

The Performance of Nationalism

Imagine the patriotic camaraderie of national day parades. How crucial is performance for the sustenance of the nation? *The Performance of Nationalism* considers the formation of the Indian and Pakistani nation, in the wake of the most violent chapter of its history: the partition of the subcontinent. In the process, Jisha Menon offers a fresh analysis of nationalism from the perspective of performance. Menon recovers the manifold valences of “mimesis”: as aesthetic representation, as the constitution of a community of witnesses, and as the mimetic relationality that underlies the encounter between India and Pakistan. The particular performances considered here range from Wagah border ceremonies, to the partition theatre of Asghar Wajahat, Kirti Jain, M.K. Raina, and the cinema of Ritwik Ghatak and M.S. Sathyu. By pointing to the tropes of twins, doubles, and doppelgängers that suffuse these performances, this study troubles the idea of two insular nation-states of India and Pakistan. In the process, Menon recovers mimetic modes of thinking that unsettle the reified categories of identity politics.

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The Performance of Nationalism
India, Pakistan, and the Memory of Partition

Jisha Menon



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1 Introduction

My whole soul rebels against the idea that Hinduism and Islam represent two antagonistic cultures and doctrines.

M.K. Gandhi

In July 1993, just seven months after the demolition of the Babri mosque in Ayodhya and the subsequent riots in Bombay, Sahitya Akademi-winning playwright Mahesh Dattani directed the premiere production of *Final Solutions* in Bangalore.¹ The plot unfolds in the midst of Bombay riots as two Muslim boys, Bobby and Javed, seek refuge in the house of the Gandhis, a Hindu family. Exasperated by their sense of the everyday humiliations of untouchability perpetrated on Muslims, Bobby and Javed expose the insidious exclusions on which the safety of the Hindu home is predicated.

The arrival of these two Muslim boys rekindles the memory of an old family secret. The secret returns us to the scene of the 1947 Partition of India and Pakistan when, in the rising tide of religious violence, the Gandhis set fire to their Muslim neighbors' shop. Torching the shop was not an expression of religious intolerance but rather a devious attempt to quash the business of their Muslim rivals. As a result, the burgeoning friendship between Zarine, the shopowner's daughter, and Daksha, the young Gandhi bride, comes to an abrupt end. Daksha's father gets brutally murdered in the violence that occurs in the wake of the Partition.

The Partition resurfaces as a repressed historical memory that continues to mold both secular and religious identities. The narrative Gandhi, in Tendulkar, *Mahatma*, 333–334.

action moves back and forth between 1947 and 1992, thus illuminating two historical moments that capture the crisis of secularism in India. Unfinished negotiations with the past fuel both Ramnik's generosity and his mother's hostility toward Muslims: Whereas Daksha harbors a festering resentment toward Muslims, her son Ramnik is guiltily aware of the family's complicity in demolishing the shop and repeatedly placates his guilt by overzealous acts of generosity toward Muslims.

Final Solutions dramatizes the self-interest that drives the violence in this case. Rather than explain violence as a "natural" explosion of primordial religious difference, Dattani considers the unstable historical conditions in 1947 and in 1992 as catalysts that generate essentialist religious identities. Set in this context, religious violence is a response to anxieties over material resources, insecurities generated by the implosion of former certitudes, and panic over the sudden collapse of long-standing social and political orders. Dattani deliberately invokes the specter of Hitler's "final solution" to the "problem" of exterminating Jews in Europe. By drawing analogies to Hitler's fascist politics, Dattani mounts his critique against violent and exclusivist Hindu nationalism in India.

The character of Daksha – as the grandmother and the young bride – is shared between two actors: The younger one is set in 1947 and removed from the action and other characters of the play, whereas the older one is set in 1993, appearing with all the other actors onstage. The narrative action is punctuated by flashback scenes in which the younger Daksha records in her diary her experience of being a young bride, her anguish when her father gets murdered during the Partition riots, her sorrow over Zarine's betrayal of their friendship, and her love of the legendary singer Noor Jehan's haunting melodies. Daksha's diary bears witness to the intrusion of the nation's public and political life into her private chambers.

In the 1993 Bangalore production, I played the role of the younger Daksha. Inhabiting Daksha's character required taking a leap back into a dark moment in the nation's history. Through her diary, I glimpsed a moment in Indian history, often overlooked in celebratory textbook accounts of India's nonviolent path to independence.

Introduction

The character of Daksha offered me a lens with which to traverse the transformation of what Dipesh Chakrabarty has termed “practices of proximity” into the “politics of identity.” Chakrabarty offers proximity and identity as alternative ways of dealing with difference, where identity refers to a congealed fixity and proximity refers to negotiation of difference.² When, for example, does Daksha withdraw from the practice of negotiating difference with her neighbor and petrify Zarine as her absolute other? How does this fixity of identity structure the Gandhi home as Hindu and foreclose the possibility of hospitality to the Muslim boys? By tracing the contingent and particular ways in which negotiated practices of proximity transform into strident and implacable politics of identity, Dattani exposes how Hindu liberals, such as Ramnik Gandhi, are unable to attend to the critique of unthinking Hindu privilege launched by Javed and Bobby.

The character of Daksha reveals the encrusted prejudices of people who grapple with the tenacious hold of the Partition on their everyday life. Embodying the character of a seventeen-year-old bride who experienced the vicissitudes of a violent political history required me to imagine and inhabit the extreme ruptures that the Partition produced in the everyday lives of its survivors. Indeed, it made me ponder how entire worldviews crumble under the weight of tumultuous events. It was during the production of *Final Solutions* that I first considered the enduring ways in which discourses of the Partition interpellated religious and secular as well as regional and national identities.

I vividly recall the sense of political urgency that drove the cast and crew of this production. Our first attempt to stage the play was thwarted when the sponsor – one of the city’s premier newspapers – pulled us out of a regional theatre festival, fearing further clashes between religious communities. When we finally mounted the production in July 1993 – with the support of Maadhyam, a local non-profit organization – the political situation had stabilized and offered the audience the opportunity to speculate on the growing crisis of secularism within the nation. The Hindu right’s disturbing ascendancy to power in the intervening years gradually strengthened the emergent project of the Sangh Parivar to redefine India, both culturally and politically.³ Indeed, the comparatively insipid public response

to the violent pogroms against the Muslims in Gujarat that broke out in 2002 suggests the insidious ways in which the Hindu right normalizes spectacular forms of violence against minorities. It is within such a political and social context that this present project acquired its critical urgency.

The specter of the Partition returns to mold contemporary subjects of religious conflicts: Survivors and witnesses of post-1947 conflicts evoke the Partition as a recurrent point of reference. For example, in the wake of the assassination of Prime Minister Indira Gandhi in 1984 by her two Sikh bodyguards, the widespread pogroms against the Sikh community constituted a pivotal moment that evoked the Partition in public memory. One survivor eloquently describes the betrayal and bewilderment: "The memory of '47 came flooding back, except that I feared this might be much worse.... When the Hindu mobs shouted 'Traitors, get out!' I asked myself, 'Traitors? Is this what I sang songs of Independence for? Was handcuffed at the age of six for?' Which is our home now? ... 1947 was no shock, the shock is now."⁴ Pioneering oral historians Ritu Menon and Kamla Bhasin reiterate the significance of the 1984 pogroms in reviving anxieties about national and ethnic belonging. In their words, "1984 changed the way 'history' concealed our past from us. Here was Partition once more in our midst, terrifying for those who had passed through it in 1947.... Yet this was our own country, our own people, our own home-grown violence."⁵ In her groundbreaking work, Urvashi Butalia also acknowledges that the 1984 pogroms played a pivotal role in her undertaking the project of collecting oral histories of the Partition: "It took the events of 1984 to make me understand how ever-present Partition was in our lives, too, to recognize that it could not so easily be put away inside the covers of history books."⁶ Another survivor reiterates the sense of panic, apprehension, and deep disillusionment the 1984 pogroms evoked: "We didn't think it could happen to us in our own country," she recalls, "this is like the Partition again."⁷ The aforementioned remarks rehearse the eruption of an older memory during a moment of historical crisis; the 1984 pogroms evoked the specter of the Partition.

