

CHAPTER-III

THE RIVER CHURNING: RE-LOCATING THE ‘WOMAN’ IN PARTITION HISTORY

Neither exclusive of all other factors, nor excluded because subjective or individual, the personal may query the political, may subvert it, may rephrase it, may even rewrite or reconfigure it.

-Ritu Menon

In the Introduction to this study, it has been suggested that dominant history failed to document women’s experience of Partition. This chapter analyses Jyotirmoyee Devi’s *The River Churning (TRC)* as a novel that challenges the erasure of women from Partition’s history. It examines how the woman protagonist, i.e., Sutara’s story delves into the issue of the politics of patriarchy which includes the way Partition’s history has been constructed away from the women’s minuscule narratives of Partition and patriarchy’s obsession with women’s sexual purity. The chapter seeks to uncover the many links which lie embedded within Sutara’s Partition story.

Jyotirmoyee Devi’s (1894-1988) *TRC* is a translation from her original novel in Bengali entitled *Epar Ganga Opar Ganga* (1968). Having had very little formal schooling Devi yet had the opportunity to read the likes of Bankimchandra and Vivekananda. Married at a very early age she also became a young widow at the age of 25. *Beginnings* is a brief piece of self-writing by the novelist. Here, she recounts how through reading books “the unending dark night of my mind was filled with countless stars and constellations...” (Devi, p. x). Saddled with six children, she returned to her parents’ house destined to live under the strictures placed upon the widowed women of conservative families. However, the reading of literature saved her and helped in the

evolution of a mind that questioned societal and patriarchal norms imposed upon women. She had apprehensions when she made her first forays into writing. She was guilt ridden because a male poet Kantichandra Ghosh was helping her publish her works and that as a Hindu widow her correspondence with him meant she was “straying from the model path” (Devi, p. xix)). Jyotirmoyee Devi overrode these doubts, deeply believing that a woman’s creative potential can be realised only through “independent selfhood” (Devi, p. xxiv). We discover in Jyotirmoyee a mind that was framed by her individual experiences of being a woman, which convinced her of the burdens of patriarchy that women must endure. *TRC* may not be an autobiographical novel, but a similarity between the author’s experiences in life and the protagonist’s in Devi’s fiction cannot be ignored. Devi (2005) clearly protested against the conservative positioning of women as objects, “In brief, my question was, why should women be equated with fish, meat and oil, and then be prohibited according to laws?” (p. xi). She naturally pleaded for women’s need of companionship and extended space. This view of the narrow space allowed to women in the conservative set up was most probably born out of her widowhood, which deprived her of normal companionship, “Widowhood deprives a woman of this support” (Devi, p. xvii). She responded to this discrimination arising out of the strictures exercised by society which must have hurt her “woman’s sensibility” (Devi, p. xi).

Jyotirmoyee Devi was well positioned to write a novel focusing on women’s experience both during and in the wake of the Partition of India. As already mentioned, she was a woman who to great degree went through the trauma of life that the patriarchal Hindu society subjects women to. In the words of Mookerjee-Leonard (2003), “Her writings address the representational deficiency in the social and cultural

historiography of the 1947 Partition of Bengal of the large scale gendered violence—except for token references in fiction”. The focus in her counter-history in the novel “is on women’s absent histories. It analyses with relentless intensity the condition of the women-victims of partition” (Mookerjea-Leonard, 2003). Works like *TRC* foreground the condition of women being twice subjected to violence, one, due to Partition and second, under the patriarchal agenda. Devi’s own words bear witness to her having realised the uniqueness of the crisis to women as explicit in these lines:

...in the hitherto straight path of my life there was a complete break...it is the sort of crisis that occurs only in the lives of women; ...inside myself, this experience made me aware of an extraordinary emptiness and loneliness. (p. vii)

Jyotirmoyee Devi has organised her narrativisation of Sutara’s story by dividing the novel into three sections which correspond to three sections selected from the *Mahabharata*. ‘Adi Parva’ or ‘The Beginning’ is the Introduction in the epic. It is in this part that Draupadi appears for the first time. In the novel, this part deals with the beginning of Sutara’s ordeal during the riots. The second section of the novel is ‘Anusasan Parva’ or ‘The Imposition’ which forms the title of the 13th book of the *Mahabharata*. It is also known as the chapter on discipline or the Book of Precepts. In the novel, this section deals with the social ordeal that she has to face and the exile that is imposed upon her. The third and final section is ‘Stree Parva’ or ‘The Woman Chapter’. This is the 11th book of the epic in which the women characters lament the death of their kith and kin in the Kurukshetra battle. Jyotirmoyee Devi’s note which comes as a kind of preface to the novel is a somewhat angry response to the manner in which the male writer of the epic, despite naming this section as the ‘Stree Parva’, does not engage with the story of the women. This section refers to an incident in which

Arjuna, after the death of Sri Krishna, is supposed to protect the women of the Yadu clan, but actually fails to do so as his weapon becomes inactive. The women are left to the mercy of the attackers who humiliate them or kill them with Arjuna powerless to do anything about it. Devi's protest is over the lack of a complete account of what follows afterwards. The gaps and silences in the 'Stree Parva' are similar to the silence surrounding the accounts of women who were separated from their families during Partition. Devi perceives this as a deliberate attempt to silence women's stories, a tradition which all male poets have followed. The same goes for history. In her own words, "No history has recorded that tragic chapter of shame and humiliation that which is forever controlled by the husband, the son, the father and their race" (p. xxxv).

Jyotirmoyee Devi could scarcely have used a better way to begin her novel than the method of interrogation. Significantly, Sutara, whose story the novel tells, is a history teacher and therefore has recourse to the official accounts of history. She has to face questions from her students relating to the shortcomings of 'history' as an academic discipline and as propagated by the establishment. The students have come from different parts of the country but find that their syllabus has excluded the histories of most of their regions. The question about history being incomplete sets her thinking of the absence of her own history in the official narrative. It is ironic that she teaches a history where no space is given to her own history – the history that was created because of Partition. Interrogation is a device used by the novelist to problematise history in as much as the silences in history raise more questions than such history can solve. Sutara has little faith in the "truth and falsehood as presented in history books" (Devi, 2005, p. 4). The history books that were taught as text and were written by great authorities like "Sir Jadunath Sarkar; Surendranath Sen...; Ramesh Ch. Mazumdar, Dr.

Tarachand” (Devi, 2005, p. 77) are “neutral and made-to-order histories” (Devi, 2005, p. 77). Similarly, it is found that Guha (2010), while presenting a critique of statist history, asserts that it is “the dominant values of the state” (p. 1) that determine what is historic and what is not. Consequently the ‘small voices’ belonging to women and other marginalised classes go unacknowledged. Women have not qualified as subjects of statist narratives of history. Sutara thinks of how history is silent “about the tortured, the exploited, the unfortunate people at the mercy of others” (Devi, 2005, p. 4). This imperfection of the traditional history becomes a tangent for the novelist to take off and to interweave into the personal story of Partition’s experience of the protagonist, a critique of official history and of patriarchal domination suffered by Indian women throughout the ages. As “the presiding deity of history is mute, and perhaps deaf as well, on these questions” (Devi, 2005, p. 74) it becomes imperative for creative literature to step in, take over and attempt to not only fill in the gaps and silences but also to question the atrocities perpetrated on women at the socio-cultural level. It is here that history and fiction coalesce. Embedded within Sutara’s narrative is the mourning of all the subcontinent’s women for the injustice that history has subjected them to by remaining silent about women’s experiences. The fictional representation of Sutara’s story as a memorial testimony of what women faced during Partition provides a fictional as well as historical context to raise a variety of questions.

