A Reading of Violence in Partition Stories from Bengal

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PREFACE

Like Shanta Sen in her Partition novella *Pitamohi,* my grandmother continues to cast a sublime influence on our displaced family resettled in Barak Valley of Assam following Partition. Like many women of her generation she had sold off her expensive jewellery to rebuild a home for our homeless family. I lost her long ago, but she continues to define my roots for me. My maternal grandfather, the late Ananta Deb who was an activist in erstwhile East Pakistan had a huge stock of Partition tales for us and the memories of his days in Sylhet and Rajshahi. As part of the third generation to be privy to Partition narratives, my everyday life too has been moulded by its cascading remnants. This deep-rooted personal engagement with Partition has naturally encouraged me to take up Partition as a research topic. Nevertheless, I was acutely aware of the moral and ethical issues and their volatile relationship with this political phenomenon. However, the keen interest and scholarship of my teacher, Professor Jharna Sanyal, inspired me further to explore this somewhat contested but nonetheless intriguing subject of research. This book is a section from my PhD thesis on the topic "Issues and Representations of Violence in Selected Partition Narratives from Bengal." At the outset, when I started my research, I discovered that expansive research had already been carried out on the Punjab Partition, covering both historical and literary spheres. A closer look at Bengal narratives on Partition revealed that a lot remained unexplored. It was with interest that I realised that contrary to the perceived opinion that Bengal had barely recorded Partition trauma, sporadic writings exist on this issue. Admittedly, if measured on a comparative scale, Punjab has been far more vocal on Partition imbroglio. Violence which marks the discourse of Partition has scarcely been investigated in the case of Bengal. The focus here has been directed more towards resettlement issues. As discussed in the introductory chapter, historical and sociological writings on Partition began to emerge in stages. As for literary narratives, quite a number of novels and a host of short stories were written in response to this seminal event. From the late 1990s onwards, a revived interest in Partition narratives has been documented palpably in the public discourse on Bengal. Manabendra Bandopadhyay's *Bhed Bibhed (Vols. I & II),* Debesh Roy's *Roktomonir Hare (Vols. I & II),* Prafulla Roy's *Onuprobesh* and Abhijit Sengupta's *Uchheder Golpo* are amongst the edited collections of short

Bangla stories on Partition which bear testimony to this renewed interest in it. As for translated works, there were hardly any translations of Bangla Partition narratives until Alok Bhalla's edited collection on Partition stories was published. Later on, Debjani Sengupta's *Mapmaking and Other Stories* in 2003 and Bashabi Fraser's *Bengal Partition Stories: An Unclosed Chapter,* in 2008, became landmark publications of translated stories on Partition. Simultaneously, a flurry of creative texts on Partition cast in the mould of memoirs has emerged in the last few years. Shanta Sen's *Pitamohi*, *Jonmer Mati*, Mihir Sengupta's *Bishadbriksha,* Sunanda Sikdar's *Doyamoyir Kotha*, Gopal Chandra Moulick's *Deshbhag o Nonipishimar Kotha* are amongst the recently published creative writings on Partition. All these individual texts and edited compilations on Partition demonstrate the continuity of Partition in our lived world. Hardly any Partition novels from Bengal have been translated. Research based works on violence—especially on literary narratives—have scarcely been touched upon in the case of Bengal. All these decisive factors confirm the need to look at the issues and representations of violence with an exclusive focus on Bengal narratives. Exhaustive research would involve encompassing untranslated texts as well, because an omission of such a substantial body of writings would invariably manifest an organic lapse in the nature of research. Encompassing texts which have not yet been translated has facilitated my presenting a nuanced and comprehensive understanding of Partition violence as reflected in literary narratives from Bengal. The textual excerpts of all the novels which I have used in the chapters are my translations except *Doyamoyir Kotha*. Here it is important to note that in the case of translated short stories featured in edited collections of Fraser, Sengupta, Bagchi and Dasgupta or Bhalla I have mentioned the editor's name when I have used textual quotes for the first time. Thereafter I have only included the respective page numbers. For the short stories which are yet to be translated and which are included in edited collections of Debesh Roy, Manabendra Bandopadhyay or Abhijit Sengupta, I have referenced the editor's name when I have used textual passages for the first time. The translations of these textual passages including the titles are mine, unless otherwise mentioned. In the case of the critical works on Partition in Bengali I have translated the relevant portions which I have used in the book. Research on Partition historiography has already been extensively conducted and relevant materials are easily accessible, so as to avoid repetition. Elaborate historical details have been exempt from my introduction. Through this research on Partition I have sought to pay homage to the collective spirit of resilience and enterprise of our grandparents' displaced generation which has gone on to make up the tapestry of the modern Indian nation.

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There are many to whom I owe gratitude for their unflagging support and inspiration that have made this book possible. This book is a section from my PhD thesis on the topic "Issues and Representations of Violence in Selected Partition Narratives from Bengal." I am deeply thankful to Professor Jharna Sanyal for supervising my PhD work that has been shaped into this book. My gratefulness is unbounded for Madam Sanyal whose meticulous review and extraordinary support drove me to perform this journey from its very beginning. She showed me with her characteristic brilliance the potentialities of this research and guided me throughout, while putting her faith in me to choose my own path forward. I am extremely grateful to Cambridge Scholars Publishing for having agreed to publish this work of mine.

I sincerely thank all my colleagues in the Department of English at North-Eastern Hill University for permitting me to take a study leave for over a year to complete my work. Special mention goes out to Professor Moon Moon Mazumdar, Professor Esther Syiem, Professor Mala Renganathan and Professor Sukalpa Bhattacharjee for their support and advice on the technicalities of attaining study leave. I also thank Dr Suparna Bhattacharjee, my friend and colleague in the department of Political Science, NEHU, for sharing her insights on Partition studies and encouraging me always. I also thank my friends, Dr Binayak Dutta at the Department of History, NEHU, who is also a noted scholar on Partition Studies, and Professor D.V Kumar, Department of Sociology, NEHU for academic inspiration and stimulating discussions. I thank all the teachers at the Department of English, Calcutta University, for giving very encouraging comments and suggestions to enrich my work.

I express my thanks to Centre for Studies in Social Sciences, Kolkata for selecting me as a participant in the NRTT Workshop on "Violence and Violation." This ten day long workshop enabled me to get to grips with strong theoretical perspectives on the concept of violence and also aided me in developing a cross disciplinary approach towards my research. I thank especially Professor Manas Ray who was the discussant of my paper and who had offered very insightful observations on my research area. The arguments in my book have been rehearsed at some of the conferences and seminars which I have attended in the recently. I express

my gratitude to all those whose comments helped me in sharpening my focus.