The diachronic doubleness of these memories that shuttle between 1947 and 1984 reveal that the Partition as "event" had not

ended – that the religious tensions that sparked in post-Independence India were haunted by the traumatic memory of the Partition.⁸ The Partition resurfaced at other volatile moments in the history of the subcontinent. Preceding and during the demolition of the Babri Masjid in 1992, the Partition reemerged in the hate speech of the Hindu right. Likewise, Muslims displaced from their homes during the ensuing Bombay riots allude to the Partition in an effort to make sense of the violent ruptures the ethnic conflict produced. Indian novelist Shama Futehally remarks that the Babri Masjid demolition has “made it impossible, so to speak, to keep the lid on Partition any more.”⁹ Victims and witnesses of these riots frequently reference Partition as a touchstone of their experience of violence. The 1998 nuclear tests conducted by India and Pakistan conjured yet again the Partition. Suvir Kaul writes eloquently about the “extraordinary irony” that undid the Partition when the highly policed border between India and Pakistan was threatened into obliteration by “the power of mutually assured nuclear destruction.”¹⁰ Ashis Nandy argues that the Gujarat pogroms in 2002 confirmed that the Partition continues to resurrect “fantasies of orgiastic violence” that taunt us to both exterminate the enemy as well as compel him/her to live in abject humiliation and disgrace.¹¹

The uncanny doubleness of memory that mimetically evokes the Partition discloses, rather than closes, the specters of the past. These recurrent associations reveal that it is not only a former time that binds one to the memory of the Partition but also a former self. The Partition simultaneously possesses and dispossesses its survivors: Its spectral memory holds subjects in thrall to the dispossessed dimensions of their self, precluding any possibility of self-possession. Despite the institutional strategies of redress and reparation and the redemptive accounts of the nation’s nonviolent path to freedom, the unruly memories of the Partition resist efforts toward a harmonizing closure. The memory of the Partition continues to shape social relations between Hindus, Muslims, and Sikhs in the subcontinent; conversely, contemporary religious conflicts shape and revise past narrations of the Partition.

The Performance of Nationalism: India, Pakistan, and the Memory of Partition explores the affective and performative

constitution of the Indian and Pakistani nation in the wake of the most violent chapter of its history: the Partition of the subcontinent. I recuperate the idea of mimesis to think about the mimetic relationship between political history and the crisis of its aesthetic representation. I also consider the relationship between India and Pakistan as constituted through a mimetic relationality, which evokes the fraternal metaphor of twins separated at birth. The particular performances I examine trouble the idea of two coherent, autonomous nation-states of India and Pakistan by pointing to the trope of mimetic doubles that suffuse the dramas of Partition. These performances reveal that the shadowy underbelly of antagonistic politics is constituted by the promise and betrayal of mimetic kinship. This study attempts to recover mimetic modes of thinking to unsettle the reified categories of identitarian politics. First, however, let us turn to a brief history of the Partition of the subcontinent.

Ruptures of Partition

In August 1947, when the British finally ceded political interest in India after colonial rule for nearly two centuries, they transferred their power to two separate nation-states: India and Pakistan. Not only did the mounting anticolonial nationalist movement put pressure on the British empire to evacuate India; the economic exigencies that a greatly impoverished Britain faced in the aftermath of World War II also reinforced the British decision to “quit” India. The return of the Labour Party to power in Britain further expedited the decolonization process. The ideological commitment of the Labour Party to postwar reparation and decolonization rapidly changed the Indian political scene. Britain’s desire to relinquish its interests in India to a centralized national government, one capable of defending British economic and political interests in the regions of the Indian Ocean, appeared unfeasible. Lord Mountbatten, the last British viceroy, was sent to India to transfer power and consider alternatives to Partition. Instead of deliberating over these complex issues in the allotted ten-month period, Mountbatten took a mere two months to announce the date for the transfer of power and for Partition.

Introduction

The division of the subcontinent into India and Pakistan was triggered by a combination of factors in the metropole and the colony: In addition to the shifting colonial position on retaining India as a colony, the demand for Partition was articulated within the context of a colonial state's framing of provincial politics and intra-elite factional conflicts within India that had already prepared the ground for irreconcilable differences. The two-nation theory, driven more by politics than religion, grew in momentum from the fears stoked by democratization in the 1930s, the Indian National Congress's anti-war stance, the growing empowerment of the Muslim League, and the British announcement to quit India. Add to this the more immediate factors expediting the process: Mountbatten's hasty and ill-conceived exit strategies and the rising tide of religious violence.¹²

Between June 3, 1947, when the decision to divide India was announced, and August 15, 1947, the day of formal Indian independence from British rule, roughly 15 million people were displaced. What the government euphemistically called "the exchange of populations" of Muslims into Pakistan and Hindus and Sikhs into India resulted in the largest human exodus ever recorded. According to *Millions on the Move*, a report published by the government of India, between August and November 1947, as many as 673 refugee trains moved approximately 2,300,000 refugees within India and across the border.¹³ From mid-September to late October, 24-foot convoys, each consisting of 30,000 to 40,000 people, marched 150 miles to cross the border into India. Roughly 32,000 refugees had been flown in either direction; nearly 133,000 people had been moved to India by steamer and country craft boats. The disputed death toll ranges from 200,000 to 2 million: People died as a result of communal clashes, floods, starvation, exhaustion, and the proliferating cases of famine and cholera caused by unhygienic conditions. Approximately 83,000 women were abducted, raped, and killed.¹⁴ Innumerable children disappeared. Many who were unable to travel with speed got left behind: the elderly, the infirm, the disabled, children, and women. Thousands of people were forcibly converted; many others voluntarily opted to convert in order to stay in their homeland. At least 500,000 people were massacred on

the trains referred to as “gifts” that people were sending across to the new nation.

The official territorial award was announced on August 16, one day after the independence of India and two days after the formation of Pakistan. The massive dislocation, however, had been set in motion by the cycle of violence that began with the Great Calcutta Killings of August 16–19, 1946, which left nearly 6000 dead and displaced 100,000 people. In addition, the Noakhali riots drove out the Hindus from a region where they constituted about a fifth of the population, and the Rawalpindi massacres in Punjab in March 1947 left 40,000 Sikhs homeless. The killings in Bengal in the 1950s prompted a further flood of refugees.¹⁵ People were on the move, uncertain of where they would settle down and whether they would eventually belong to India or to Pakistan.