The novel not only raises questions about the imperfection of history, but also expands the area of questions to expose the deficiencies of a variety of codes, customs and beliefs coming down from the past and percolating from myth to reality, from the past to the present. Sutara’s family become victims of the communal violence that gripped parts of Bengal in the run-up to the Partition. Tamijuddin, Sutara’s neighbour,

who later rescued her, describes the violence as irrational. This violence was also directed at the honour and dignity of women resulting in large scale abduction and rape of women. Committed in the name of Partition and religion, the violence against women is questioned by Tamijuddin's wife. Tamijuddin is agonised by "the shameful truth" (Devi, 2005, p. 15) as to why they failed to save Sutara's family and he does not know how to explain the brutality of the event – the attack on Sutara's family and friends at her father's house. The brutality and the violence against their neighbours are frequently questioned by Tamijuddin and his family. It connects the event with ethics. Tamijuddin and his wife, at different levels, find no sanction for it in any religion. Tamijuddin's wife looks at Partition as male domain with women being used as pawns, "You want to Partition the country, go ahead; you want to fight over it – do it by all means. But why don't you leave the women alone? Does your religion allow you to dishonour women the way you are doing?" (Devi, 2005, pp. 13-14). Her words here could be easily misread as endorsing the ideas of patriarchy and patriarchal nationalism. But Tamij's wife actually sees men as the progenitors of conflict and division and questions their right to involve women in their power games. As she sees it, it is the custodians of religion who exploit communalism as a source of perpetuating their power. Thus, the exercise of power is connected with violence and hence, power and its exercise become unethical.

The recurrence of rhetorical questions spread all over the text forms a pattern of ethical issues inter-relating Partition, history, violence, victimization, women, social codes, patriarchy and religion. Such questions are significantly used both as a means of comprehending an event and as a representation of the traumatic experience of the event. It is Sutara's female students who question her on the so many silenced chapters

of history which leads Sutara to retrieve her own personal history. One of the methods used by Jyotirmoyee Devi to effect this retrieval is that of flashback and a whole spate of memories trigger off in Sutara's mind. This kind of narrativisation is starkly at odds with the linear statist narratives. The latter engage primarily with a coherently put together structured version of history. The purpose behind writing such history is to make it lose its bite and neutralise the traumatic experiences of large sections of the people, women being among them. The lack of articulation of those experiences that have the potential to lay bare certain uncomfortable truths can be seen as a deliberate agenda on the part of state sponsored history. That is why, Jyotirmoyee Devi seems to have only suggested the enormity of the violence without taking recourse to elaborate description of the gruesome details. That is how she has been able to avoid sensationalism in engaging with a very sensitive issue irrespective of religious and social concerns. The use of suggestion as a device to describe violence against the victims adds to the aesthetic value of the novel. Mostly, it is left to the imagination of the reader to conjecture as to the nature of the event. That the brutality of the events and their injustice was not easy to explain is indirectly conveyed through Tamijuddin's letter to Sutara's brother. It was not easy for him to describe the bloodshed, "Tamijuddin sahib's letter was cryptic because he did not know what else to write. And how could he explain the brutality of the events, the injustice!" (Devi, 2005, p. 15). After the horrific event of the violence to her family and the burning down of their house in Noakhali that Sutara had witnessed, she is in a state of daze and does not know or remember what had happened after that. She questions her friend Sakina about it who in turn is unable to give her clear answers. She asks Sakina's mother, "Kakima, how long did I remain unconscious? What happened?" (Devi, 2005, p.17). Jyotirmoyee

Devi only suggests as to what happened to Sutara on the night of the riots. The most likely explanation for such silence may be that it is not relevant whether Sutara was sexually violated or not. The novelist is more concerned with the prejudices that women are subjected to merely on the basis of assumption.

The mystery of the disappearance of her mother and sister remain a lifelong puzzle to Sutara. This haze covering their fate and what happened to her between consciousness and unconsciousness on that fateful day is akin to the haze that history has laid over the experiences of women. Their sudden disappearance from her life symbolises the erasure that historical memory has subjected women to. Questions are also used as a device to take us into the mind of Sutara who is frightened by the questions that the members of the Relief Mission put to her. Jyotirmoyee Devi here questions the manner in which the state was recovering women for relief and rehabilitation. Sutara panics when she is made to face “a lot of searching questions” and a “barrage of questions by a group of strangers” (Devi, 2005, pp. 24-25). Accompanying them is for her a deeply insecure prospect. Even Tamijuddin is concerned about the implications of handing Sutara over to Hindu strangers. The whole exercise is devoid of any element of trust or sensitivity. Still trying to confront the recent traumatic events Sutara is unable to invest any confidence in the manner in which the state machinery carried out the rescue jobs. Her refusal to be accompanied to Calcutta by the people who had come to rescue her poses a problem for them. Her refusal comes in conflict with their cultural prejudice which makes it difficult for them to comprehend how a young Hindu woman – considering the communally charged atmosphere of the times – can repose so much confidence on a Muslim but distrust them. Echoes of the more independent Sutara of the future, even in the midst of her

trauma and loss, can also be found in her ability to voice her decision and refusal to give in to coercion. Sutara's turning to Tamij for safety and security speaks of the state's failure to instil confidence in the women.

The experience of Partition related violence has put a question mark on Sutara's future and her anxiety can find an expression only in the form of questions. Her residence in a Muslim family raises doubts in Tamij's wife whether Sutara's 'Hindu brothers' would accept her. This doubt becomes an ironic prophecy. Sutara is invited to Subha's wedding and it turns out to be a "historic wedding" (Devi, 2005, p. 60). It is historic in a double sense. Sutara's humiliation at the wedding is an event, which is no less traumatic than the events of the night when the violence engulfed not only her house but her entire family. It is also historic in the sense that her humiliation is an outcome of a long history of prejudice against women by the Hindu society. Further, Sutara's presence at the wedding makes the assembled women raise a plethora of questions, "All sorts of questions, innuendos and oblique remarks burst forth" (Devi, 2005, p. 61). Besides the spectre of Sutara remaining unmarried and leading a solitary life, Amulya Babu's family is worried about "other questions – Reba's marriage and the presence of an unmarried aunt" (Devi, 2005, p. 67). By implication the stereotyping of Hindus and Muslims marked by their religious denomination also brings under the interrogative lens as to who could be held responsible for Partition. Historically speaking, this is a question for which there cannot be a clear cut answer. Within the novel, also there is ambiguity about the Hindu-Muslim relationship. It is the Muslim domestic helps, Rahim and Karim, who are responsible for the arson and violence against Sutara's home and family. The desire to see that Sutara is restored to the security and love of her family also comes from the 'other' – the Muslim Tamijuddin's