I express my sincere thanks to all the staff members at the National Library, Kolkata; the British Council Library, Kolkata; Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture, Kolkata; Bangiya Sahitya Parishad, Kolkata. I wish to acknowledge my indebtedness to the staff members of Calcutta University Library, NEHU Library, Shillong, and Netaji Library, Shillong. I would also like to express my gratitude to the staff members of the Centre for Studies in Social Sciences Library, Kolkata, for assisting me in gaining access to important research materials.

Friends have played a very positive part in the course of my research. I'd like to take this opportunity to thank especially Samrat Sengupta, a very close friend and committed researcher who has helped me immensely over these last few years. He willingly allowed me to access books from his enviable collection and often sent research materials to Shillong whenever I needed them. I also thank especially my other close friends Ananya, Deepti, Rudra, Suchismita, Nabanita and Suparna for helping me on various occasions during my research. I am grateful to Debasri Basu, a fellow researcher who has helped me with invaluable tips and suggestions.

The most sustaining force in this entire journey has been that of relatives. From the very outset of my research I have found endless motivation and inspiration in my parents. They were instrumental to my stepping out of my home town Silchar and pursue a higher education in Kolkata. On many occasions when I would lose all patience and fret anxiously, they would encourage me to move onward and upward. I thank my mother Aruna Choudhury and father Dr Chinmoy Choudhury for having done everything without being asked. I am grateful to my grandfather the late Ananta Deb, who was very enthusiastic at witnessing my research take form. He had helped me out with many Partition related writings which he had collected over a long span of time. I would also like to thank profusely Amitabha Dev Choudhury, the creative writer from Barak Valley and who is my maternal uncle as well. He had sent me his own books and materials when I most needed them. I am grateful to my Aunts and Uncles in Kolkata and Shillong who have offered much needed help and support. My thanks go to my extended family members, my father in law, and all my in-laws for supporting me immensely in my journey. My husband, Ratnadip Choudhury, has shown a keen interest in my research and has shared a rare sense of understanding throughout. Suffice to say that his academic spirit and positive disposition have enriched this course of my journey.

INTRODUCTION

NARRATIVES ON VIOLENCE: PARTITION AND AFTER[1]

Teler Shishi Bhanglo Bole/Khukur Pore Raag Koro/ Tomra Je Shob Buro Khoka/ Bharat Bhenge Bhag Koro/ Tar Bela?[2] Annadashankar Ray
(For breaking a bottle of oil/ you snub the little girl/ All you old boys/ you have partitioned Bharat/ What about that?)

ye daagdaagujaalaa, ye shab_gaziidaasahar /wo intazaarthaajiskaa, ye wo sahar to nahiin/ye wo sahar to nahiinjiskii aarzuulekar /chale the yaarki mil jaayegiikahiinnakahiin[3] Faiz Ahmed Faiz
(These tarnished rays, this night-smudged light --
This is not that Dawn for which, ravished with freedom,
we had set out in sheer longing)

Partition continues to peer through ongoing spirals of fear; it lives on through communal riots and violence in each of the three nation states, India, Pakistan and Bangladesh. Recent (as well as past) eruptions of mob violence in Bodo land in Assam, Mumbai, or the panicked flight of North East migrants from Bangalore reiterate these strands of continued conflict.[4] As a pivotal event in the history of the Indian subcontinent, Partition and its outcomes continue to mould socio-cultural contours and engagements within the context of India, Pakistan and Bangladesh. Partition echoes through the socio-political and cultural discourses due to its experiential distillations. This holds true not only for discourses which a focus on religion's position in India but also "for [the] historical interpretation of justice and minority belonging and for the tension-ridden struggle over the production of secular national culture in the subcontinent." (Daiya, 2). Even now, seminars, panel discussions, workshops, conferences and chat shows are being held in myriad colleges, universities, research institutes and television channels to reflect on the lasting consequences of Partition in the public sphere in the subcontinent. Martha C. Nussbaum, in discussing the pervasive effects of religious violence in modern India, comments pertinently:

> If we really want to understand the impact of religious nationalism on democratic values, India currently provides a deeply troubling example, and one without which any understanding of the more general phenomenon is dangerously incomplete. It also provides an example of how democracy can survive the assault of religious extremism, from which all modern democracies can learn.[5] (Nussbaum, *Religious Violence* 1)

It is not unexpected that the crisis and disruption which emerged during Partition would lead to such explosive outcomes and increasingly saturate current discourses about political violence across the country. Partition has become—in more ways than one—an evocative receptacle of meanings, ideas and metaphors of contemporary ethnic belongings of South Asia. The very nature of socio-historical arrangements and the ideological rhetoric afforded by the experiences of Partition has been such that it opens up a perpetual potentiality for creatively playing upon the conceivability inherent in the phenomenon. In the case of India, the heady years of diversified and extended struggle for freedom, the consequent dismembering of two mutually antagonistic nations, the statistical dimension of the displacement of millions—all these remain the principle concerns of official historiography and investigations in Social Science. The singularly violent nature of the event stands out. Details of varied forms of violence have emerged through such research; images of trains[6] loaded with corpses as they arrived on either side of the border, mutilated bodies, cases of forced religious conversions, the tattooing of women's bodies with symbols of the religion which was not their own, forcing apart homes and families. In certain regions, killings scaled up to the definition of genocide, and ethnic cleansing was carried out to raze many districts of minority populations. There were also abominable effects on pluralist practices and syncretic forms of culture and associated resources that sought to preserve such practices and forms.[7]

Partition historiography has shifted markedly from the study of archival matters relating to the transfer of power and high politics, to the other shades of the event. This shift has been enabling for scholars across disciplinary boundaries. New perspectives have included accounts and experiences based on oral witness accounts, memoirs, popular source materials, and a broadening of the framework of analysis. While colonialist historiography sought to reify the age-old divide between the communities as the key factor inciting a heightened separatism and the subsequent Partition, nationalist historiography marked a departure from this historical position emphasising colonial rulers' device of divide-and-rule. The onus of this scholarship was also on the role of high politics and

the heroic contributions of national leaders, and thus an analysis of the effects of violence on the lives of the common people was neglected.