The Partition was unlike any other religious conflict in the region. Talbot and Singh identify crucial features that distinguish the violence of the Partition from more traditional communal riots: ethnic cleansing of minority populations, political desire for power and territory, sadistic violence, intrusion into the domestic sphere, and organized violence through the use of paramilitary groups, which included the complicity of state agents.¹⁶ Talbot and Singh further point out that the organized violence of the Partition must be located within the framework of the Second World War and the widespread presence of weapons and demobilized soldiers in north India who trained volunteer groups through spectacular parades and drills. Seen in this light, the violence was far more organized than “spontaneous”; not an atavistic feature of fanatically religious groups, the violence was produced in a mimetic encounter with a European fascistic culture of hostility that was refracted ideologically and materially within the subcontinent.¹⁷

Colonialism, religion, enumeration

Edward Said reminds us that “rhetorically speaking Orientalism is absolutely anatomical and enumerative, to use its vocabulary is to engage in the particularizing and dividing of things Oriental into manageable parts.”¹⁸ British administrative policies consolidated Hindus

and Muslims as separate “enumerative communities” through the introduction of a range of bureaucratic measures, which mimetically reproduced western analytical categories of classification. For example, the introduction of the colonial census throughout India in 1881 had far-reaching effects in the ossification of religious identities. By imposing orientalist grids, such as the census, the British calcified fluid, flexible, and heterogeneous cultural practices into the antinomies of religious majority and minority.

Several South Asian scholars have developed Said’s insights about the relationship between enumeration and the ossification of identities. David Ludden establishes the dialectical production of communalism from its interaction with orientalism when the latter institutionalized oppositions between Hindus and Muslims in colonial administrative, bureaucratic, and legal practices.¹⁹ Gyanendra Pandey argues that British officers treated Hindu-Muslim antagonism as a given “fact” that then became a touchstone in colonial bureaucratic practices.²⁰ When quantitative technologies of colonial state governance turned their lens to religious identities, it had the result of gradually turning what political theorist Sudipta Kaviraj has termed “fuzzy communities” – “a relative lack of clarity of where one’s community, or even region, ended and another began” – into enumerative communities.²¹ Dipesh Chakrabarty also accentuates the “pervasive marriage between government and measurement” that he suggests is constitutive of the “deep structure of the imagination that is invested in modern political order.”²² Arjun Appadurai further develops the relationship between the logic of arithmetic and the production of religious violence: The categories of majority/minority are haunted by an “anxiety of incompleteness,” which diminishes the project of national purity and consequently triggers ethnocidal mobilization.²³

The interdependence of governance and enumerative strategies was central to the production of religious differences between Hindus and Muslims of British India.²⁴ By the early twentieth century, religious differences had been institutionalized on the principle of communal representation. In 1861, the Indian Councils Act introduced separate electorates to increase Muslim representation through the system of elective local government. Constitutional reforms in 1919

and 1937 further democratized and consolidated Muslim political constituency. These changes increased opportunities for the Muslim political majorities in Punjab and Bengal to correct the educational and economic imbalance in favor of Hindu and Sikh populations. The Muslim backlash against the Congress administration in Uttar Pradesh (1937–1939) was to provide the critical catalyst in the demand for a separate homeland. Following the Government of India Act of 1935 – which introduced a substantial measure of representative government through provincial autonomy and represented one of the important efforts at transferring limited power to Indians – provincial elections were held in 1937 based on the notion of a communal representation.

The creation of separate electorates according to religious identity consolidated the idea that people sharing a particular faith constituted an identifiable group with common interests, which marked them off from another group, which practiced a different faith. This particular way of imagining community affirmed certain commonalities through the category of religious identity while underestimating other axes of similitude and association. This idea was embedded in everyday life, “the idea that (Indian) society consisted of groups set apart from each other. . . . The result was the flowering of a new communal rhetoric, and ultimately, of the Pakistan movement.”²⁵

Performance and the nation

What can a performative approach to the study of the nation make visible?²⁶ *The Performance of Nationalism: India, Pakistan, and the Memory of Partition* considers the ways in which logocentric, cognitivist ideas of “the imagined community” acquire their affective and material force through embodied performances. Moving beyond dominant considerations of politics underpinned by institutional policies, theories of rational choice, and Habermasian critical-rational public spheres, this study considers the centrality of performance as a tactic of political power. The relationship between power and performance has been theorized as far back as Machiavelli’s *The Prince* and continues to reverberate today from the quotidian secular Wagah ceremonies to the disruptive *rathyatras* (chariot processions) coordinated by the Hindu right.²⁷ This book makes visible the double-edged power

of performative politics – the aesthetic and spectacular representations of the state are not simply absorbed by its citizen-subjects but contested, contradicted, and negotiated through other enduring imaginaries of kinship and belonging.²⁸

Dominant accounts of nationalism foreground how capitalist production, print technology, and monoglot reading publics combined to create the conditions for imagining the nation.²⁹ The consumers of the novel and the newspaper accessed the same information, and this served to link the mass-reading publics within the same imagined boundaries. Media such as newspapers contribute to the formation of public opinion, enabling civil society to exercise surveillance over the state. A good deal has been written about the centrality of print journalism, of literature – especially novels – in the creation of national identity. For example, Benedict Anderson examines “print-capitalism” as the institutional form through which the “imagined community” of nation is forged; Timothy Brennan argues that nations depend for their existence on a system of cultural fictions in which “imaginative literature” plays a decisive role; Homi Bhabha encounters the nation “as it is written” and examines its narrative address to draw attention to its language and rhetoric and thereby reexamine the conceptual object of nation itself.³⁰

The analysis of embodied performance in public spaces brings new questions to studies of nationalism. It places centerstage the role of performance in understanding the complex processes of nation formation. The internalization of an ideational construct of nation depends for its success on its affective translation into material symbols such as the flag, the military uniforms, and the national anthem. Sandria Freitag has argued that central to the act of imagining a community is the pictorial image where “spectatorship meets creation in a complex interplay between visibility, apparatus, institutions, discourse, bodies and figurality.”³¹ Although performance certainly engages a visual vocabulary, it resists ocularcentric notions of the general dominance of the visual in late modernity and does not reinforce an artificial dichotomy between the visual and the linguistic.³²

I also draw on deconstructive notions of the performative to think about the iterative constitution of refugees into national

subjects. How are people persuaded to attach their loyalties to abstractions rather than to the embedded, concrete relationships in their everyday life? The process by which colonial subjects are produced as national citizens through complex iterative practices is exemplified at the moment of Partition when national identities were still gestational. Those displaced were enjoined to resignify themselves as Indian/Pakistani, an identification with which some may have had little prior affiliation. The assumption of this new macro-identity also served to make official and permanent the displacement from their prior homes. The performative insists on the processual, unfinished, and constantly renewed function of national belonging – what Renan calls “the daily plebiscite” – rather than assume the unchanging, static, a priori ontology of national identity. It is within the context of a compulsory citationality that the reconstitution of refugees as national subjects needs to be thought.

The performative speech act fundamentally revises our understanding of the stability and given-ness of national and religious identities. By paying attention not only to the descriptive features of language, meaning, and intentionality of speech acts, but also to their ability to effect through their very utterance, performative speech acts demonstrate the world-making and world-shattering power of discourse. Conferring national and religious identities through the power of performative speech acts radically refigures the citizen-subjects of the Partition. The illocutionary force of performative speech acts, in the context of the Partition, makes visible that the very terms of recognition of one’s existence had to be articulated through the address of the state. The act of state recognition differentially interpellates the citizen: It is through the address of the state that the citizen acquires an ontological status.

Although the analytical categories of performance theory offer ways to think about the spectacular and iterative practices through which citizen-subjects were constituted in the wake of the Partition, I turn to the trope of mimesis through which to consider the undoing of the national and religious ontology. The conceptual richness of mimesis enables me to ask a range of questions with regard to the Partition, and it is to mimesis as a fertile conceptual lens that we will now turn.