family. Sutara has to be separated from her protector and his family because, “Circumstances had transformed them into two sets of confused individuals” (Devi, 2005, p. 40). The novel highlights the difference in treatment of a Hindu girl by a Muslim family against all odds and her treatment by her Hindu relatives. Obviously, this has a dual purpose – one purpose is to question the political division of the country on the basis of religious identity, and the other is to question the Hindu notions of women’s sexual purity. The humiliation and lack of support that Sutara faces at the hands of her own relatives shows that at a microscopic level the stereotyping of identity on religious grounds is not justifiable. Sutara remains an outcast in her own Hindu family but not in the Muslim family. Her Hindu family finds it difficult to own her whereas the Muslims take her as their own daughter and are even ready to include her in their family. Jyotirmoyee Devi has captured the poignancy of the situation of women like Sutara who were shunned by their own families because of their notions of honour and purity.

The question of women’s honour is interlinked to another age-old partition/discrimination between men and women. Altekar (2009) in *The Position of Women in Hindu Civilization: From Prehistoric Times to the Present Day* has traced the evolution of the attitude of Hindu society towards women who were taken into captivity by an enemy or who were violated. The Smritis and Puranas, according to him, do not advocate that such women should be abandoned by their families. They recommend that these women be accepted by their families and be treated with sympathy. However, as Altekar claims, this liberal mindedness was visible within Hinduism only up to the 11th century A.D.:

From about the 11th century society began to change its attitude towards these unfortunate women and refused to admit them back. Women carried into captivity by force could no longer entertain any hope of regaining their old position in Hindu society. The advice of the Smritis, which recommended a contrary course, was silently brushed aside and the door of Hinduism was once for all closed to such women. The establishment of the Muslim rule in the country might have been partially responsible for this development. (p. 309)

It would be relevant to mention the fact that this historical idea of the women's impurity continue to exist among the Hindus. It proved to be an obstacle in the retrieval of the abducted Hindu women post-Partition. But the absence of such stigma related to the Muslim women, facilitated their retrieval. Kamlaben Patel, a social worker involved in recovery operations after Partition recounts to Menon and Bhasin (1998) her own experiences and points towards the disparity in the attitudes of Hindu and Muslim families towards women who were recovered:

It was not so important for the Muslims because they did not think of the women as impure, but the Hindus did. With Muslims there was no problem about women's impurity and they hesitated much less when taking them back.

This was my experience. A Hindu woman felt that she had been made impure, had become sullied...A Muslim woman did not feel like this. It was not in her blood, it is in our blood. We feel we have been polluted, we are no longer worthy of showing our faces in public...this tradition is so deeply ingrained in us. (p. 77)

Throughout the novel Sutara's condition is equated with that of Draupadi's and Sita's. The college in Delhi where she teaches history is aptly called Yagnaseni College. Sutara seems to realise that the students require Draupadi's boldness and bravery to survive, "Since there was nobody to support them these days these Yagnsenis were forced to fend for themselves" (Devi, 2005, p. 69). Partition's women victims are the Yagnasenis "molested, without shelter money or power" (Devi, 2005, p. 69). The use of the myths of Sita and Draupadi can be seen as the author's conviction that such figures have relevance in the modern times. Readers are made to recognise elements of these mythical women in Sutara. Sutara experiences the same social pressures that Sita and Draupadi were subjected to. Sita's exile in the name of chastity and Draupadi's public humiliation are experiences that revisited the lives of women during Partition. Jyotirmoyee Devi has, however, affected a recasting of these mythical women in the form of Sutara who destabilises age-old norms about chastity and survives against all odds by carving out a life for herself where the familial power structures, which had proved to be her bane, have no scope of operating. The mythical Draupadi's abandonment was not recorded by Vyasdev who told the tale from his point of view, but Sutara's story is scripted by others only up to a point. She begins to script her own story from the time that she shifts to Delhi to work. Her reflections on her life, her questioning of history and myth, the freedom to form her own sisterhood of friends, her economic independence and realisation of self and life around her – all suggest that it is not society but she who is at a better vantage point to script her story on her own lines and therefore she makes it different from what society desires.

The novel also provides space for the articulation of individual trauma. The memory of the night of violence that Sutara witnesses and survives resurfaces at

different moments as flashbacks and nightmares. Caruth (2010) explains the phenomenon of trauma as being a delayed response to an event. She describes trauma “as the successive movement from an event to its repression to its return” (p. 202) and that “the traumatic event is not experienced as it occurs” (pp. 202-203). The person who goes through a catastrophic event does not experience immediate trauma. The trauma sets in after a period of latency. Traumatic memories are therefore a belated manifestation of the event reappearing in the sufferer’s mind. For Sutara, the ‘unconscious’ survivor, “...dreadful memories of that night kept returning like a nightmare” (Devi, 2005, p. 16) and “...there were the invisible scenes in her mind which she could not get rid of” (Devi, 2005, p. 19). Sutara’s traumatic experience finds expression at various levels – physical, psychological, and social. The violent events of the night had left her unconscious, “she felt so shattered physically and psychologically that she couldn’t get up from her bed” (Devi, 2005, p.10). She had lost the sense of time as she asked, “How long have I been here?” (Devi, 2005, p. 10). It is very interesting to note what Robert Jay Lifton – who has worked on trauma arising out of catastrophic events such as Hiroshima, Vietnam and the Holocaust – has to say about survivors of such events. In an interview to Caruth (1995), Lifton says:

When I first began to talk about psychic numbing in relation to Hiroshima survivors, I learned that they required numbing, that is, the sudden cutting off of feeling, which couldn’t be understood simply by repression. It had elements of repression, elements of isolation, denial, almost any psychoanalytic defense mechanism you could name, but was primarily a cessation of feeling. (p. 136)

Sutara’s gap in memory about what precisely had taken place and that “No tears came, her eyes were dry” (Devi, 2005, p.11) when she heard the news about the complete

disappearance of her parents and sister after the carnage, was the numbing that acted as a “protective shield” to borrow Lifton’s term in his interview to Caruth (1995, p. 136). Unable to make sense out of an experience about which there was not the slightest indication in the past, she was shattered and was “only aware of something terrible having crushed her existence out of shape” (Devi, 2005, p. 16). During the next few months of her stay with Tamij’s family, she undergoes a process of trying to absorb her loss which is also inevitably accompanied by the troubling questions which demand answers to which there are none. Lifton explains the situation of traumatised survivors thus, “being shattered, one struggles to put together the pieces, so to speak, of the psyche, and to balance that need to reconstitute oneself with the capacity to take in the experience” (1995, p. 137). Psychologically the event has created numbness to the extent that she is afraid of asking questions about the event as there were too many to which there was no answer. The questions she asks remain unanswered and appear as if she was still in the past as time was erased for her, “And what happened to Ma and Didi? Who brought me here? Why weren’t they brought too?” (Devi, 2005, p.11). Sutara’s questions reverberate in her friend Sakina’s response to the events of violence and abduction as she herself only vaguely understood as to what happened that night. The response of the victim, Sakina and her mother to the event points towards the inexpressibility of traumatic experience which becomes problematised as an unknown territory. Apart from the fact that witnessing of certain events can lead to trauma, it is also the uncertainty regarding the fate of loved ones, especially parents, which becomes difficult to reconcile to. Sutara’s “mother was constantly on her mind” (Devi, 2005, p. 19) and not knowing whether she was dead or alive is a weight that Sutara has to carry forever. Sutara’s peculiar dilemma attains a deep poignancy when during the

pilgrimage while observing the ritual of offering water to her forefathers she does not know whether she should offer it to her mother because she “wondered if her mother was actually dead” (Devi, 2005, p. 111). The necessary closure which comes with performing the last rites of the dead is something that is denied to Sutara. The memory of the past remains etched in her mind representing a continuity of the experience of the event. It is through her memories that Sutara mourns her past.