It is noteworthy that in the historical framework of India and Pakistan, heroes in one national discourse are rendered villains in the other. In India, most nationalist studies often view Jinnah as the decisive figure masterminding the division; again in Pakistan many Hindu leaders like Gandhi, Nehru, and Patel have been held responsible for their incapacity to protect minority rights. These competing versions of history have been critical in facilitating other analytical approaches to reveal hitherto unknown facets of Partition and violence associated with it.[8]

There has sprung up over the last few decades an academic interest in exploring issues related to the social and cultural dimensions of this event. Bouts of violence in several regions (anti-Muslim violence and anti-Sikh riots) of India especially, have led historians to consider these periodical ruptures in terms of Partition massacres. In *Remembering Partition*, Gyanendra Pandey rightly remarks that, countering the nationalist version of history, the survivors' testimonies maintain that Partition was violence, a cataclysm, a world (or worlds) torn apart. So, in parallel to institutional streams of history writing, there have come about newer modes of examining multiple truths of Partition violence. With regard to the broad range of perspectives on Partition studies, Joe Cleary makes a pertinent remark:

> While Irish and Middle Eastern historiography continues to be dominated by the 'high' politics of partition, South Asian historians have begun to investigate the issue from the perspective of those 'below' as well. In so doing, critical new insights on the communal violence that accompanied partition, on the specific experiences of women, and on the role of literature in constructing collective understandings and representations of the traumas involved have been opened up. (Cleary, 10)

Those archives generated by the state agencies are not the only primary sources. Scholars including Mushirul Hasan, Gyanendra Pandey, Ashis Nandy, Urvashi Butalia, Kamla Bhasin, Jasodhara Bagchi and Subhoranjan Dasgupta have offered diverse angles on the Partition story while highlighting the mystery shrouding its details. Their studies give expression to marginal elements and focus on the popular culture of the period. Effectively these have reconstructed the fall-out of Partition through a magnifying glass.

Essentially, the spotlight is now on oral history, gender issues and the minority predicament. As for instance, Butalia's *The Other Side of Silence* and Menon and Bhasin's *Borders and Boundaries* have given rise to, as Debra Castillo and Kavita Panjabi note in their introduction to

Cartographies of Affect, "a critical shift in the entire field of Partition by questioning the silence on women and also by subverting the monoliths of top down nationalist and state oriented histories." (Castillo & Panjabi, 25). Ashis Nandy's study of Partition history offers critical insight into the multiplicity of voices and silences which coexist within the paradigm of assessing Partition violence in the context of the South Asian history. As he notes in his foreword to *Mapmaking*:

> The great Partition riots were one instance when our society, culture and the very basis of civilised life tottered. Though they also included elements of organisation and planning, the riots did reach the interstices of our society. That is why to look at them is to explore the derecognised, contraband selves we live with and to re-examine one's cherished ideological and ethical moorings. (Sengupta, *Mapmaking* ix)

Gyanendra Pandey's rich works on Partition are primarily concerned with the interrelated issues of community, nationhood and violence. He basically argues that the separation between Partition and violence was over-simplified by nationalist historiography, and opines that history is in need of radical reconsideration. Veena Das's study of the prolongation of Partition consequences in contemporary society is instructive of the ways in which events of collective violence continue to form the intermingling of experiences of community and state. Her formulations based on an empirical framework are important for facilitating a better understanding of violence. Das views violence not as a disturbance of ordinary life but as something that is implicated in the ordinary. Multiple perspectives on assessing Partition historiography and on the accounts of violence connected to this decisive moment give rise to a range of challenging issues waiting to be explored.

Violence: Multiplicity of Reading

> It seems that the difficulty violence poses to the subject undergoing it is mirrored in the difficulty of the representation of violence.[9]
> —Willem Schinkel

Violence is tantamount to one of the clearest projections of Partition. Its dynamics—the nature of violence, its repercussions on society and the individual, and the forms of its socio-cultural and political insertion—are invariably imbued with the aesthetic sensibility of its writers. The event's singularly violent character makes it a highly controversial and inflamed domain of research. Beyond the murder and pillage of others, it also involved enormous violence directed towards the

self. It is challenging to conceptualise violence in a transparent and singular manner. Paul R. Brass, in a significant work on violence argues that the struggle over the meaning of violence in each society may or may not afford a consensus or a hegemonic interpretation. It will certainly not lead to the truth, but at most to a regime of truth, as Brass puts it, which would provide a context for reinterpreting previous acts of violence in a country's history.[10] Multiple narratives compete for control over the explanation of violence. There were several sites of violence during the period 1946-47 after which there were communal riots of a magnitude not seen before which had occurred earlier during British rule. These bouts of violence have been viewed as a phased sequence of revenge and retaliation. Furthermore, there is also a tendency to view them as subsets of wider communal conflicts between the Hindus and the Muslims over the future of the subcontinent. On the pervasiveness of violence during Partition, Paul R Brass comments, "In the last days of the British Raj, it was not only the case that violence occurred as a consequence of partition, but violence was a principal mechanism for creating the conditions for partition." (Brass, 19) This raises a flummoxing question regarding the curious proximity between religion and the very violence it so often claims to lament. Deliberating on the link between religion and the current of constant conflict between religious communities, Martin Jay in *Refractions of Violence* claims that these antagonisms raise "profound questions about the deep and abiding link between religious belief, practice and institutionalization on the one hand and violating the putative sanctity of human life and inviolability, of the human body on the other" (Jay, 178). Was the violence unleashed during Partition a case of danger engendered in the act of obsessively preserving religious sanctity? Or was it an example of a deep seated propensity for bestiality ingrained within the human psyche? The answer is not easily found. Fascinating complexities and disciplinarian pluralities mark the defining parameters of violence and its relationship to the question of ethics and righteousness. Philosophical, anthropological, sociological and political approaches towards explaining and understanding violence express a range of positions on negotiating with the subject.

