east and was orchestrated by the Governor-General Lord Curzon, who claimed administrative grounds. The partition was supported by the East Bengali Muslims but violently opposed by the Hindu businessmen and landlords in fear that it would make them minority. It was revoked in 1911. The 1905 partition provoked the swadeshi (own country) movement leading to the 1947 partition. Bengal’s response to the 1947 Partition must be viewed with this previous 1905 partition in mind, since for the Bengalis the second partition might have felt like a familiar division of their state, perhaps one that they thought would not be permanent (Harrington, 2016). For a history of the 1905 Partition of Bengal and a detailed study of the famous nationalist movement (Swadeshi) that it engendered, see Sarkar, Sumit (1973), The Swadeshi Movement in Bengal 1903-1908. New Delhi: People’s Publishing House. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Led by Ranajit Guha, this group of Indian historians, known as the Subaltern Studies group challenged the elitist and nationalist historiography of the partition. In his 1983 study, *Elementary Aspects of Peasant Insurgency in Colonial India*, Guha deployed Antonio Gramsci’s terminology, ‘subaltern’ and showed that anti colonial resistance was much more “complex and variegated phenomenon traceable to the initial territorial encroachments of the English East India Company in the mid-18th century.” [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Iqbal embodied the layered and composite nature of Indian identity as he had supported the essential unity of India on many earlier occasions. For a detailed study on Iqbal’s political philosophy, see M. Saeed Sheikh (ed). (1972). *Studies in Iqbal's Thought and* Art. Lahore: Bazm-i Iqbal. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. See, for instance, Taj ul-Islam Hashmi *Peasant Utopia: the Communalization of Class Politics in East Bengal, 1920–47* and Ahmed Kamal ‘A Land of Eternal Eid: Independence, People and Politics in East Bengal.’ [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Constitutional Relations between Britain and India: The Transfer of Power, 1942–7, ed. Nicholas Mansergh, 1970–83. These twelve volumes brought crucial documentary sources related to the partition into the public domain. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Maulana Azad (1888–1958) was a leading member of the Indian National Congress who, as Congress President, was a participant in the transfer of power negotiations and went on to become India’s first Education Minister. In the full version of his memoirs, published thirty years after his death, he appeared to hold his Congress colleagues responsible for partition: Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, India Wins Freedom, Delhi, 1988. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Ayesha Jalal, The Sole Spokesman: Jinnah, the Muslim League and the Demand for Pakistan, Cambridge, 1985. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. See for example, Mushirul Hasan (2001). *Legacy of a Divided Nation: India’s Muslims since Independence,* New Delhi: Oxford University Press; Mushirul Hasan ed. (1993) *India’s Partition: Process, Strategy, and Mobilization,* New Delhi: Oxford University Press; Ayesha Jalal (1985) *The Sole Spokesman.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press; Ayesha Jalal (2001), Self and Sovereignty: Individual and Community in South Asian Islam since 1850, New Delhi: Oxford University Press; Gyanendra Pandey, *Remembering Partition*; Talbor, (2000) *Inventing the Nation: India and Pakistan;* Yasmin Khan (2007), *The Great Partition,* New Haven: Yale University Press; Zamindar (2007), *The Long Partition*; Sing, Iyer, & Gairola (2016), Revisiting India’s Partition: News Essays on Memory, Culture, and Politics. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. See Urvashi Butalia (2000), *The Other Side of Silence: Voices from the Partition of India,* New Delhi: Penguin; Ritu Menon and Kamla Bhasin (1998), *Borders and Boundaries: Women in India’s Partition*, New Delhi: Kali for Women; Veena Das (1995): Critical Events: An Anthropological Perspective on Contemporary Indian, New Delhi: Oxford University Press. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Among the fictional work on the partition, some well-known works are The Urdu writer Saadat Hasan Manto’s “Toba Tek Singh” (1955); Khushwant Singh’s Train to Pakistan (1956); Amrita Pritam’s *Pinjar* (1950); Anita Desai’s *Clear Light of Day* (1980); Bapsi Sidhwa’s *Cracking India* (1988); Amitav Ghosh’s *The Shadow Lines* (1988); Salman Rushdie’s *The Midnight’s Children* (1981). In addition to fictions, cinema has also engaged with Partition right from the start, as is evident from Nemai Ghosh’s Bengali film *Chinnamul* (1950), Ritwik Ghatak’s Bengali trilogy *Meghe Dhaka Tara* (1960), *Komal Gandhar* (1961), and *Subarnarekha* (1962), and M.S. Sathyu’s Urdu film *Garm Hawa* (1973). [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. See, for example, Partha Chatterjee, (1984). *Bengal 1920-1947: The Land Question*. Calcutta: K.P. Bagchi and Co; Joya Chatterji, (2002), *Bengal Divided: Hindu Communalism and Partition, 1932-1947*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press; Joya Chatterji, (2011). The Spoils of Bangladesh: Bengal and India, 1947-1967. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press; Soumitra De (1992), Nationlism and Seperatism in Bengal: A Study of India’s Parition. Har-Anand & Vikas Pub. House; Haimanti Roy (2012). Migrants, Refugees, Citizens in India and Pakistan, 1947–1965. New York: Oxford University Press. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. See for example, Anjani Gera Roy, and Nandi Bhatia. (2008). *Partitioned Lives: Narratives of Home, Displacement, and Resettlement*. Delhi: Pearson Education India; Jayita Sengupta, ed. (2012). *Barbed Wire: Borders and Partitions in South Asia*. New Delhi: Routledge; Ananya Jahanara Kabir. (2013). *Partition’s Post Amnesias: 1947, 1971 and Modern South Asia*. New Delhi: Women Unlimited; Rini Bhattacharya Mehta, and Debali Mookerjea-Leonard, eds. (2014). *The Indian Partition in Literature and Films: History, Politics, Aesthetics*. London: Routledge. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. There are also numbers of novels that deal with the Indian nationalist movement of the early decades of the twentieth century leading up to the Partition and its immediate social aftermath through a nationalist perspective. See for example, *Kanthapura* by Raja Rao (1938); *Waiting for the Mahatma* by R.K. Narayan (1956); *Sunlight on a Broken Column* by Attia Hossain (1951); *Inquilab* by Khwaja Ahmed Abbas (1955); *Some Inner Fury* by Kamala Markandaya (1956); *A Time to be Happy* by Nayantara Sahgal (1957); *Azadi* by Chaman Nahal (1975); and *Looking Through Glass* by Mukul Kesavan (1995). [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. See for more, Narendranath Mitra’s *Upanagar* (1963), Manik Bandopadhyay’s Shonar Cheye Dami Part I & Part II (1951 & 1952), Samaresh Basu’s Shahider Ma, and Raghab Bandopadhyay’s Saishab; Atin Bandopadhyay’s novel Nilkantho Pakhir Khonje (1971), Ramapada Chaudhury’s short stories “The Stricken Daughter” (“Karun Kanya” n.d.) and “Embrace” (“Angapali” n.d.), Narendra Mitra’s short story “Illegitimate” (“Jaiba” 1948). [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. For first-generation Dalit experiences of the partition, see Adhir Biswas’ memoirs *Deshbhager Smriti* (*Memory of Partition* 2010), *Allar Jomite Paa* (*Stepping on the Land of Allah* 2012), and Manoranjan Byapari’s autobiography *Itibritte Chandal Jibon* (*Memoir of Chandal* *Life* 2012). [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. Admittedly, an effort was made. In the essay “The Dynamics of Division” (2003), Menon confronts the lack of engagement with the Eastern side in the book and explains how she and her colleagues initially came up with the idea for a “collaborative oral history of women in Partition *from a combined perspective*” with two researchers in Pakistan, two in India, and one in Bangladesh. In this way, they sought to decenter the nationalist histories of Partition and provide an inclusive trans-border account of women were marginalized in the dominant historiography. This objective disintegrated when they began to conduct research in Bengal because they found that the first-hand account of the partition was overwhelmingly linked to the memories of the 1971. Menon writes, “We were forced to accept – regretfully, as far as our project was concerned that for Bangladesh the defining moment was 1971: birth of a nation, freedom from Pakistan. If there was any history that needed to be recovered, it was that of the movement for Sonar Bangla; 1947 almost did not exist, except perhaps as the genesis of the struggles of 1971. ... Partition did not seem to be a research priority at the time. We could hardly insist that it become one. ... All we could do was to hope that at some later date, someone else would be more successful.” Menon’s explanation for the collapse of the research in Bengal leads to the complete omission of the Eastern side from their study. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. Pakistan was to be the “land of eternal Eid,” the Muslim festival celebrating the end of Ramadan. Ahmed Kamal provides a more focused discussion of the various utopian ideas that east Bengalis attached to the idea of Pakistan in, Kamal, Ahmed, ‘A Land of Eternal Eid: Independence, People and Politics in East Bengal.’ [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. Originally written in Bengali, the story was later translated into English by the author himself as well as by Tutum Mukherjee, whose version was included in *Stories About the Partition of India* edited by Alok Bhalla (1994). [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. Holy basil is sacred to Hindus as they regard it as an earthly manifestation of the goddess Tulsi. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. Waliullah translated the book into English presumably to allow his wife, Anne-Marie, to translate the novel into French. In 1961, Anne-Marie’s translated the novel into French was published as L'Arbre Sans Racines. An English translation appeared in 1967, as *Tree Without Roots*, a translation of the French title. In 2001, the book was made into a movie by Tanvir Mokammel. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. It is perhaps the first deliberate killing of a named character in a Pakistani novel about the Partition (Zaman, 1999). [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. Jahangir Nagar is the former name of Dhaka. It was named after Mughal Emperor Jahangir. For more on the history of Dhaka, see Hasan, F (2008). From Jahangirnagar to Dhaka. *Daily Star Forum*, 3(8). Retrieved from <http://archive.thedailystar.net/forum/2008/august/jahangirnagar.htm> [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. Jatra is a folk dramatic genre that incorporates music and dance and is performed primarily in the eastern India and Bangladesh. It is usually performed on an open-air stage. Jatra season begins in autumn and continues until monsoon. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. Some three million Indians died in the famine of 1943 known as the Bengal Famine as majority of the deaths were in Bengal. In *Churchill's Secret War* (2010), journalist Madhusree Mukherjee blames Mr Churchill's policies for being largely responsible for one of the worst famines in India's history. Mukherjee writes, it was "not so much racism as the imbalance of power inherent in the social Darwinian pyramid that explains why famine could be tolerated in India while bread rationing was regarded as an intolerable deprivation in wartime Britain" (Biswas, 2010). [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. Interview with Aktharuzzaman Elias in the literary magazine Lyric, in the special issue on him. Dhaka: 1991, 132. [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. The Tebhaga movement, considered one of the greatest peasant movement in the history of subcontinent, was a movement of the sharecroppers of Bengal demanding two thirds instead of half of what they produced. The movement reflected the development of the political consciousness of the poor peasants and tribal sharecroppers and it may safely be opined that it marked a turning point in the history of agrarian movement in India. See more in Asok Majumdar, (2011). The Tebhaga Movement: Politics of Peasant Protest in Bengal 1946-50. New Delhi: Aakar [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. JUH and radical groups like the Ahrar and the Khaksar believed that every Indian’s first goal should be independence from the British. They believed that Muslims of India were a significant minority (approximately 30per cent at the time) and (thus) would be in a position (after independence) to carve out a more powerful political, economic and cultural role for themselves in India. They also claimed that Muslim League’s Muslim Nationalism was a construct based on the European idea of a nation-state and that Islam cannot be confined within the boundaries of nationalism (Paracha, 2014). [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. A complete collection of the novels was published in 2003 by Somoy Prakashan [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. Awami League issued a Six-Point Program in 1966 which called for Pakistan to become a federation of the two wings, each with the power to define its own fiscal and monetary policies, sign international commercial treaties and raise its own armed forces. The federal government would be responsible solely for national defense and foreign affairs. [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. Locally known as *chhitmohol,* where *chhit* means a sliver of something, enclaves are pockets of India within Bangladesh, and vice versa. As per the joint verification carried out by Indian and Bangladesh Governments in April 1997, there are 111 Indian enclaves in Bangladesh and 51 Bangladeshi enclaves in India although these numbers can be disputed. The reasons that lead to the birth of these anomalous geographical areas are obscure but it is probable that the highly fertile lands belonging to the *chhits* became negotiating tools between the neighboring rulers of the princely states of Cooch Behar and Rangpur, when the former integrated into India and the latter into Bangladesh (Sengupta, 2015). In 2015, the two countries swapped more than 150 pockets of land to settle the demarcation line dividing them. Until, 2015, they find it difficult to travel outside their enclaves as they have no opportunity to obtain valid travel documents. They are essentially prisoners within those areas, or stateless people, with fewer lacilities than prisoners held by the state. To all intents and purpose, the residents of the enclaves are illegible/invisible to their governments because they possess no documents that mark a nation’s citizen, like passports or identity cards. [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