At the social level the traumatic experience takes the form of Sutara’s humiliation at Subha’s marriage. The rigidity of Hindu customs in Bengali society is emphasised by Jyotirmoyee Devi, having herself had to directly negotiate with it and out of it. The slightest departure from normative standards of traditional Hindu behaviour met with “public censure, while major violations meant more severe punishments, which usually took the form of social boycott” (Bandyopadhyay, 2007, p. 150). Bandyopadhyay also explains that the maintenance of acceptable behavioural norms was monitored by:

...an elaborate power structure within which every single individual had his or her own location. The primary unit within this structure was the extended family, which was always patriarchal, as patriarchy alone corresponded to the hierarchical ethos of Hindu society. The family household...was organised in a hierarchical structure of obedience, in which every member was situated according to age, generation and gender... (pp. 151-152)

According to this power structure, the woman is at the lowest rung of the ladder with the eldest male holding the position of highest authority. Jyotirmoyee Devi has, however, taken away the voice of authority from the one who would be most

representative of it, and instead transferred it to the older women of Amulya Babu's family. It is not that the patriarchal norms are being challenged by these women. They are, on the other hand, carrying the mantle of tradition with such zeal that the feeble voice raised by Amulya Babu in Sutara's favour remains forever crushed. This speaks of the hegemonic culture so deeply ingrained in the Hindu women that they cannot think of subverting it. In nineteenth century Bengal social reforms "affected many aspects of human relations and existential realities, the most important of them being gender relations and the condition of women" (Bandyopadhyay, 2007, p. 145). This reform movement was against social evils practised in the name of religious traditions and customs, but in real terms did not make much difference to cultural traditions particularly in the everyday life of the elite Bengali community generally known as *bhadralok*. *The National Encyclopaedia of Bangladesh* describes the *bhadralok*:

By the mid-nineteenth century, the *bhadralok* seemed to have received social recognition. By then, they were not only wealthy but also educated and influential. From that time onward, the administrative and the landed middle classes of the nineteenth century came to be known in general as *bhadraloks*, whose hallmarks were education and wealth.
(<http://en.banglapedia.org/index.php?title=Bhadralok>)

The Bengali gentlefolk or the *bhadralok*, a social construct of the 19th and 20th century, was refined and economically empowered. The *bhadralok's* idea of identity is defined by their tradition and conventions and the idea of purity particularly women's purity, and they would not allow any infringement on this identity. Amulya Babu's family epitomises socio-cultural values of the *bhadralok*.

Amulya Babu's passive resistance murmuring against the mistreatment meted out to Sutara in the name of tradition is a reflection of the weakness of reform. Bandyopadhyay (2007) attributes this to "the power of tradition that refused to be reformed" (p.146). She is sent to school and college not because her brother's want her to be educated but because they want her to be 'exiled' from their home. In the case of Amulya Babu, he does realise the positive role education can play in Sutara's life and future but his motives too are to a larger degree guided by the need to appease the women of the family. Sutara is forced to place herself in the care of her brother and his in-laws, who assume moral authority to decide what was best for her. Here, the family played a role similar to that of the state which decided exclusively on the kind and duration of relief to be provided to Partition's refugees without taking into account their needs and requirements. Amulya Babu seemingly takes on the role of the father that Sutara has lost. Placed in a situation of conflict he has to see to it that because of Sutara the family's good name is not jeopardised and also like the true patriarch decide on Sutara's fate. Amulya Babu finds, in his perception, the ideal balance. He doles out charity to Sutara by sending her off to hostel for her education. To be involved with her psychological needs – she is after all still an adolescent – would embroil the whole family in unnecessary and embarrassing complexities. Sutara's removal to the hostel is a kind of eviction that most refugees faced when they overstayed in the relief camps set up by the Bengal government. Chatterji's (2016) interesting piece *Right or Charity?: The Debate over Relief and Rehabilitation in West Bengal, 1947-50* focuses on the way the Bengal government shook off responsibility of providing relief beyond a certain limit:

It asserted that it had fulfilled its responsibility to provide relief to the refugees...Refugees had to be made to understand that they should expect no further relief and that they would be entitled to whatever crumbs by way of rehabilitation government decided to offer them. (p. 79)

The novel also raises some similar pertinent questions about Sutara and women like her: What were their rights? Was it that Sutara was entitled to just what was on offer or did her claims include a more permanent settlement and rehabilitation which would include not only an opportunity for education, but also care, warmth and understanding of family and home? Did it also include the chance to be helped to undergo the process of recovery from psychic trauma?

Jyotirmoyee Devi shows how the women of Amulya Babu's family are situated within power structures and fully complicit with hegemonic perspectives having internalised these ideas. Proud of their Bengali Hindu *bhadralok* culture, they have always maintained strict demarcation from the lower castes, the untouchables and the Muslims to the point of despising them. One method of maintaining this boundary is by adhering to issues related to food taboo. Since the ancient times Hindus have attached a lot of significance to the practise of keeping food and the space of the kitchen unpolluted. Upper caste families have practised this with almost a religious fervour. Amulya Babu's wife uses the space of the kitchen and the politics of food to exercise hegemonic control over Sutara. Sutara has transgressed by staying for six months with a Muslim family and having their food. Talking of Hindu-Muslim divide after the Calcutta and Noakhali riots, Bandyopadhyay (2013) says, "The caste Hindus always had a deep hatred towards the Muslims whom they treated as untouchables or foreigners" (p. 58). According to him, this feeling became more acute after the riots.