The deduction of the belief that violence is a natural and normal phenomenon is usually the end point of any discussion on violence. Looking closely at contemporary ethnic violence and worldwide unrest, it can very comfortably be ascertained that violence actualises the inner world of lived values, and acts of violence are key to the moulding of moral order, and these give shape to the norms and codes of ethics. In the Indian context, multiple connotations of violence are emanated in drawing

out its conceptual framework. From the *Mahabharata* to the Gandhian doctrine, the opposition between 'Ahimsa' and 'Himsa', as conjectural categories, is frequently adhered to. The significance attached to the ethics of Ahimsa (nonviolence) is repeatedly reflected in most of the Indian philosophical canon. There is a kind of critical consensus that in the *Mahabharata*, the colossal work that within the Indian taxonomy of genres bears the title 'itihasa'[11] attaches great importance to nonviolence. Though it persistently stages episodes of gory bloodshed and apocalyptic violence—especially in the Kurukshetra war—there is also an intellectual and spiritual struggle to tame violence. It is ultimately 'anrsamsya'[12] which is extolled as the supreme virtue in the odyssey for self-realisation. In the Western philosophical tradition, formulations on violence have been posited by thinkers, amongst whom are Arendt, Benjamin, Zizek, Habermas and Agamben. These diverse theorisations of 'violence' as an analytical subject need to be dealt with in addressing the basic premise of Partition violence. It should be taken into account that in most of these discourses on violence primacy is attached to the link between ethics, governance, violence and issues of justice and morality. In this context it is worth mentioning Walter Benjamin, the noted critical thinker who makes a radical intellectual move by formulating a 'poetics of violence' in his "Critique of Violence."[13] Benjamin rejects any critique of violence which is based on a theory of justification with an allusion to ends or means. The relation between law and justice are the basic problem he addresses, as it hinges on violence. As he succinctly puts it, the task of a critique of violence may be summed up as the explicating its relation to law and justice. Particularly, his essay addresses the question of whether violence in the social and political realms could be justified as pure means in themselves, independent of whether it was applied to just or unjust ends. It is also a programmatic concern he shares with Georges Sorel in his *Reflections on Violence.*[14] Within the paradigm of the state, Benjamin distinguishes between two forms of violence that mutually presuppose and deconstruct each other: "All violence as a means is either law-making or law-preserving." (Bullock & Jennings, 243) Against mythic violence and its inborn cycle of law-making and law-preserving violence, Benjamin establishes a category of nonviolent, pure or unalloyed violence that could suspend the application of law to bare life. He coins this violence as "divine violence" – a paradoxically pure or non-violent violence that coincides with its tautological opposite: a strikingly violent violence. The recognition that the creating and conserving of the law has but scant relations with justice, has been widely recognised in the history of European discourses on legality and power. This reference significantly

evokes Hannah Arendt's treatment of violence as a discursive category of analysis which effectively brings out the instrumentality of the state and its relation with the moments of "radical evil." Arendt primarily deliberates on the legitimacy of violence in the theatre of ideas. She attempts to improve our understanding of violence responding to Vietnam War and the threat of nuclear war during the burgeoning Cold War. Her ideas are substantial and shed light on how mankind can view power and violence. In *On Violence,* Arendt argues that justifications and rationalisations which are normatively used to legitimise some forms of violence are flawed. The question she is posing is, how is it possible to rationalise the irrational? Arendt argues that there is a dearth of real critical analysis on the role and function of violence in human society. As Arendt comments, "no one engaged in thought about history and politics can remain unaware of the enormous role violence has played in human affairs, and it is at first glance rather surprising that violence has been singled out so seldom for special consideration." (Arendt, *On Violence* 8) The latter reflects the belief that in human affairs, the means-ends dichotomy is always open to unpredictability. The ends are at risk of being superseded by the means. However, Arendt believes that once violence is introduced into the debate then it becomes completely unpredictable and the very substance of violent action is ruled by the means-ends category, whose chief trait, if applied to human affairs, has always been that the end is in danger of being overwhelmed by the means which it is said to justify and which are needed to reach it. This endless debate emerging from the tussle between means and ends is crucial to the study of violence and its implications. The fundamental argument centres on the question of whether it is possible to track and identify the evolution of violence from its natural and primitive functions to the cultural manifestations of violence that had become so widespread in the 20th century. In any discussion on the specificity of Partition violence, analysing the broader paradigm of diverse theorisations on violence becomes an important academic area of exploration. These divergent modes of conceptualising violence and affirming the nature of its impact cannot be placed under an umbrella framework of theoretical stance. This plurality of stances amplifies the complex territory of defining violence and distinguishing its diverse forms and structures.

A fascinating correspondence between Sigmund Freud and Albert Einstein questions whether there can be any politically viable system of ethics structured around the notion of absolute nonviolence. Commenting on the embedded thread of violence within the human psyche, Freud comments, "A lust for aggression and destruction is certainly among them; the countless cruelties in our history and in our everyday lives vouch for

its existence and its strength."[15] (Strachey, 210) In studying the concept of violence, covering all the consequent dimensions of violence becomes a pressing need—trauma, pain, suffering and so on. The experiences of suffering, pain, trauma, affliction, torture, fear and betrayal are also constituted within the structural analysis of violence. Violence does not simplistically suggest acts of physical aggression and infliction; instead its subtle and implicit representations require intensive analysis. Rather than merely emphasising only the raw, bloody effect of violence, it worthwhile looking at the more subtle, implicit forms of violence encased within trauma[16], pain, fear or betrayal.

Partition Violence and its Pluralities

> From Ras Kumari to Amritsar, from Sialkot to Dhaka or from Calcutta to Delhi and Lahore to Khyber, the entire subcontinent was drenched in blood. In a word it had become one big slaughter house.[17]
> —Shorish Kashmiri

In his study on the relation between violence and the states of South Asia—with a view to defining the territorial sources of contemporary violence,—Willem van Schendel pertinently points out that the disintegration of British India has often been depicted as necessary violence, as if it were a surgical procedure.[18] This equation between the Partition and the accompanying violence has been viewed diversely and numerously by scholars and South Asian experts. As a result of Partition, several ironies weighed down the birth of secular democratic nations. A subcontinent which had hitherto offered the entire world examples of *satyagraha*, *ahimsa* took recourse to grotesque forms of violence during this crucial stage in history. In his leadership of the freedom struggle, Gandhi established the methodology of nonviolence, which is a prerequisite for a culture of peace. He perennially sought to transform the ethics of nonviolence into an instrument of social and political action. His distrust of violence as a tool to achieve liberty and as a tool of revolution was torn asunder by an incredible release of violence at that time. Forms of collective violence placed along a continuum of overlapping categories ranging from riots, pogroms to genocide were confronted.[19] An overarching historical issue has developed from this: why did the mass migrations and the horrendous violence that accompanied them occur, and who was responsible for it? The Indian subcontinent has been subject to Partition thrice—in 1905, in 1947, and in 1971. In 1905, the partition of Bengal received widespread resistance and was subsequently withdrawn. Urvashi Butalia has noted the silence which swathes Partition in *The Other Side of*

Silence, "In India, there is no institutional memory of Partition. The State has not seen fit to construct any memorials, to mark any particular places—as has been done, say, in the case of Holocaust memorials or memorials for the Vietnam War." (Butalia, 361) The 1947 Partition, however, released an orgy of mutual violence leading to far-reaching devastation. As Kavita Panjabi points out in her research on Partition violence, "The collapse of the grand ideas of secularism and democracy began in the very moment that the nationalist struggle came to fruition." (Castillo & Panjabi, 219) As mentioned previously, initially only an insular, blinkered perspective on Partition historiography was accessible; gradually the received histories have been interrogated which consequently set into motion a plurality of understandings of the event. In a similar vein, the violence set loose during Partition has also been examined from several vantage points. Questions and counter-questions have been raised as to how to explain the outbreak of such abominable violence. Debates on community, gender, economic determinations, and caste identity regarding violence have expanded various accounts on the subject. Complex experiences, interpretations and insights collected by scholars and writers on Partition violence emphasise the importance of recognising this diversity.