34. An interview of Shawkat Osman by Nur Kamroon Nahar for Sakin Blog [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
35. 172 of Ahmed’s books are in Bengali and three are in English. [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
36. Ahmed and Milon, particularly Humayun Ahmed, are credited for creating and expanding readership in Bangladesh. One of India's top authors, Sunil Ganguly, described Humayun Ahmed as ''the most popular writer in the Bengali language for a century'' (Mustafa, 2012). [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
37. Other prominent Partition novels by Bangladeshi writers include: Surja Dighal Bari, (A Cursed House, 1955) by Abu Ishaque (1926-2003), *Padma, Meghna, Jamuna* (1974) by Abu Jafar Shamsuddin (1911-1988), *Kalo Baraf* (Black Ice, 1992) by Mahmudul Haq (1941-2008), *Neer Sandhani* (Ferret Nest, 1968) by Anwar Pasha (1928-1971), Uttam Purush (The Best Man, 1961) by Rahid Karim (1925-2010), *Deshantor* (The Longitude, 2010) by Nirmalendu Goon (1945-), Fera (The Return 1993) by Taslima Nasreen (1962-). [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
38. Since 2013, extremists have killed over 30 individuals including foreign nationals. In July 2016, a terrorist attack in a bakery in Dhaka killed at least 20 people. Since the attack, the security forces have launched a nationwide crackdown, killing or arresting at least 60 suspected militants. Yet, the Prime Minister, who is also the leader of the largest self-proclaimed secular party has refused to take a strong stance against rising religious zealotry. In fact, with a general election coming in 2019, the ruling party has warmed up its relationship the Hefazat-e-Islam and other Islamist organization in fear of not upsetting Islamist electorates. [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
39. Jinnah also announced that scripts in which Bengali is written would be replaced by alphabets used in Urdu. After Jinnah’s successor governer-general Khawaja Nazimuddin reignited the “Urdu-only” policy in early 1952, a group of students staged a protest in University of Dhaka on February 21, 1952. In an attempt to stop the protest, police opened fire and killed a number of students. February 21 was declared as the International Mother Language Day by UNESCO in 1999. [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
40. Italics is mine to emphasize the refusal to acknowledge not only the century long Bengal history but also two partitions preceding the 1971 Bangladesh war. [↑](#footnote-ref-40)
41. When the Awami League is in power, it emphasizes the role of Bangabandhu (Friend of Bengal) Sheikh Mujib as the Father of the Country ruling out any alternative narratives. Similarly, when the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) is in power, it declares Zia-ur-Rahman (founder of the party and president from 1977-1981. He came to power as the president in 1977 after series of coups. He initiated the history and tendency of military rules in Bangladesh. He was killed in a coup in 1981 and was replaced by another military dictator) as the founder of the country. [↑](#footnote-ref-41)
42. The debate is usually over who declared independence on the night of March 25, 1971 that instructed the people to go to war. This question is a burning topic that has yet to be solved. Any attempt to reconcile can be interpreted as treason to the party and their version of the history. My understanding of the issue is that the declaration of independence by Mujib was sent out on wireless late at night on March 25, just before he was arrested by the Pakistani army. Major Zia, later to be a section commander during the war, had been requested to make the broadcast “in Mujib’s name”. On March 27, the first time he read the declaration, “he did so in the name of Mujib” (Rosser, 2003). [↑](#footnote-ref-42)
43. Both two identities had exclusionary elements – the first towards non-Bengalis such as the Chakma and other tribal peoples found in the Hill Tracts and elsewhere, and non-Bengali ‘Biharis’ left over from Pakistan; and the second towards non-Muslims, who had long considered themselves to be Bengalis (Bhardwaj, 2011). [↑](#footnote-ref-43)
44. The geographic area called Bangladesh is a direct result of the partition in 1947. Moreover, the nationalist movement that resulted in the establishment of an independent Bangladesh was pitted against Pakistan, a state which came into being as a result of the partition. [↑](#footnote-ref-44)