Mimesis as aesthetic representation

A protean and capacious concept, mimesis has been used over millennia to convey a range of meanings from falsehood, fiction, *imitatio* (tradition, convention, emulation), *mimesthai* (representation), and nonsensuous correspondence, among others. The concept traverses a spectrum of semantic and performative possibilities that range from aesthetic theories to accounts of self- and world-making. Rather than serving a strictly referential function, mimesis evokes a world of similitude; semblance rather than sign connotes mimetic modes of thinking. A brief consideration of some of the leading theorists and critics of mimesis gives a sense of the heterogeneity of associations generated by the concept.

Traced back to at least the fifth century BC, mimesis derives from *mimos*, designating both a person who imitates and a genre of performance based on imitation of stereotypical character traits. The first probing analysis of mimesis in ancient Greek thought emerges in Plato's *The Republic* (c. 375 BC), which advances a rich, complex, and multivalent conception of mimesis. Here Plato uses the figure of his mentor, Socrates, to mimetically address questions regarding the constitution of an ideal republic, where psychic and civic integrity are key to the governance of the city.³³ Mimetic arts could provoke the destabilization and disintegration of self-possessed, composed citizen-subjects, which could then precipitate the disintegration of the civic constitution.

The Socratic resistance in Plato's *Republic* to mimetic arts emerges not from a dismissal but rather from an acknowledgment of the transformative power of art to influence audiences. Plato cautions against irresponsible appeals to emotions that paralyze the critical-rational faculty. Losing self-possession through a mimetic identification with the charismatic actor/character/orator can disable critical distance and sway audiences to act in ways that are ethically dubious and politically treacherous.³⁴ Mimesis, in the Platonic conception, threatens the integrity of the autonomous subject, and therefore must be proscribed from the ideal republic.

Aristotle resuscitates mimesis from the Platonic conception of it as threat to civic and psychic integrity by suggesting that mimesis

offers us a means to understand past events and to make sense of the world we inhabit. Aristotle distinguishes the Platonic conception of mimesis as *pseudos*, or falsehood, from mimesis as fiction. The awareness of the fictional status of an artistic work enables the viewer to derive pleasure from otherwise painful memories.³⁵ The ontological otherness of a parallel, imaginary world enables a safe distance from which to reflect on our own world.³⁶ By highlighting the capacity of art to enable a deeper awareness of our world and our lives, Aristotle rejects Platonic moralism that proscribes mimesis. The transformation of painful past into aesthetic pleasure through mimetic practice depends on the capacity of the mimetic art to offer a renewed understanding of the event. Whereas philosophy is concerned with abstract universal, and history with contingent particular, poetry offers a sensuous understanding – at once concrete and contemplative – of the world we inhabit.³⁷

During the thousand years that constitute the Middle Ages and up until the end of the eighteenth century, mimesis was frequently reimagined as *imitatio*, which consisted predominantly in the conventional emulation of authoritative literary texts.³⁸ Emulating exemplary texts not only offered artists the opportunity to aspire to the highest role models beyond their time; the intertextual tissue of meanings and resonances also established a sense of traditional continuity between classical authors and their mimetic counterparts.³⁹ Although second, the imitated work was not secondary; reconfiguring and retelling offered the possibilities for structured play while still drawing on classical models. Renaissance writers in turn drew on the artistic resources of the Roman tradition. Imitation was central to education by supplying both the method of repetition and the model of exemplary figures to inculcate and inspire virtue in readers.

The decline of imitation's significance at the end of the eighteenth century owed something to the emergence of detached, instrumental rationality, which privileged reason and disinterestedness. Whereas thinkers such as René Descartes and Immanuel Kant championed science, progress, innovation, and genius, others such as Alexander Pope continued to emphasize the importance of learning from past masters.⁴⁰ For Descartes the subject is the creator of the

world, a world idealized and formulated in mathematical language – abstract and universal; the language of abstract universality departed from that of mimetic similitude. Setting aside the incommensurable particularity of embodied experience, Descartes pursued science, which consisted of universal rules supplied in nature.

The quarrel between the ancients and the moderns polarized venerable tradition and innovative modernity, and definitively privileged originality over *imitatio*. Unsurprisingly, the Romantic period, which stressed uniqueness, also saw the emergence of copyright laws that legally bound creativity to individual private property. *Imitatio* now raised specters of plagiarism or intellectual piracy. The romantic genius struggled to break free from the shackles of tradition, to rebel against authority. The resultant devaluation of mimetic modes of thinking continues to circulate in the modern world.⁴¹

Mimesis as world-making

The Performance of Nationalism: India, Pakistan, and the Memory of Partition argues that recovering mimetic modes of thinking about the relationship between India and Pakistan stresses similitude over semiotics, kinship over referentiality, and troubles the reified categories of identity politics. How do mimetic practices discohere the sovereign subject, enabling her to enter into a radically rearranged relationship with the other? Complicating theories of autonomous subject formation, I argue that mimesis re-enchants a Cartesian split between subject and object, self and other by reintroducing the specter of enigmatic semblance.

To make this argument I draw on mimesis as both aesthetic practice and social relation. As we have seen, the discussions of mimesis co-implicate aesthetics with ideas of subject formation. Even as early as Plato's *Republic* we find the dual connotations of mimesis as both dramatic representation and mimetic identification. Linking action to virtue, mimesis oscillates between aesthetic practice and subject formation.⁴² More recently, critical theory has resuscitated the fertile concept of mimesis. For Walter Benjamin, the translator of Charles Baudelaire, Marcel Proust, and Theodor Lessing, language constitutes an archive of nonsensuous similarity in a predominantly disenchanting

world. Unlike a disinterested, neutral, instrumental approach that consolidates the subject-object split, sensuous knowledge attends to the proliferation of mimetic similitude. Likewise, Horkheimer and Adorno argue that the reified subject-object relationship supplants the manifold affinities that exist between things. Human beings are turned into mere examples of species, identical to one another through isolation within the compulsively controlled collectivity. Ruled by the principle of equivalence, dissimilar things are made identical by reducing them to abstract qualities, subsuming difference under sameness.

The rich contributions of Rene Girard, Michael Taussig, and Elin Diamond have augmented our understanding of mimetic practice and its relation to questions of desire, colonialism, and sexual difference. Girard complicates the dyadic structure between subject and object by exposing the triangulation within which mimetic desires are enmeshed; the desire to emulate the model draws the subject toward the object. He plumbs the varying implications of mimetic desire, depending on whether the subject is drawn to an idealized model or a rival. Far from autonomous or original, desires are mimetically generated, ignited by a mimetic rivalry with someone else. Girard's conception of mimetic desire cautions us against uncritical celebrations of mimesis by exposing its potential for insidious violence.

Taussig develops Benjamin's conception of the "mimetic faculty" to consider its ramifications within colonial encounters.⁴³ Defined as "the nature that culture uses to create second nature," the mimetic impulse carries a vestige of a compulsive need for people to become/ behave like something else. The wonder of mimesis lies in the copy drawing on the character and power of the original to the point where the representation may even assume that character and that power. Taussig combines Benjaminian insights with Marxist ideas of alienated labor: The spectral commodity denies its historicity and multiple sensuous interactions and emerges as pristine fetish object, its particularity grinded into an abstract identity.