There is also the implicit assumption about Sutara's sexual violation. The nature of these transgressions – religious and sexual – makes Sutara ineligible for inclusion within the caste Hindu fold, a case of “losing caste” (p.150) to borrow a term from Bandyopadhyay (2007). She is not from the low caste but having come in contact with pollutants she is now considered a polluting agent. In traditional Hindu custom pollution and purification have religious connotations. Hence, Sutara's identity as a Hindu itself is called into question. The women in Amulya Babu's family are obsessed with the question of Sutara's purity and hence there are boundaries and forbidden territories marked out for her in the house. The purity or otherwise of food is determined by who touches it or prepares it. Water is also associated with purification rituals. Amulya Babu's wife objects to Sutara using the water jug and she is prohibited from touching the water pitcher. Every precaution is taken to keep her away from the kitchen and household work. Forbidden from either cooking or serving food, the idea of division and hegemony is reflected in the treatment of Sutara as ‘impure’ by the dominant ‘pure’ within the same family and community which serves to achieve a fragmentation based on a socially constructed power structure. Her stepping into the kitchen elicits an angry reaction from Amulya Babu's wife, which remains “so deeply etched in Sutara's memory that even now she recalled every word of it and flushed with humiliation” (Devi, 2005, p. 36). Amulya Babu's wife makes it clear in no uncertain terms to the other women of the house about how Sutara is to be treated:

Have you taken leave of your senses? She has spent so many days in a Muslim household, six long months. What is left of her caste, you tell me! It was good of you to bring her over, that is alright. But keep her away from household work as you would a low caste hadi or Bagdi. Look at what she is doing, polluting

everything. Who knows what she has done, the kind of food she has eaten there!
(Devi, 2005, p. 36)

Similar sentiments are echoed by Amulya Babu's widowed sister:

Yes, of course, we Hindus have some code of daily rituals. It does not allow such girls to be accepted back into the family. They have to be kept apart. She has eaten with Muslims, lived with them – how can she be accepted in the community? The pots and pans in the kitchen must not be touched by her. We have to respect the deity, the Brahmins and the codes of social conduct. (Devi, 2005, p. 42)

The strong belief reflected above is that “the deity, the Brahmins and the codes of social conduct” hold similar views on the issue of women like Sutara and that religion and society both sanction such treatment. For Sutara the domestic space becomes the arena where patriarchal systems of power are played out and proves more threatening than the public space. Sutara's position is equated with that of a *hadi* or a *bagdi* meaning one from the lower caste. The narrative of contamination and pollution continues during her entire stay in Amulya Babu's house – each experience more harrowing than the last. Her very entry into the house is marked by a vocal protest from Amulya Babu's wife, “No, no don't touch me now. You have not changed your clothes” (Devi, 2005, p. 31) and her strict instructions to her daughter include, “See that she does not sit on the bed. She must be purified with Ganga water first. God only knows what kind of forbidden food she has eaten there” (Devi, 2005, p. 33). Encoded within these everyday objects like food, water, bed or pitcher, are meanings which privilege these items for use by only those who qualify as ‘pure’. Almost an

untouchable, marriage for a girl like Sutara is now impossible and her presence would also jeopardise the marriage of her niece. She is unwanted at Subha's wedding by the senior ladies of the family because people "are bound to talk" (Devi, 2005, p. 59) and "She can't sit in the same batch" and so "Let her eat apart from others" (Devi, 2005, p. 62). Served separately and made to leave early Sutara's 'polluted' presence is seen as an encroachment upon their 'pure' space. Amulya Babu's wife admits to a social and cultural pressure when she justifies her segregation of Sutara at Subha's wedding, "People might have objected, that was why" (Devi, 2005, p. 65) and "We have to mix with all sorts of people in social functions. How would you understand?" (Devi, 2005, p. 66). Since such kind of treatment is traditionally reserved for people of lower caste, and hence Sutara, a member of their own family is unable to comprehend it and remains confused and traumatised because of it. For Sutara there does not seem much hope of reclaiming her old position in Hindu society, at least the one of which the women in Amulya Babu's family are a part.

Partition gave rise to a socio-cultural group in Delhi made up of the single women who were refugees or were displaced during the event. Erikson (1995) makes a very interesting observation albeit in another context, about traumatised people, "...as if persons without homes or citizenship or any other niche in the larger order of things were invited to gather together in a quarter set aside for the disenfranchised, a ghetto for the unattached" (p. 186). The social perception of single women is that they are unfortunate, unconventional and financially independent. This trend at the time of Partition cannot surely be attributed to notions of progress and modernisation as it is circumstances beyond their control that had thrown the women into the state of singlehood. When Sutara moves to Delhi to work in a private college as a teacher of

History she sees how Delhi has become the refuge for women who were victims of Partition, “Some were from Punjab, some from the South, there were a few Khatri, a few Bengalis” (Devi, 2005, p. 69). The demography of Delhi has changed because of the arrival of displaced Partition refugees. Questions on the issue of identity emerge in Sutara’s mind. Her college becomes the converging ground for women from various cultural, linguistic and regional backgrounds. She acutely feels this difference. This consciousness of regional differences would not have come had Partition not taken place. Unless one encounters difference one does not become conscious of the difference about region and ethnicity. The idea of India was in the abstract, more of a cultural concept of nation – and not that of a nation state which was a political concept and hence alien. After the Partition, movement of people became natural and hence encountering differences also was natural. However, within these differences she is also able to locate similarities – those of religious rituals.

Sutara, like many other single women, lives in a single room in a hostel. This is her personal space got “through her hard-earned money” (Devi, 2005, p. 69). It is here that as a single woman Sutara shapes and negotiates her life. Always denied ‘community’ within the family, Sutara finds it in the hostel, maintaining a comfortable and friendly relationship with some of the other women. Caulfield (2014) who has conducted a study on single women and their lived experience in Delhi, has this to say, “Many of the women said that they did not feel settled in the hostels and therefore did not feel as if the hostels were ‘home’. Personal belongings were minimal” (p. 168). It is also true that in the case of a majority of women their single status with financial independence along with a personal space is a temporary phase with the choice of either remaining single to pursue career goals or to enter into matrimony. However, in

Sutara's case, her singleness and lack of home are hardly self made choices. The desire for a home although not voiced, is there in her subconscious, "She knew, only too well, the bitter truth that she would never have a home" (Devi, 2005, p.69). While it is difficult to exactly determine what constitutes Sutara's idea of a home, we can safely assume that she identifies home with the kind of place she had once lived in, in Noakhali, before the riots and perhaps associates with it the notions of security, care and the love of family. Seen in this light, the room is simply that – a 'room' – with none of the emotional attachment associated with a 'home'. However, it is a space which empowers her in certain ways, allowing for her own personal corner in the big, wide cosmopolitan world of Delhi that she finds herself in, and it also becomes a marker of her financial independence giving her a sense of adequacy. What satisfies her most is the idea of not being a "burden" and financially dependent on her brothers. This knowledge is liberating, filling her with a contented consciousness. This can be seen as "transgressing traditional standards of female economic dependence" (Caulfield, 2014, p. 179). Traditionally society is more comfortable with the idea of a woman financially relying on her father, brother or husband. Sutara goes against these norms and her economic independence has further significance in that her earnings do not have to be given to her family. This gives her greater mobility for she is unrestricted by family relationships. She is able to engage in activities and practices in ways that marriage would not allow her. It is her singleness that offers her the opportunity to join the other women on a pilgrimage. This situation, however, comes with its own complexities and paradoxes. Sutara's independent living in her own space is an assertion of her selfhood but at the same time a compromise with the values set by society. Her life in the hostel is described as "friendless" for despite her friendship with her colleagues who also

stayed in the hostel she has not been able to share her past. Apart from the barrier of language, she has also not yet overcome the trauma of past experiences.