Partition, as part of a renowned nationalist historiography, and especially its violence, began to vanish from the Indian public sphere after it occurred. The notion of maintaining harmonious ethnic relations within the state is best forgotten; generally perceived as incongruous with peaceful, non-violent, anti-colonial struggle under Gandhi's leadership, this violence suggested its failure. On this issue, Kavita Daiya comments:

> Because responsibility for the violence lay with all the constituencies involved—British, Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs—Partition has ultimately been disavowed historically as an aberration, a moment of "insanity" in an otherwise remarkable story of non-violently achieved freedom from British oppression. (Daiya, 7)

The spotlight in any research on Partition violence frequently falls on a strategy of elision and disavowal. In their article "Listening for Echoes: Partition in Three Contexts," Smita Tewari Jassal and Eyal Ben Ari talk about this streak of evasion where they contend:

> The post-independence vision of sociology as a science of society in the service of the Indian nation was informed by a consent on nation-building which could only be achieved by securing a respectable distance from the trauma, the pain and guilt --- the "underside" of independence. Moreover, in the interests of ensuring "objectivity" and "neutrality", the underpinnings of

> a "value-free" sociology, the emotive violence of partition, appears to have been sacrificed as a subject worthy of sociological study. (Jassal & Ben Ari, “Echoes” 2216)

Partition violence has been presented in the guise of a calamity, a *pralaya* or *tandava*[20] which would trail off after its brief tempestuous passing. The severity, uncertainty and jagged edges of violence are now seen as intrusions, impositions or exceptions. However, muting the violence is a very different task from the perspective of a survivor and the accounts disseminated by official historiography. Gyanendra Pandey’s description in this regard is pertinent:

> Whereas historians’ history seems to suggest that what Partition amounted to was, in the main, a new constitutional/political arrangement, which did not deeply affect the central structures of Indian society or the broad contours of its history, the survivors’ account would appear to say that it amounted to a sundering, a whole new beginning and, thus, a radical reconstitution of community and history. (Pandey, *Remembering* 7)

This difference of perspective raises the level of complexity in studying the violence of Partition.

The issue of Partition violence is concomitant to the issue of community configurations in more ways than one. The conceptual framework of community identity, religious ties and negotiating factors like historical contingency, remains central to the issue of the violence incited on the basis of conflicting consciousness. Gyanendra Pandey, Veena Das, Ashis Nandy, Sudipta Kaviraj et al. have developed interesting insights on the overlapping parameters of community, its solidarity and violence. This dynamic weave between community and violence is alternately configured through strategies of acceptance and disavowal respectively. Violence and community qualify each other, and violence can occur only at or beyond that limit. The perpetration of violence is rationalised by the respective narratives of each rival community. The reasoning goes that whatever has happened within the community limits is not violence at all. Within highly specialised and exclusivist community limits, violence is seen as an aberration, an exception which would not come within the folds of group- (here, religious community) solidarity. It never occurs within the permissible boundaries of community. The community remains protective of all its members, untainted by violence, which resides ‘somewhere else’. Given the changing, malleable parameters of community identity at various historical junctures, this argument is particularly interesting. That which happens within the margins of community, be it atrocities committed against women or the forceful

conversion of religious faith, cannot be labelled as violence. This strain of disregard or allusion becomes a strategic reasoning which actually endorses acts of violence. This relates to the general question of the ethics of survival.[21] The task of offloading responsibility to the rival camp (here, community) is marked by a sense of preserving the self at the cost of the other. Stanley J. Tambiah expands on the role-indeterminacy of ethnic conflicts.[22] Assailants and victims frequently get their roles reversed which takes on the shape of a diabolical riddle. Tambiah, in "Obliterating the Other in former Yugoslavia" notes that this riddle is marked by a continual process of "constructing the other as the enemy and violence is unleashed under the thrall of a felt collective demonizing and everyday taboo lifting." (Tambiah, 77) The venomous intensity of the forcedly allocated boundaries is directly proportionate to the build-up of ambiguities between the socially constructed categories. Most survivors' accounts express this fear-psychosis of being annihilated and posit it as a justification for committing violence. It would seem that the perceived threat to survival instigates violence. To what extent does it stand in an explanation of the violence of Partition?

Parallel to this discussion, is the question of whether our understanding of community needs to be deepened. The differences in place within the same, so called homogeneous community come to be muted in order to whittle together a unified community identity. On the one hand, communal ideology may reflect a disdain for other groups, but it might also represent the group's attempt to define a legitimate space for itself in the public sphere. The language which was evolved by the state (intending here the colonial administration) fundamentally saw communal violence as proof of an age-old conflict between the Hindus and the Muslims, rather than as the degradation of the moral order of the cities brought under colonial rule. Very often contemporary accounts of violence get appropriated by this description though it is a flawed, short-sighted deduction. Instead of investigating the specific conditions which lie behind the emergence of communal conflict, the language of the state lays emphasis upon the tension that has persisted for several centuries. What is the motif of signifiers that structures the ideologies of communalism and ethnicity? Is Partition violence merely a continuation of prevalent communal conflicts, or is it possible to point to a different trajectory of features characterising the violence of Partition? Contemporary Hindu-Muslim communal violence in the Indian nation cannot be isolated from Partition because continuing troubles clearly indicate that Partition still haunts the human psyche beyond the public rhetoric of unity and the everyday life of one nation. In his study on violence and civilization

especially in the context of communal conflicts, Gyanendra Pandey links the two astutely, "Civilization is the absence, then, or at least the strict control of violence." (Pandey, *Question* 7) He further qualifies his statement by adding that the discourse of civilization may be described as a discourse on violence in the negative. "Violence is Civilization's other, as it were. It is what Civilization and History are not." (9). Represented as pathological; a symptom of disease, violence is barely related to normal conditions of life situations. Whether happening within the folds of community or viewed as an occurrence on the other side of the boundaries, Partition violence exposes a minefield of inquiry. In order to study this complex field it is equally necessary to resist absolutely any single causal explanation behind its occurrence.