Elin Diamond's astute analysis of feminist performance insists on mimesis as a creative interpretive process. Counterposing identity with identification, she argues that identifications produce and

destabilize identity; in assimilating the other the subject doubles herself. If identity works to sustain a believable and mobilizing fiction that binds each individual into an imagined unity, identification is a "passionate mimesis," drawing another into oneself, projecting oneself onto another. Whereas identity operates through a logic of exclusion – my being or consciousness affirms its self-sameness by not being you – identification is trespass, to be the other is a loss of self. "Identification," according to Diamond, "violates identity."⁴⁴

The Performance of Nationalism: India, Pakistan, and the Memory of Partition develops the idea of mimesis in three crucial directions: as aesthetic practice, as social relation, and as world-making. Considering the Partition of the subcontinent through its aesthetic representations offers a *sensuous understanding* of the events of political history. Charting a space between the contingent particular of history and the abstract universal of philosophy, aesthetic mimesis enables a sensuous knowledge that attends to the particular lives of protagonists while simultaneously enabling a bigger-picture understanding of events through *theoria* or contemplation.⁴⁵

As social relation, mimesis takes seriously the promise and peril of similitude that does not dissolve into sameness. Mimetic relationality offers productive political possibilities for imagining cross-border affiliations. Recognizing the mimetic doubleness of political subjects moves us away from the shrill polarities of identity politics. The agon of the Partition illuminates the irresolvable doubleness at the heart of the fraternal encounter between India and Pakistan. Building on Elin Diamond's perceptive remark, "Mimesis is impossibly double," I argue that mimetic thinking moves from identity and the principle of equivalence endemic to abstract rationality to an insistence on incommensurable difference. This "impossibly double" attribute of mimesis, however, also cautions us to its contradictoriness. Although mimesis offers a powerful challenge to dominant ideologies of ethnic and national identity, it is not necessarily a benevolent or "progressive" force. For example, Chapters 5 and 6 consider mimetic desire as triangulated among masculinist institutions of community and state, where the possession of women and territory (Kashmir, in this case) becomes the means to stage rivalry between implacably hostile groups.⁴⁶

Finally, *The Performance of Nationalism: India, Pakistan, and the Memory of Partition* considers the ways in which publics are constituted through mimetic practices.⁴⁷ Can mimesis initiate a process of renewed world-making? Theatre, the most social of all arts, moves us beyond the merely private or domestic sphere toward a larger, common civic philia – an emotionally charged public sphere of kinship and community. Aesthetic pleasure derives not only from dramatic action, but also from a sense of shared witnessing. The public recognition of the sufferings one has endured reconnects the grieving individual to a wider community of witnesses. Plato’s warning that mimesis disintegrates the unity of the subject could point the way to a radical rearrangement of the discoherent subject, dispersed in the wake of grief. Could mimesis then offer the opportunity to rearrange the self and fashion a new ethical relation to the other? *The Performance of Nationalism* argues that grief can offer the occasion for reimagining community. Rather than privatizing grief, such acts of collective witnessing offer the ground to generate a powerful sense of solidarity.⁴⁸

In addition, all the productions I consider in this book bear conscious semblance to earlier works. The mimetic practice of adaptation allows the artist to embed creative difference by retelling a story that is similar but not identical to the original. In the words of Edward Said, “The writer thinks less of writing originally, and more of rewriting. The image for writing changes from original inscription to parallel script, from tumbled-out confidence to deliberate fathering-forth, . . . from melody to fugue.”⁴⁹ Each of the works considered here is shaped through mimetic engagements with other texts: M.S. Sathyu draws on Ismat Chughtai; Kirti Jain draws on Saadat Hasan Manto; Ritwik Ghatak draws on Shaktipada Rajguru; Asghar Wajahat draws on Nasir Kazmi; and M.K. Raina draws on Shakespeare. Mimetic semblance points not only to the doubleness of characters within these stories but also to the palimpsestic doubleness of the narratives themselves.

This book examines dramatic and filmic representations of the Partition from the 1960s to 2010. What can varying narrations of the Partition tell us about the particular historical moment of its creative articulation? Contemporary retellings of the Partition do not simply reflect the past but inscribe within their very narration the stories one

wants to tell of the present. The following chapters hold the mimetic discourses of performance and history in contrapuntal tension without dissolving their discursive differences into a unifying closure.⁵⁰ The discrepant discursive fields of performance and history have discrete agendas and internal formations, and critically interanimate each other. Weaving together in contrapuntal tension aesthetic, political, and historical discourses without harmonizing closures allows us to pay attention to individual, sometimes dissonant, narratives and attend to their incommensurable heterogeneity.

Focusing on the symbolic, affective, and embodied dimensions of state-making, Chapter 2 considers the role of political performance as a key technique in the constitution of publics. It lays the groundwork for the book by considering the performative dimensions of political power through a consideration of high political debates and spectacular displays of state power. From a brief account of the high politics of the Partition played out by the colonial and nationalist elite, I turn to the Retreat ceremony at Wagah, at the border of India and Pakistan. The border ceremonies at Wagah exemplify the spectacular strategies that not only reify and make visible the power of the state but also insidiously inscribe social power onto the bodies of its spectators. The spectacular representation of the nation at Wagah attempts to secure the mimetic political relationship between the representative and the represented through the sensuous evocation of patriotic *philia*. The mimetic rituals across the border performed by Indian and Pakistani border guards, however, ironically destabilize both accounts of identity within and difference without the nation. This chapter argues that mimetic semblance across the border unsettles the spectacular production of political power.

Chapter 3 turns to the cinema of avant-garde Bengali filmmaker Ritwik Ghatak, which explores the mimetic relationship between person and place in partitioned Bengal. For Ghatak, love of country cannot be subsumed within accounts of nationalism and political contestations over territoriality. Ghatak systematically rejects the logic and lure of the nation by invoking the nonsensuous similitude between person and place in the riverine Bengal. Ghatak demonstrates the affinity between place and person through the trope of nonidentical

twins; the relationship between the twins is analogous to the bond between the twin Bengals. By insistently depicting two orphaned siblings as analogous to the partitioned East and West Bengal, Ghatak forwards kinship as the terrain on which the Partition played out its antagonistic politics.

In Chapter 4 I continue to explore the ramifications of the Partition's displacement by turning from the eastern to the western border between India and Pakistan. This chapter specifically addresses the ways in which Hindu and Muslim minority communities configured questions of displacement, national belonging, and gender. Does the concept of accommodation offer a spectral mode of cohabitation between the self and the other? By looking at two performance texts, M.S. Sathyu's film *Garm Hawa* (1973) and Asghar Wajahat's play *Jis Lahore Ne Dekhiya* (1988), I argue that home, property, and the idea of accommodation provide an urgent lens through which to consider the anxieties regarding national belonging in the partitioned subcontinent. I explore how the dialectical production of Hindus and Muslims, India and Pakistan pivots around the question of semblance. The mimetic doubleness disturbs the symmetries of insider/outsider, and destabilizes the sovereign subjects of the Partition.

Chapter 5 turns to the gendered dimensions of the violence that occurred in the wake of Partition. The constitutive role played by gendered violence during the Partition took on an uncanny mimetic dimension. As bearers of the nation, women ensured the perpetuity of both the religious community and the nation. By desecrating the possession of the rival, mimetic violence reveals that women themselves were evacuated of subjectivity. Not only were members of one community responding to violence done across the border but the nation-states, too, participated in this scenario of mimetic violence. Kirti Jain's 2001 production, *Aur Kitne Tukde*, depicts the circulation of female bodies between men from opposing communities and nations. This chapter takes up the relationship between embodiment and discourse in a context where bodies themselves circulated as "somatic texts." I argue that marking female bodies through specific

acts of gendered violence constitutes a mode of transcription for men to communicate with their mimetic counterparts.