Her decision to join the other women on a pilgrimage is not due to a desire for spiritual salvation, but is dictated by her extreme need for companionship which she is compelled to find “among strangers” (Devi, 2005, p. 95). Khattak (2006) says in the context of Afghan refugee women, “As aliens without any reliable structures for protection, they rely much more heavily upon their informal networks of friends and relatives” (p.125). Through her singleness Sutara discovers a new fluidity in the boundaries of her self. This space that she now occupies educates her about similar stories of suffering and loss that other women had experienced. The story of the violence on women on the western borders during Partition is revealed to her here. Mookherjea-Leonard (2003) comments, “Sutara's feeling of a special affinity with her Punjabi colleagues and friends at Delhi is based on a shared history of violence, homelessness, and migrancy”. The truth of the Punjab violence which happened on a different scale to that of Bengal is revealed to her in Delhi by the other Partition victims. Sutara meets her moment of anagnorisis here. Mookherjea-Leonard (2003) suggests Devi had perceived the “qualitative difference in the character of the violence in Punjab and Bengal.” Punjab witnessed mass scale gendered violence but events in Bengal did not reach the same intensity. It is the story of the Punjab violence that gives Sutara a clue and makes her comprehend as to what might have happened to her family.

Sutara's consciousness about the world around her grows and she is curious about the other women, about their traumatic experience during Partition. The novel in this section deals with the bond that develops between Sutara and the women refugees

from Punjab because of the shared history of violence and grief. It is in the course of the pilgrimage that she is told by her companions about the traumatic experiences of women regardless of which community they belonged to—Hindu, Muslim or Sikh. Although she still finds she cannot share her grief with them, “Yet she felt a kind of unspoken sympathy and a bond of kinship with the people from Punjab” (Devi, 2005, p.74). Erikson (1995) too suggests that “Trauma can create community” (p. 185). The illustration he provides of a female survivor of another traumatic event seems apt in Sutara’s case too, “She viewed herself as having an altered relationship to the rest of humankind, to history, to the processes of nature. She viewed herself as marked...” (Erikson, 1995, p.186). Still in her early twenties, Sutara “felt the weight of age and the experience of centuries added to her body,” (Devi, 2005, p.69) leading her also to wonder, “why, why did things happen the way they did?” (Devi, 2005, p.77). Erikson’s observation about such survivors may be applied to Sutara:

For some survivors, at least, this sense of difference can become a kind of calling, a status, where people are drawn to others similarly marked. The wariness and numbness and slowness of feeling shared by traumatised people everywhere may mean that relating to others comes hard...Still trauma shared can serve as a source of communality in the same way that common languages and common backgrounds can. There is a spiritual kinship there, a sense of identity, even when feelings of affection are deadened and the ability to care numbed. (1995, p. 186)

As the letters from her extended family dwindle over time and her brothers never invite her to stay in their home, Sutara finds succour in the company of other women. Community is often the anchor that tethers women and allows them to form

support systems earning for them a measure of self respect and self confidence. This is empowering for the women as their problem of isolation too is addressed. Oral histories of women's experience during Partition retrieved by Butalia (1998) and Menon and Bhasin (1998) have scrutinised the cases of women as victims who killed themselves for the sake of their honour. But in a creative work like Jyotirmoyee Devi's there is a welcome departure because the traumatised victim chooses to live. Sutara's instinct for survival is evident even at the time when she is sheltered in Tamij's house after her loss. Believing that her brothers would look after her, she is willing to make a clean break from Noakhali and join them in Calcutta. Even when they remain indifferent to her trauma and send her off to hostel Sutara is resilient enough "to dream of a new future" (Devi, 2005, p. 52). Her acknowledgement of the Muslim family's help during her troubled times also brings with it the realisation that had they not rescued her, her fate would have been one about which she shuddered to even think. It is memories of the support and love of this family that provides her enough strength and succour to carry on with the business of living. Forgetting the terrible events is not an option for Sutara, but living is and she chooses it. She creates an alternative world where there is no room for "over-allegiance to tradition" (p. 17), to borrow a phrase from Biswas (2013). Devi, like the Kashmiri-American poet Agha Shahid Ali in *Snowmen*, is pleading for a relook at outdated traditions and he calls such traditions "heirloom" which are imposed on and relayed quite mechanically from generation to generation and are patriarchy ridden. Such traditions come into conflict with ideas of progress. While Ali, in his poem, takes on the mantle of being the harbinger of change, Devi too feels it is the younger generation that can rethink the implications of events like Partition on women. The conventional society demands that women will follow established customs. The

pressures towards marriage for a single woman is dictated by these very same established cultural arrangements and any departure is seen as unconventional. However, in Sutara's case, her family which is steeped in tradition finds the idea of her marriage unacceptable. This is not due to some modernisation process or a broader understanding of her requirements as a working woman. Sutara's transgression calls for punishment which includes the curse of living alone. The Hindu concept of marriage is put under a question mark. Devi hands over the responsibility of reviewing centuries old norms to the progressive thinking Promode, Amulya Babu's son. Promode has the sensitivity to mourn the fate of Partition's women refugees and is capable of comprehending the "living hell" (Devi, 2005, p 118) that exiled women like Sutara are subject to. Promode must exhibit the daring that will challenge his mother's dogmatic resistance to change and his father's inability to rise above mere lip service about Sutara's welfare. Promode's proposal of marriage to Sutara can be seen in terms of a restoration from exile. Just as social exclusion had thrown her off balance, Promod's attempts to rectify society's mistake fills her with doubts and apprehensions. Emotionally deprived of familial dependency and love for a long period, her response is ambiguous. But Sutara is clear on one count – she does not want the proposal to have been made out of pity or charity. As the prospect of a new future gradually sinks in, she is ready to welcome it if its source is love because she cannot give up her hard won independence after five long years at any other cost.

The pilgrimage seems to Sutara like the eternal journey traversing the same path that had once been taken by the Pandavas and Draupadi on their final journey. This journey once again reminds Sutara of Draupadi who was the first to die on the way, "but the writer of the epic had no time to lament her. Even the five Pandavas did not

pause to mourn the woman who was so dear to them” and “...about this particular death Vyasadeva is strangely silent” (Devi, 2005, p 108) This silence is questioned by the author to imply perhaps that since the very ancient times the woman, whether with a husband or not, is destined to be alone. It is in this section that Sutara is traumatised most by the memories of the violence that she had witnessed in 1946 and perhaps is able to surmise about the fate of her mother and sister, “Now she understood the full import of it”. The journey during the pilgrimage also becomes a learning experience for Sutara who ponders over some of life’s questions – her own painful past and the past of the mythical Draupadi. Lonely and abandoned, Sutara strives towards a better understanding of herself and the world around her. Confronted with the complexities of life this journey becomes the medium through which she arrives at a point where the latent possibilities of life are revealed to her. The wondrous serenity of the Himalayas proves a fascinating experience, enough to make her forget her worries and “her sorrows faded” and “She heard a voice within her – all is not yet over, there are other things in life” (Devi, 2005, p 113). While life still retains its troubling and unresolved ambiguities for Sutara, yet she has arrived at a cathartic moment when she is now able to embrace these ambiguities in order to move ahead. According to Prabhakar (2011):