Was the nature of mob fury during Partition sporadic, scattered here and there? Or was it organised and strategic? There is no simple, linear way of answering this. It is not easy to grasp the entire pattern of mob behaviour during that period.[23] In fact as discussed earlier, it is considered as momentary madness and at the same time, as a manifestation of accumulated mutual hostility. In his analysis of different facets of crowd behaviour in the context of violent outbreaks, Sudhir Kakar gives interesting insight on the subject. Mobs, he comments, "illustrate more clearly than in any other comparable social situation, the evanescence of rational thought, the fragility of internalised behaviour controls, values, and moral and ethical standards." (Das, *Mirrors* 142) The collapse of neighbourhoods, the psychopathic and sadomasochistic aspects of the violence during Partition represent such fragilities as mentioned by Kakar. In fact they have resulted in complete disorientation in the process of identifying the victim and the aggressor. In Partition therefore, many aggressors are sufferers and many sufferers are perpetrators, and logically there is no distinct boundary demarcating the two. This mercurial nature is peculiar because it was unleashed to bring about fixity, a certain sense of self-containment within the participating groups. Gyanendra Pandey hits upon this feature in his focus on Partition violence:

> What appears to count more and more in the context of Partition are believers and non-believers, Hindus and Muslims and Sikhs and even the usually remote India and Pakistan. Violence --- indeed, excessive, unforgiving violence is sometimes thought to have been needed in the effort to establish these new communities on secure foundations and it is no shame to declare it. (Pandey, *Question* 45)

The role engineered by rumours throughout Partition to mobilise one community against the other warrants investigation. Murmured insinuations

and over-zealous declarations create a state of anxiety which in turn paves the way for promoting violence on the basis of misinformation. Ordinary people caught up in the mob behaviour during Partition grew to be easily swayed by the circulating stream of stories murmuring of impending dangers on the one side, and another set of glorified tales of bravery and new accounts of tradition on the other. The dynamics of rumour exhibit the vulnerability of the masses in relying on all types of narrations. The broadcast of false reports and exaggerated figures serves to intensify the justification behind annihilating the enemy. Gyanendra Pandey, in his study on the enormous role of rumour in unleashing violence during Partition remarks:

> Rumour is marked characteristically not only by indeterminacy, anonymity and contagion, but also by a tendency to excess and 'certainty' – a 'certainty' confirmed when the report moves from a verbal to a graphic or filmic mode. (Pandey, *Remembering* 70)

Most often, rumours are intentionally designed to incite different emotions in different stages.[24] The noted historian, Bipan Chandra, in his article "Truth of Incidents, Truth of History" looks at the implication of rumour in the overall scenario of turbulence and concludes that, during Partition in particular, rumours majorly manipulated the course of human behaviour.[25] It is interesting to reflect on how these rumours during Partition escalated the general sense of panic and also the specific ways in which images of hatred, imperatives to revenge and such were translated into actual acts of violence. Through the creation and circulation of hatred, the images of assailant and victim were frequently reversed depending on the perspective from which the memories of traumatic events and of everyday violence were viewed and relived. The anti-Sikh riots in Delhi can also be seen this way, as in Veena Das' analysis of a similar mode of intriguing phenomenology of panic rumour, "In stunning reversals of what was the experience of violence here and now, panic rumours created a kind of screen in which aggressors came to identify themselves and even experience themselves as victims." (Das, *Life and Words* 111) The issue was not merely one of truth or falsehood but also of the power and the structure of this discourse that completes the question of violence. These cases are repeatedly heard of and at a certain point these versions almost assume the status of gospel and are being ultimately confirmed through writing. It is pertinent to cite Pandey once more regarding the instrumental role of rumour vis–à-vis Partition violence, "Is it far-fetched to suggest that the general discourse on Partition still functions as something like a

gigantic rumour, albeit a rumour commonly presented as 'testimony' (or 'history')?" (Pandey, *Remembering* 91)

An interesting take on violence is seen in the celebratory rhetoric of upholding nationhood in the postcolonial context, paving the way for an overwhelming accolade to violence. The rhetoric of revenge sets into motion most of the accounts detailing acts of violence in the wake of Partition. A different kind of vocabulary is adopted to incorporate such acts of violence within the permissibility of ethics, so acts of brutality and murders are transformed into 'veerta' and 'sahosikta'[26] and at times participants are hailed as 'deshkerakhwale'. These accounts make a tangible distinction between martyrdom and violence. The tendency to view violence as "not really violence" affords a sense of propriety to these otherwise brutal acts. Martyrdom and revenge do constitute instances of violence but at the same time they are presented as if they were carried out in order to stop further and more damaging violence, and there is a degree of ethical allowance which goes along with these acts. To quote Gyanendra Pandey:

> Indeed, in the case of martyrdom, the victim's narrative tends to transform it into something altogether different, not only just, but beautiful and even otherworldly- God's deeds as it were, performed in defence of God's word and work: 'dharma', religion, the religious community. (Pandey, "Community" 2037)

In this course of perpetration there is barely any tolerance of committing violence or inflicting pain. Veena Das and Arthur Kleinman *et al.* make an interesting observation in this context; "Collective violence particularly presents the temptation to homogenize a collectivity through languages of patriotism and betrayal in populations, which is then mimicked in anthropological accounts of this violence." (Das et al., *Violence* 11) Most of the survivors' accounts are saturated with suggestions of violence being committed as a means of revenge or sacrifice. Kavita Panjabi too notes that, as violence was perceived in terms of performing a duty, securing the life of the community or nation- so neither self-immolation nor revenge, amounted to acts of violence in the victims' accounts. Equally true is that there prevails a conviction that sacrificial bloodletting is necessary for building strong nation states. Suvir Kaul contends that the vocabulary of martyrdom is a key characteristic of such a belief, and this further makes death extremely meaningful and renders guilt involved in such acts less oppressive, so validating war and violence.[27] As Suvir Kaul positions it, "In this vision, the nation, or the *quam* (community) demands its *shaheeds*, and is strengthened by them."(Kaul, 7) The trope of revenge too

operates similarly. It is presented as a matter in which the actors have no choice; it is only treated as recompense, i.e. paying someone back. As Gyanendra Pandey puts it, "The survivors' accounts are often interspersed with terms of abuse, calling forth damnation upon these mother fuckers, sister fuckers and so on." (Pandey, "Community" 2044) Embroiled in this matter is the question of survival, which in turn legitimises violence. In his essay "Survival of Violence: Violence of Survival" Anup Dhar touches upon this issue interestingly:

> Or perhaps, are we not all surviving at the cost of others? Is not Israel surviving at the cost of Palestine? But then, what is so natural about the survival of self, survival at any cost, at the cost of the other? Is survival then always already violent, something that intrinsically impinges on the survival of the other? Is there anything natural about the violence of survival, is there anything natural about the annihilation of the 'other' for the survival of 'self'? (Dhar, 65)

In this context, it is illuminating to see Ashis Nandy's point that "all the victims knew that in other parts of the region, often only a few miles away, people from their own community were doing exactly what was being done to them." (Nandy, "Invisible Holocaust" 313) The breakdown of all inherited senses of community as well as the changing pattern of moral codes are reiterated in this way. Ironically, all the communities involved felt that their community had triumphed because they had succeeded in inflicting greater suffering upon the rival community/communities.

Did Partition violence differ distinctly from other communal conflicts? An important feature of Partition violence was the type of massive violence directed reflexively towards the self. It represented numerous instances of killing own family members along with destruction of the selves.[28] Urvashi Butalia's documentation of the Thoa Khalsa incident is a significant example in this regard. Partition historiography narrates several other similar incidents; Thoa Khalsa is not an isolated episode. As Butalia points out, stories of this kind of mass suicide, or of women being slain by their own families are legion. In the context of Partition it is easy to encounter episodes of fathers killing daughters in order to avoid abduction and potential victims committing suicide to honour the community. The fear of losing one's religion and culture motivated the enactment of such drastic measures. Another important dimension of Partition violence can be discerned in its pervasiveness, the remote villages of Punjab and Bengal bleeding profusely during the period. Ashis Nandy comments that the riots were not merely a speciality of the cities or a matter of urban slums exploding in violence. It was not merely an urban phenomenon concentrated exclusively in Calcutta, Delhi,

Lahore or Rawalpindi.[29] It precipitated to the villages of Punjab as well as many pockets of Bihar and Bengal. South Asian society, including rural South Asia, was implicated in the Partition riots. As the division of the country progressed, interreligious ways through which ordinary people in villages and urban areas conducted their lives were violated. This becomes an interesting discovery bearing in mind the continuous evocation of pristine, idyllic village settings through Partition memories. The villages, slums and cities were gradually contaminated as they got caught up in the whirlwind of the heightened communal rift. This overtly romanticised image of the homeland and its sudden transition becomes an important marker of the implications of violence during Partition. However this strategic mode of remembering is not without its complications. Most critical scholarship on Partition indicates that many such remembrances are misleading, and tinted with romanticised reminiscing.[30]

Depicting Bengal Violence and its Features

> "Both in terms of social geography and political developments Bengal occupied a crucial place in the evolution of communal politics in the subcontinent."[31]
> —Suranjan Das

> "Partition transformed Bengal and India yet, for the most part, the changes which flowed from Partition were as unexpected as they were far-reaching."[32]
> —Joya Chatterji

Bengal represents a significant chapter for research and investigation, from both an historical and a political perspective. The partition experience in Bengal has been greatly distinct from that of the western part of the nation. The landscape of the nationalist movement, the increasing rift in terms of ideological affiliations and the gradual mobilisation for separation provide important points of reference for examining the special case of Bengal. It is of use to explicate how the Bengal story affected the Indian socio-political scenario throughout its course right up to the journey towards Partition. As Bashabi Fraser opines on this connection, "These events force one to reconsider questions of religious allegiance, personal beliefs, community consciousness and the divisive politics round the term communal in Bengal and in the greater context India." (Fraser, 4) There is a need for a separate analytical framework for the specifics of violent events in Bengal during Partition. The differences between these two divisions are many. The 'serious gap' in the nature and occurrence of

violence between Punjab and Bengal require an altogether separate space in which to be to be examined. As Jasodhara Bagchi and Subhoranjan Dasgupta in their path-breaking analysis of Bengal division note, "While history and politics have been constant and definitive in the context of Punjab, the Partition of Bengal has been refracted through conflicting prisms during the last six decades." (Bagchi and Dasgupta Vol. 1, 2) The intermittency of the outbursts of violence, the protracted and agonising terrors, the porosity of borders, and an unfinished enterprise of recovery make Bengal an unprecedented case. Its violence is of a different nature, manifested in a protracted struggle for survival, the relentless exodus of a section of the populous seeking a new home in an alien landscape. Numerous historical and socio-political pieces of research have made evident the particularities of Bengal division as well. In the context of Bengal, Partha Chatterjee, Suranjan Das, Joya Chatterji, Sugata Bose, Sekhar Bandopadhyay[33] and many others have done extensive research on the gradual polarisation of religious identities and the explosion of communal violence. The second partition of Bengal as it is called, being connected with the Partition of 1905 opens up a realm of concomitant issues of conflicting alliances and debatable identities. This wound had probably not healed and continued to play on a subterranean level. In his essay "Lokohito" Tagore states, "[the] Partition of Bengal did not affect our livelihood but it struck deep into our hearts." (Tagore, 549) 'Deshbhag', 'Utpaton', 'Uchhed', 'Griha-hara'[34] are some of the many terms which have become loaded with layered socio-cultural connotations in this regard.