If “woman” was the token of exchange in a conflict between warring men, Chapter 6 considers the ways in which the valley of Kashmir becomes the object of desire in the mimetic fraternal encounter between India and Pakistan. This chapter considers the ways in which the Bhand Pather, a satiric form of Kashmiri folk theatre, negotiates the hostility of antagonistic politics in the region. Through an analysis of M.K. Raina’s folk adaptation of *King Lear*, *Badshah Pather*, I consider the ways in which mimesis offers the occasion for the constitution of a witnessing public. *Badshah Pather* oscillates between the satiric critique of Bhand Pather and the tragic awareness of human vulnerability. In the process, the performance moves the audience toward an affective public sphere of kinship and solidarity. The public witnessing of grief, particularly of parents mourning the untimely deaths of their children, generates a powerful sensuous solidarity among the audience.

In the final analysis, *The Performance of Nationalism: India, Pakistan, and the Memory of Partition* argues that recovering mimetic modes of thinking potentially unsettles the reified certitudes of community and nation. Mimetic semblance does not dissolve difference into sameness but rather exposes the doubleness of the self, the non-identity of the self with the self, thus fracturing the unity and uniformity on which civic and religious nationalisms depend.

2 Bordering on drama: the performance of politics and the politics of performance

Borders are scratched across the hearts of men
By strangers with a calm, judicial pen
And when the borders bleed we watch with dread
The lines of ink across the map turn red.

This chapter considers the role of political performance as a key technique in the constitution of publics. I argue that spectacular and quotidian political performance affectively binds its audience – a word derived from *audentia*, an assembly of listeners, into publics. The focus on performance allows us to consider the symbolic, affective, embodied dimensions of state-making, which redresses the social-scientific focus on Weberian and rational choice accounts that concentrate on institutions and interests respectively.¹ I begin with an account of the routine performances of the “high politics” of the Partition that deployed rhetoric as a strategy to advance political goals.² From the performance of high politics, I turn to the Retreat ceremony at Wagah, at the India–Pakistan border, to examine the politics of performance. The sensuousness of political life as experienced through spectatorial and auditory practices does not interpellate pre-given subjects; rather, the persuasiveness of rhetoric and ceremony hegemonically produces the desired forms of political subjecthood, the basis for social cohesion and political unity.

The border ceremonies at Wagah exemplify the spectacular strategies that not only reify and make visible the power of the state, but also insidiously inscribe social power onto the bodies of its spectators.

Mannes, *Subverse*, 12.

Reading the Retreat ceremony as a spectacular theatre of nationalism allows us to consider the relationship between aesthetic and political representation. The aesthetic representation of the nation attempts to secure the political relationship between the representative and the represented; however, the identical rituals across the border performed by Indian and Pakistani border guards ironically destabilize both accounts of identity within and difference without the nation. This chapter argues that mimetic similitude across the border unsettles the aesthetic representation of the nation.

Rather than binarize history and fiction, statist and humanist accounts, I suggest that a performative reading of the political troubles the dichotomies through which we narrate the Partition and generates a more labile understanding of our histories and our politics. Moving beyond questions regarding the causes and effects of the Partition, this study considers the ways in which bodies carry stories. Archives and repertoires are co-constituted, drawing from elite policies and mass mobilizations through a dialectical inter-animation of performance and history.³ Let us turn first to explore the performative practices of the high politics of the Partition.

The drama of high politics

Anticolonial nationalist politics was an exemplary instance of political performance. The strategic deployment of language, theatrics, and the interplay of speech and silence in the political debates between the Muslims League and the Congress constituted the grounds on which the questions surrounding the Partition were articulated. South Asian political theorist Sudipta Kaviraj may well have been referring to Pakistani Governor-General Jinnah's masterful manipulation of language when he observed that "politics often becomes a contest over the use of language, a matter of defiance of linguistic and symbolic norms. Indeed the whole world of colonialism seemed perfectly suited to a theater of a typically Austinian defiance... Politics in colonial society is a world of performatives."⁴ Their educational background in law gave leaders such as Nehru, Jinnah, and Gandhi an acute awareness of the performative power of rhetoric. The formation of publics through the cultivation of audiences, an assembly of listeners, suggests

the central role played by rhetoric and persuasion in the formation of imagined communities. Further, the growing momentum of the anti-colonial movement provided the perfect opportunity to illustrate, in J.L. Austin's words, "how to do things with words." Jinnah's performative manipulation of language clearly illustrates this point.

The dominant account of Partition in India has been rooted in two central assumptions:

1. The Muslim League, headed by Jinnah (who later became the first governor-general of Pakistan) stood for Partition. The Muslim League vigorously disseminated the two-nation theory, which held that Muslims and Hindus had incommensurable differences and thus constituted two different nations.
2. The Congress rejected the Partition proposal and stood for unity. They were, however, forced to concede to the demand for Partition because of the mounting religious violence.

The histories of the Partition's high politics recall a Habermasian model of a critical-rational public sphere. Such a model of the public sphere foregrounds its dispassion, neutrality, and transparency, obscuring the drama, ambition, and manipulation that surrounded these discussions. The passionate speech acts of the high politics of the Partition illustrate the ways in which words perform actions; moving beyond a consideration of language as a neutral, inert channel of communication, an analysis of the performative dimensions of speech foregrounds the world-making and world-shattering power of speech acts.⁵

The revisionist critique, pioneered by Ayesha Jalal, locates the ambiguity in Jinnah's demand for Pakistan in the supplementary space of the unspoken. Jalal attends to the crucially significant aspect of the performative – the shared language of expressive behavior – and restores the significance of the performative to historical debates. She argues that the Muslim League used the bogey of Pakistan as a bargaining counter with the Congress. The Muslim League demanded representative parity with the Congress, independent of numerical proportions on the basis of the inherent dichotomy between Hindus and Muslims.⁶ The effort was to coerce the concerned parties into

conceding substantial representation of Muslims at the center, with the threat of Partition. Thus, Ayesha Jalal makes an intervention into the assumption that the League stood for Partition by revealing the slippage between the rhetoric and practice of Jinnah.

The famous speech by Jinnah in 1940, known as the Lahore Resolution, has often been cited as the first clear articulation of Pakistan. The Resolution, however, made no mention of the Partition but spoke eloquently of “two nations” and of Muslims having “their homelands, their territory and their state.” Refuting notions of composite nationhood, Jinnah passionately argued that “it is a dream that the Hindus and the Muslims can ever evolve a common nationality, and this misconception of one Indian nation has gone far beyond the limits, and is the cause of most of our troubles, and will lead India to destruction, if we fail to revise our notions in time.”⁷

By declaring the Muslims a nation, Jinnah’s speech clearly rejected his former position that the Muslims constituted a minority. When Jinnah’s secularist idea of resolving the problem of Muslim minoritization through substantial representation at the center and provisional autonomy was thwarted, he shifted his rhetorical strategy. He realized the only way to be taken seriously was to shift from empiricist, enumerative, and bureaucratic accounts of “Muslims” as minority to an aspirational account of Muslims as a “nation.” Subsequently, he realized that “an honorable settlement can only be achieved between equals and politics means power and not relying only on cries of justice or fair play or goodwill.”⁸ Thus evolved his claim for parity at the center based on the claim of being a separate religious nation, and this in turn provided the foundation for the two-nation theory. Dominant explanations suggest a radical change in Jinnah’s personality from a secular politician to a communalist one.⁹ Jalal, among other revisionist historians, has shifted our attention from preoccupations with Jinnah’s political beliefs, his “interior” personhood, to his political persona, his public performance. Jinnah’s shift in rhetorical position serves as a tactical maneuver and signals no serious change in his political goals.