Each individual has a ‘self’ which is different from that of the others and the loss of this ‘self’ will be the loss of his/her identity. The realisation of this ‘self’ is the realisation of one’s potentialities and the strength of a human being lies in the attainment of this ‘selfhood’. (p.84)

Having undergone trauma at multiple levels women like Sutara need respite from the troubling memories and the breathing space provided by the pilgrimage assists in personal healing. Draupadi’s story is embedded within Sutara’s narrative in order to

challenge age-old hegemonic perspectives laid down by a patriarchal culture wherein the abandonment of Draupadi has neither been questioned by the writer of the epic nor by culture. The personal story is blended into the mythological one raising questions about the betrayal that women have faced both at the hands of society and history. Throughout the novel, Devi has fore-grounded the silence maintained by official history about the women's stories during Partition. Kaushalyavati's bitter angst is evident when she recounts the various stories of women whose family members were stabbed right in front of their eyes or who went missing and were never traced:

“So you see Bibiji,” said Kaushalyavati, “this is what independence has meant to us. Who are the unfortunate people who had to give up their lives? Millions of poor people went through hell, their daughters were abducted, their children butchered. Has anybody kept count? Perhaps only God, if he's there at all.”
(Devi, 2005, p. 85)

The Partition of the country resulted in the dislocation and exile of millions giving rise to issues of alienation, space and identity. Since Partition was premised on religion, people who suddenly became minorities found themselves on the wrong side of the Radcliff Line. The painful process of losing home and hearth coupled with the process of finding resettlement with or without the government's help carved out a space of liminal existence for many. Jyotirmoyee Devi takes up the case of women like Sutara who are caught in such an in-between space and whose future on their 'own' side of the border remains forever uncertain. It was the violence consequent to Partition that had forced Sutara to find shelter in a Muslim house. This incidence of staying with the Muslim family becomes the cause of her alienation from the Hindu family in Calcutta. Self-consciously aware of being an outsider in the only family and relatives

she has left, she very soon becomes an outcast evident from the treatment by her brother Sanat's in-laws, "All of a sudden she seemed to have landed in a new world with an unknown path stretching ahead" (J. Devi, 2005, p. 34). Sanat's mother-in-law's hostility and his own indifference to the way she is treated, lands her on the margins of a society where she has a very limited space to move about. This denial of space in the community life is a kind of ex-communication taking the form of social exile. Just as the political Partition assigned fixed space on communal lines, the Hindu concept of polluted woman assigns respective spaces to the pure and the impure. The similarity between the "exiled, without a homeland, people who had lost their all" (Devi, 2005, p. 39) and Sutara's exile cannot be missed. She cannot find a place in her brother's family. At best she is accommodated in a home for the abandoned where "Everything was unfamiliar, the teachers were European. Most of the boarders were converted Christians from the villages, belonging to low castes like nabasak, namasudra, rishi, and some tribals" (Devi, 2005, pp.51-52). Not only has her brother under social and familial pressure withdrawn his support to her but has also withdrawn from – while she is still in college – the responsibility of guardianship. She is forced to be known by her own name. The ties of kinship are sacrificed at the altar of tradition forcing her period of transition from one place to another to continue indefinitely. Thus, it is not only her social space that shrinks but also her identity.

Partition has led to the reduction of national space – space that was carved out to create Pakistan – leading to fragmentation of India. Sutara's personal space has been reduced after the riots and from now on exists only in its fragmented form. The familiar space of home, family, friendly neighbours gradually diminishes to the extent that it disappears altogether. Her Noakhali home with its backyard, two tanks, an orchard and

a cowshed conveyed the sense of freedom and openness – territory that she has now lost forever. After her arrival in Calcutta and till the next twelve years all she lives in are rooms – first she is very grudgingly, to say the least, allowed to share a bedroom with her younger brothers at Amulya Babu’s house, after this are the series of rooms in hostels. Each of these that she occupies is paradoxically both neutral space as well as space overburdened with meaning. The shared accommodation in Calcutta is associated with experiences of humiliation and lack of acceptance; the hostel rooms of school and college are an indication of her unwanted status and abandonment. These rooms spell confinement for Sutara. She is placed on a par with other “orphaned girls who were exiles, fugitives, with no place to go to” (J. Devi, 2005, p.56). The room in Delhi is a marker of her independence. While here also the physical space is reduced, the social space is enlarged through mobility, her agency and the valuable tool of education. Sutara has mapped out new spaces for herself and her radius of movement is enlarged. Delhi becomes the space where she encounters a mixed culture; her college further expands her sphere of coming in contact with an eclectic group, both in terms of age and intellect; the journey of the pilgrimage helps her reconstruct the route taken by Draupadi, enabling her to bridge both a temporal and spatial gap with myth resulting in her understanding of the lack of focus on women’s narratives and experiences be it in mythology or history. Sutara’s mobility began as a forced thing, which was also the beginning of her nomadic life. Khan (2006) points out that when women were dislocated during Partition it was a “violent transition from the private to the public space” (p. 109). She begins life as a nomad with her journey from Noakhali to Calcutta to be supposedly ‘restored’ to her brothers. This escape under the protection of Tamizuddin is fraught with risks because of the prevailing atmosphere of communal

hatred and mistrust. As recorded by Bandyopadhyay (2013) “the escape routes became complex and perilous” (p. 96). Since Noakhali was in Chittagong “Those of Chittagong reached Goalando by ferries to catch the train to Calcutta” (Bandyopadhyay, 2013, p. 96). The boat ride and train ride are the means through which Sutara’s spatial separation from home and country become final. This sudden mobility catapults her into a life which is unfamiliar to say the least. Moving from her native village of Noakhali to the cities of Calcutta and Delhi is a complete shift away from a local, organic and agricultural community to an urban, heterogeneous society. The inclusiveness of the close-knit village is replaced by Amulya Babu’s family which basks in its cultural sophistication and where inclusion is decided on those conditions, which Sutara is unable to meet.

Sutara’s exile from history, nation and family fits in Said’s (2000) definition that, “Exiles are cut off from their roots, their land, their past”. She is displaced from her place of origin which is Noakhali, having hardly any semblance of a link with her extended family. Sutara’s ostracism is equated with the mythological Sita being sent off into exile “for the same offence” (Devi, 2005, p. 43). Like Sita, Sutara too is perceived to have crossed a metaphorical *Lakshman Rekha* set by traditional Hindu society for which punishment entails a social exile with the curse of living alone in an unfamiliar and alien land. Even the comparatively kinder Amulya Babu surrenders to the idea of Sutara being sent to boarding school which he admits to himself is akin to being “sent to her exile” (Devi, 2005, p. 50) so that they are relieved of the stigmatised girl’s shadow which could jeopardise the futures of the daughters of their own family. This decision, albeit taken with some amount of guilt, is conveniently sought to be justified by Amulya Babu as adhering to age-old value systems set by none other than the great

Ramchandra and King Janak himself in the case of Sita, “Even the great Ramchandra could not do so for his wife. Did King Janak come to the aid of Sita? The entire history of the Ramayana does not give us a single example of it” (Devi, 2005, p. 50). Amulya Babu’s inability to protest speaks of the gap that exists between his humanist ideas and actual practice. Under the guise of tradition he valorises a patriarchal and hierarchical culture which frames moral regulations for women and decides on their chastity or lack of it.