The partition of 1905 warrants a mention because this division is attributed primarily to a colonial strategy of divide and rule, and was undone in six years. Partha Chatterjee in "The Second Partition of Bengal" discusses the conjecturing of a unified identity of Bengal at the time, "The idea that Bengal was one and indivisible, regardless of religious plurality, was a crucial element that shaped the notion that territory and culture were inseparably tied in a sort of natural history of the nation." (Roy, *Why 1947?* 148) He further posits that the Swadeshi movement propagated an Indian nationalism pronouncing the Aryan-Hindu tradition, a linguistic nationalism valorising Bengal cultural unity and a rhetoric of Hindu-Muslim unity. However, over time, a host of political negotiations and developments threw this entire contrivance into disarray. The older dynamic of Hindu-Muslim unity was not sufficient for addressing the question of agrarian class relations. Sugata Bose, in a piece of intensive research on Bengal communalism: "The Roots of Communal Violence in Rural Bengal: A Study of the Kishoreganj Riots 1930" stresses the fact that without the agrarian dimension of the Hindu-Muslim problem in

Bengal, the politics of separatism would have been diluted by the strong influx of composite nationalism. Bose also highlights a critical juncture in Bengal's history; that religion provided the basis of a national bond and became the rallying cry of a political organisation demanding the sprouting of a separate Muslim homeland. Thus religion was used to disguise what was essentially an economic conflict which was burdened heavily by an economic and political order, while Muslim peasantry responded readily to appeals of religion and legitimised the breakdown of social relations. In this context it is interesting to flag up Zillur R Khan's comment in his essay "Islam and Bengali Nationalism" on the rise of Bengali Muslim nationalism:

> What began as non-secular nationalism for Bengalis who had embraced Islam in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries gradually became more religio-ethno-linguistic nationalism in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries under economic pressure from non-Muslims and later from non-Bengalis.[35] (Khan, 834)

Another significant contribution on the morphed character of Hindu-Muslim relations[36] comes from Suranjan Das, a noted historian from Bengal—particularly concerning the period following the 1930s—and its repercussions on the political turmoil which broke out during that time. A sharp transition ensued from unorganised, unstructured politics to a more organised and institutionalised communal politics. Elite and popular communalism tended to converge, and, concurrently, communal and class identities also converged majorly at the time. In this context, Das notes in his essay "Towards an Understanding of Communal Violence in Twentieth Century Bengal":

> The outbreaks in this phase lost their initial class basis; became more organised; and were directly connected with developments in institutional politics and consequently exclusively related to communal politics rather than class interests. Crowd violence no longer focused primarily on richer and more influential sections of the two communities -but was instead directed at any manifestation of the rival community, such as religious centres, clubs and schools. (Das, "Understanding" 1805)

He also emphasises that polarised stereotypes were evoked, and apprehensions and fears were manipulated against specific symbols, individuals and objects. The conflict and strand of separatism percolating through society was intensified by the polarisation of the entire population into two communal blocs.

Joya Chatterji's work *Bengal Divided* represents Bengal's socio-political instigation of Partition and its close link with the development of Hindu communalism, along with the existing politics of Muslim separatism. In response to the Communal Award of 1932 and the threat of loss of influence and authority that followed, Zamindars, congressmen, urban professionals, businessmen and members of the Hindu Mahasabha worked towards putting together a monolithic representation of the Hindu community. Through the rhetoric of communalism, they mobilised the "sanskritising aspirations of low caste groups" to reject the possibility of rule of the Muslim majority. As she comments:

> A large number of Hindus of Bengal backed up by the provincial branches of the Congress and the Hindu Mahasabha, campaigned intensively in 1947 for the partition of Bengal and for the creation of a separate Hindu province that would remain inside an Indian union. (Chatterji, *Bengal Divided* 227)

Disasters such as the 1930s depression, food shortages, fuel shortages created by the war, and the fall of Burma, the refugees fleeing Burma, the 1942 cyclone, the famine of 1943 and the economic strain of the war effort had already shattered the place's morale. Bouts of violence taking place in Dhaka, Kishoreganj, Jessore and some other zones of Bengal reached their climax in the 1946 Great Calcutta Killing.[38] Direct Action Day was observed in Kolkata with the unleashing of undeterred mob fury without the constraints of government machinery to pull the reins in on the violence. Bashabi Fraser refers to Maulana Azad's recollections of the infamous day in his memoir, "Throughout Calcutta, the military and the police were standing by but remained inactive while innocent men and women were being killed." (Fraser, 17) Suranjan Das too notes in his study "Communal Violence in Twentieth Century Colonial Bengal: An Analytical Framework" how August 1946 saw the first large scale involvement of the Bengali Hindus and Muslims in communal violence. This orgy of violence displayed communal hostility at its strongest, thereby completing the process of dehumanisation. Violence perpetrated by the opposing communities was alarming, insidious and sadistic.

The bloodbath of 1946 in Calcutta instantly put into motion a series of violent episodes in Noakhali and Tippera. Due to strengthened communal identities, the riot gained considerable local support once it had begun. The riots in Noakhali and Tippera were in some respects extensions of the Calcutta carnage. Alarming acts of looting, arson and forced conversions accompanied these riots. The police and ineffective governance aggravated the situation. It was not merely a spontaneous mass uprising;

rather it was the result of planned, calculated preparation. In the Hindu psyche, Noakhali came to personify Muslim tyranny. The article "Forbearance or the Violence of Memory: Noakhali, Bengal, 1946" by Anjan Ghosh provides comment on the aftermath of the riot: "in an effort to heal the wounds of the two communities, Gandhi set out for Noakhali to spread his message of nonviolence and brotherhood during the second week of November in 1946." (Ghosh & Ray, 44) However, the news of this massacre reached the rest of India a few days later which resulted in a vehement outpouring of communal violence, especially in Bihar. A wave of murders and looting swept through Bihar and Gurmukteswar in Uttar Pradesh. This ricochet of violence and counter-violence reached its peak in the eruption of riots in the Punjab. On the last phase of violence in the drive to Partition, David Gilmartin[39] in "Partition, Pakistan and South Asian History: In Search of a Narrative" observes:

> From late 1946 there is evidence that violence was often aimed not at renegotiating status and power within the symbolic framework of a local order but rather at 'cleansing' the local community to reground it symbolically in the territorial frameworks promised by partition. (Gilmartin, 1086)

While it is true that violence was less dramatic in Bengal than Punjab in 1947, both in Punjab and Bengal the psychological impact of the violence associated with Partition was profound. The gore and horror of the violence of 1946-'47 ultimately marked the significance of the connection between religious communities and fixed territorial boundaries. The significance of boundaries mapped geographically seeped into popular consciousness through the severity of the violence. Bengal, as a distinct episode in the history of a partitioned nation, lays itself open to critical engagement of a different dimension. The subsequent chapters of this book, therefore, seek to dissect the dynamics of Bengal violence during Partition and its modes of representations in literary narratives.

Convictions of Narration: Partition Violence on a Fictional Canvas

> "To talk of despair is to conquer it."[40]
> —Albert Camus

How does one go about formulating the contentious relationship between history and literature? Does one qualify the other? Is it conceivable to locate the ways in which the functionality of one is