Despite the fact that the Lahore Resolution does not explicitly mention Pakistan, it soon acquired the status of the first cogent

articulation for the creation of Pakistan and was, in fact, referred to as the Pakistan Resolution. As Jinnah himself lashes out, "When we passed the Lahore Resolution, we had not used the word 'Pakistan.' Who gave us this word? ... You know that Pakistan is a word which is really foisted upon us and fathered on us by some section of the Hindu press and also by the British press."¹⁰ Jinnah rejects the conflation of the Lahore Resolution with the demand for Pakistan.

Jinnah's momentous address at Lahore is ambiguous, as he refused to define his "nation," leaving it open to diverse interpretations. Its very vagueness, however, played an important role in securing Jinnah some strategic leverage with the Congress. The elusiveness of the Resolution, Jalal suggests, confirms that Jinnah was always less interested in the creation of a real Pakistan than he was in using the notional Pakistan to secure the needs of Indian Muslims. Seen this way, the two-nation theory was a means to advocate parity, while Congress stood for majority rule.

According to Ayesha Jalal, the Lahore Resolution was a rhetorical performance advanced to secure an equal say for Muslims in India's political future. Although Jinnah framed his demand using the rhetoric of Muslim "nationhood," his oratory was incommensurate with his political objectives. The key to unpacking this conundrum lies in asking not only what Jinnah's words *mean* but also what they *do*. The shift from hermeneutic to performative modes of analysis bears rich insights: The affective force of the Lahore Resolution constituted a powerful audience through its address that claimed Muslims not as a minority but as a nation. In addition to the discursive constitution of a public, it served to shift from an enumerative economy of political representation to an aspirational one. The Lahore Resolution aimed to generate an unequivocal recognition of Muslim nationhood that could then redress the political disadvantage of a minority status in a federal constitution. South Asian historian Asim Roy explains it thus:

The thrust of Jinnah's political strategy underpinning the resolution was initially to secure the recognition of the Indian Muslim nationhood on the basis of the acceptance of

the "Pakistan" demand by the British and the Congress, and thereby gain an equal say for Muslims in any arrangement about India's political future at the centre. Once the principle of the Muslim right to self-determination as embodied in the Lahore Resolution was conceded, the resultant Muslims state or states could either "enter into a confederation with non-Muslim provinces on the basis of parity at the center" or make as a sovereign state, "treaty arrangement with the rest of India about matters of common concern."¹¹

By shoring up evidence of the complicity of the Congress in the Partition of the subcontinent, Ayesha Jalal also makes an intervention into the widespread assumption that the Congress stood for unity.¹² For example, Jalal persuasively argues that faced with the choice between a strong center and territorial unity, the Congress chose the former. The League sought to create a negotiated pattern of sharing power at the center with the Congress on the basis of a substantial League representation at the centre. A solid center was integral to Nehru's socialist vision of a united and modernized India, capable of economic reconstruction, based on centralized planning and a strong army. Further, the increasing ethnic tensions of the provincial Congress ministries after 1937 reinforced Congress's reluctance to seek political accommodation with the League. Having a strong center would enable the Congress to stem the centrifugal tendencies and frame a constitution unhampered by communal considerations. Ultimately, the Congress did not want to forfeit control by sharing power with the Muslim League and thus preferred Partition to giving up control in a unified India.

Jalal's path-breaking scholarship has been criticized for being too exclusively focused on high politics and diplomacy.¹³ For example, Mushirul Hasan points out that Jalal's analysis does not account for the growing movement for Partition drawn from different regions as well as classes. It does not deconstruct the notion of a monolithic Islam by foregrounding dissenting Muslim voices against the creation of Pakistan. There is little analysis of the ideological content of the movement, the social base of the Muslim League, its mobilization

techniques after the Lahore Resolution, or its ability to use Islam as a rallying symbol.¹⁴ Further, certain questions remain unanswered in Jalal's theory. Why, for instance, does Jinnah not dispel the conflation of the Lahore Resolution with the demand for Pakistan? Why not opt to be more straightforward and mature and put forward the demands of the Muslims in minority areas along with those in majority? Why does Jinnah play into the hands of the Congress by persisting on "Pakistan?"¹⁵ By forwarding sincerity in politics, these criticisms obscure the central role played by performance in the field of politics. Jalal's scholarship radically intervened into orthodox histories surrounding the Partition and circumvented textual fetishization by examining the performative dimensions of political rhetoric.

The debates between the Muslim League and the Congress over the Partition issue exemplify the performative deployment of language by both political parties; the performance of political positions plays on the subterfuge of language. In playing with the idea of Pakistan as a bargaining counter, both parties "said what they did not mean, stood for what they did not want and what they truly wanted was not stated publicly but only betrayed in their vital and purposive political decisions and actions."¹⁶ Words take on a life of their own, however, and Jinnah's rhetorical ingenuity exceeded his intentions and generated unpredictable effects.

Attending to the performative dimension in the political debates decenters a linguistically overdetermined scrutiny of pedagogical history and allows us to consider rhetoric not only for its meaning but also for its generative effects and affective force. Dwight Conquergood reminds us, "A whole realm of complex, finely nuanced meaning that is embodied, tacit, intoned, gestured, improvised, co-experienced, covert – and all the more deeply meaningful because of its refusal to be spelled out" gets left out by textually overdetermined analyses.¹⁷ The world-making perlocutionary force of the rhetorical address of powerful, charismatic leaders played no small role in the generation of counterpublics that gained momentum and culminated in the division of the subcontinent. It is to the moment of Partition that we will now turn.

The Radcliffe boundary

The Radcliffe Boundary, which separates India from Pakistan, materially instantiates the two-nation theory, which held that Muslims and Hindus were essentially incompatible and could not coexist within the same nation-state. By exploring some of the genealogies of that idea, as well as its contemporary reverberations in South Asian politics, I now examine the discursive, material, and ideological production of the India–Pakistan border at Wagah.

To begin with, let us turn to “Partition”, a poem written by British poet W.H. Auden.¹⁸ In 1966, nearly two decades after the Partition of British India into two separate nation-states, Auden’s “Partition” ironizes the high drama just prior to British India’s independence after a century of colonial rule. Auden’s unnamed protagonist is Cyril Radcliffe, a British lawyer, called in from England to delineate the precise territorial boundary between the two independent nation-states of India and Pakistan.