For the brief time that she lived with her brother’s wife’s family Sutara was already cast away into a metaphorical exile before living the next twelve years in physical exile. Forbidden to come anywhere near the household gods of Sanat’s in-law’s family – the only family left to her after her parents’ death – Sutara can only join in the *pujas* and pilgrimages undertaken at the more public level in Delhi where most of Partition’s women refugees have had similar kind of experiences. Ramone indicates towards a similar sentiment when she quotes George Lamming, the writer from Barbados, who says about the West Indian exile in his memoir, *The Pleasures of Exile*, that he is “exiled from his god, exiled from his nature, exiled from his own name” (as cited in Ramone, 2011, p. 18). Sutara’s exile seems complete for “nobody from Calcutta got in touch with Sutara nor was she asked to come down” (Devi, 2005, p. 79). Even earlier after her matriculation when summer vacations began “no one came for her” (J. Devi, 2005, p.56) and she was destined to spend it with other orphaned girls who had no home to go to. Said (2000) in *Reflections on Exile* says:

Exile...is a “mind of winter” in which the pathos of summer and autumn as much as the potential of spring are nearby but unobtainable. Perhaps this is another way of saying that a life of exile moves according to a different

calendar, and is less seasonal and settled than life at home. Exile is life led outside habitual order. It is nomadic, decentred, contrapuntal; but no sooner does one get accustomed to it than its unsettling force erupts anew.

Said (2000) distinguishes between an exile and a refugee. According to him “Exile originated in the age-old practice of banishment” and “anyone prevented from returning home is an exile”. He observes:

Refugees, on the other hand, are a creation of the twentieth century state. The word “refugee” has become a political one, suggesting large herds of innocent and bewildered people requiring urgent international assistance, whereas “exile” carries with it, I think, a touch of solitude and spirituality.

Life has placed Sutara in a unique space where cutting across the distinctions laid down by Said (2000) she can be seen as both an exile and a refugee. But unlike most other refugees, Sutara never experiences permanent rehabilitation which in her case would have been easy had her brother and his family accepted her. She can therefore be called a self settled refugee. She has the exile’s inner solitariness. She may have developed newer affiliations but old ties are hard to give up. She has tried to assimilate into and identify herself with the new nation called India, but “the ties of language, of kinship, of region, are deep and strong” (Devi, 2005, p. 79). The exile’s nostalgia for home takes precedence over the idea of belonging to an “all encompassing” (Devi, 2005, p. 79) India. Sutara is, of course, not attracted to spirituality, but there is a higher consciousness in her that makes her question history, the socio-cultural norms set for women and even Partition’s violence.

In the light of the above discussion, it is obvious that *TRC* engages with Sutara's experience of Partition as an attempt to redefine the dominant history of Partition. The novel, although a work of fiction, also serves as a slice of history for the very reason that it questions history and presents a searing critique of it. Persistently unacknowledged and muted, the woman's experience of Partition finds a voice in Sutara's story and can be said to offer a dual resistance – first, by contesting and rejecting official history, and second by retrieving women's experiences of Partition with the various issues embedded within them, through literature.

References:

- Bandyopadhyay, S. (2013). *Bengal Partition: Battered Background Broken Minds*. Kolkata: Radical Impression.
- Bandyopadhyay, S. (2007). Caste, Widow-Remarriage, and the Reform of Popular Culture in Colonial Bengal. In S. Sarkar & T. Sarkar (Eds.), *Women and Social Reform in Modern India. Vol. I*. (pp. 145-171). Ranikhet: Permanent Black.
- Biswas, G. (2013). Rabindranath Tagore's Philosophy of Art and Literature. In S. Bhattacharjee & C. J. Thomas (Eds.), *Society, Representation and Textuality: The Critical Interface* (pp. 13-21). New Delhi: Sage Publications.
- Caulfield, T. (2014). Happily Unmarried: Interrogations of the Single Women in South Asia. In M. Viz, M. Bhatia & S. Pandey (Eds.), *Women's Studies in India: A Journey of 25 years* (pp. 164-184). Jaipur: Rawat Publications.

- Caruth, C. (2010). Trauma and Experience. In M. Rossington & A. Whitehead (Eds.), *Theories of Memory: A Reader* (pp. 199-205). Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press Ltd.
- Chatterji, J. (2016). Right or Charity? The Debate over Relief and Rehabilitation in West Bengal, 1947-50. In S. Kaul (Ed.), *The Partitions of Memory: The Afterlife of the Division of India* (pp.74-110). Ranikhet: Permanent Black.
- Devi, J. (1995). *The River Churning*. (E. Chatterjee, Trans.). New Delhi: Kali for Women.
- Erikson, K. (1995). Notes on Trauma and Community. In C. Caruth (Ed.), *Trauma: Explorations in Memory* (pp. 183-199). Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press.
- Guha, Ranajit. (2010). The Small Voice of History. In S. Amin & D. Chakrabarty (Eds.), *Subaltern Studies IX: Writings on South Asian History and Society* (pp. 1-12). New Delhi: Oxford University Press.
- Khan, F.A. (2006). Speaking Violence: Pakistani Women's Narratives of Partition. In N. C. Behera (Ed.), *Gender, Conflict and Migration* (pp. 97-115). New Delhi: Sage Publications.
- Khattak, S.G. (2006). Violence and Home: Afghan Women's Experience of Displacement. In N. C. Behera (Ed.), *Gender, Conflict and Migration* (pp. 116-136). New Delhi: Sage Publications.

- Menon, R. (2004). No Woman's Land. In R. Menon (Ed.), *No Woman's Land: Women from Pakistan, India and Bangladesh Write on the Partition of India* (pp. 1-11). New Delhi: Women Unlimited.
- Mookerjee-Leonard, D. (2003). Disenfranchised Bodies: Jyotirmoyee Devi's Writings on the Partition. Retrieved from <https://www.colorado.edu/gendersarchive1998-2013/2003/12/01/disenfranchised-bodies-jyotirmoyee-devis-writings-partition>
- Prabhakar, S. (2011). *Fiction and Society: Narrativisation of Realities in the Novels of Shashi Deshpande and Githa Harharan*. Jaipur: Rawat Publications.
- Raman, V. (2010). *The Warp and the Weft: Community and Gender Identity among Banaras Weavers*. New Delhi: Routledge.
- Ramone, J. (2011). *Postcolonial Theories*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Said, E. W. (2000). *Reflections on Exile and Other Essays*. London: Granta Books.