W.H. Auden (1907–1973), radical-leftist British poet, pithily captures the sweat and nerves of Radcliffe, the trusty barrister, assigned with the momentous task of allocating the precise boundary between the two nation-states. Following on the heels of Leonard Mosley’s influential account, *The Last Days of the British Raj*, published in 1962, Auden’s poem appeared at a political moment when the question of international partitions resurfaced in the public sphere (for example, the partition of North and South Vietnam in 1954, and the erection of the Berlin Wall in 1961). By highlighting the restiveness of the final days, “Partition” punctures the facade of order that the departing British empire struggled to present to the world. The poem also interrupts the dominant account of a peaceful decolonization on the subcontinent.¹⁹

Cyril Radcliffe, the beleaguered protagonist of “Partition,” is significantly unnamed, referred to only as “he.” In devaluing Radcliffe’s authorial agency, Auden affirms his role as merely another institutional player in the political theatre of colonialism and violently emerging nationalisms. Through the brisk anapestic meter of the poem, Auden conveys not only the urgency of the times but also ironizes the serious business of partitioning nations. The poem dramatizes the

manner in which Radcliffe was sucked into the political vortex: The paucity of time in which he was to delineate the territorial boundaries made his task all the more daunting. Radcliffe had the onerous responsibility of reconciling the demands of the key political players: Jinnah of the Muslim League, Nehru of the Indian National Congress, and Lord Mountbatten, the governor-general of British India.

Auden's poem captures the frantic urgency under which Radcliffe had to produce his Boundary Award. Mountbatten, the governor-general of India, understood that appearance was a key technique of power and maintained a Machiavellian facade of order, rational deliberation, and due process.²⁰ In reality, disorder, haste, and poorly conceived and executed exit strategies marked Britain's departure from India. Mounting evidence suggests that the violence in the wake of Partition had less to do with "religious fanaticism" than with the panic generated in the aftermath of the collapse of political negotiations, which were widely anticipated by British officials at the highest levels.²¹ Radcliffe then offered a convenient scapegoat not only for colonial officers but also for Indian politicians who were fully aware that the new border would provoke further unrest.

Radcliffe was only one node in the colonial discursive machine but as the final authority of a Boundary Award that eventually frustrated all concerned parties, he provided an expedient shield. Auden's poem punctures the notion of a monolithic omnipotent colonizer. He reminds us colonial power was disseminated through multiple and shifting channels: Radcliffe was at once both architect and scapegoat.

Auden's poem also offers an interesting point of entry into the Radcliffe Boundary Award because it rehearses many of the widespread assumptions about the final days of the British empire in India. Radcliffe, a wealthy and successful barrister, well known for his loyalty to the British government and his perspicacious intelligence, was selected for the momentous task of delineating the boundary between the two nation-states. A surprising choice, Radcliffe had little expertise in matters of boundary allocation; he had no experience of India, never having visited the region. Radcliffe himself expected to have two years to complete his task, which was subsequently curtailed to six months. On his arrival in India, however, he was informed that he

must produce the Boundary Award within seven weeks.²² And so, "in seven weeks it was done, the frontiers decided, A continent for better or worse divided."²³

Auden's poem captures the careful arithmetic of the British empire: "We can give you four judges, two Moslem and two Hindu, To consult with, but the final decision must rest with you."²⁴ The Boundary Award Commission consisted of two committees: one for Punjab and another for Bengal, both headed by Radcliffe. The Muslim League and the Congress nominated two judges each to the committees. This political arithmetic ultimately culminated in a deadlock, thus making Radcliffe the final arbiter on contentious issues. The appointment of four political nominees casts a judicial veneer of balance and orderliness to the boundary allocation process, which obscured the increasingly unstable situation on the ground. The representatives from both parties conceded little, creating a political impasse in the discussions around the Punjab Partition.²⁵ In addition, the members of the Boundary Commission were all judges with a background in criminal law and with little experience in matters of boundary allocation.

In Bengal, the Bengal Legislative Assembly arrived at the decision to partition by dividing the assembly into two units, one part representing Muslim majority districts and the other part Hindu majority districts. On June 20, 1947, these two units voted on the question of Partition, with the Hindu majority unit in favor and the Muslim majority unit opposed.²⁶ Foregrounding the territorial considerations that drove the decision to partition, Joya Chatterji reminds us that the Bengal Assembly consisted of representatives of territorial rather than communal units, thus reinforcing that communal autonomy had to take the shape of territorial sovereignty.

Auden evokes the image of a sickly Radcliffe: "Shut up in a lonely mansion, with police night and day, Patrolling the gardens to keep the assassins away, He got down to work, to the task of settling the fate, Of millions. . . . The weather was frightfully hot, And a bout of dysentery kept him constantly on the trot."²⁷ Perspiring and petrified, poring over inaccurate maps and census data as fanatical and murderous, unruly masses lurked in the shadows, threatening to infringe

into a precariously ordered world. The image at once recalls the enumerative practices of colonial administration: census reports, maps, land surveys, and other modes of governance that insistently relied on techniques of measurement.

Radcliffe's knowledge of the territory to be partitioned was predominantly textual – the urgency with which he was required to work meant that he did not have the time for field surveys – or even any visits to the regions in question.²⁸ The confidence in empiricist methods of boundary allocation – a variety of discursive texts ranging from maps, surveys, and censuses, reinforces a particularly orientalist mode of apprehending place, one that simplifies and sanitizes the complex embeddedness and intermingling among communities of Hindus, Sikhs, and Muslims into orientalist maxims about bounded and polarized religious communities.²⁹ Auden's poem reinforces the colonial taxonomies of Hindus and Muslims as “two peoples fanatically at odds, with their different diets and their incompatible gods.”³⁰

I take up questions of the sedimentation of religious identities in the public sphere again in the chapters that follow. For now it is sufficient to note that it is within the colonial enumerative categories such as the census that religious identities such as Muslim and Hindu began to calcify as political groups. Thus, “communalism” or what Auden calls “two peoples fanatically at odds” was insidiously consolidated by enumerative practices of the colonial state that finally also provided the flawed tools for partitioning British India.

In fewer than six weeks, the Radcliffe Boundary drew 2,500 miles of boundary in Punjab, allocating 64 percent of the area of undivided Punjab to Pakistan, with slightly less than 60 percent of the populace. To Pakistan, the award gave 63,800 square miles of Punjabi territory, whereas India received 35,300 square miles.³¹ In Bengal, the award gave India an area of 28,000 square miles, with a population of 21.19 million people, of which nearly 5.3 million (29 percent) were Muslim. East Pakistan was awarded 49,000 square miles for a population of 39.11 million, of which 29.1 (11.4 million) were Hindu. West Bengal got 36.36 percent of the land to accommodate 35.14 percent of the population, whereas East Bengal got 63.6 percent of the land to accommodate 64.85 percent of the population.³²

The commission's terms of reference emphasized the importance of contiguous religious majorities, making religion – rather than infrastructure, kinship relations, or topography – the governing rationale behind the boundary allocation. The commission was advised to “demarcate the boundaries of the two parts of the Punjab on the basis of ascertaining the contiguous majority areas of Muslims and non-Muslims. In doing so, it will also take into account other factors.”³³ The new boundary traced the major administrative divisions, but cut across well-developed infrastructural systems disrupting road, telephone, and telegraph communications and most importantly, interfering with the region's vital irrigation system, the repercussions of which extend to the contentious question of Kashmir.³⁴

The Radcliffe Award was announced on August 17, two days after the Independence of India and three days after the formation of Pakistan. Lord Mountbatten, who replaced Lord Wavell in February 1947, advanced the date of this award by almost a year. Despite his deadline of June 1948 for Britain to withdraw from India, Mountbatten rushed to decolonize India within six months of his arrival. Chester warns that perhaps even alternative borders may not have helped to divide the Hindus, Sikhs, and Muslims amicably into two separate nations.³⁵ It did, however, placate the primary political players: The British, hastily leaving the scene of religious violence, exonerated themselves from their responsibilities of a peaceful transfer of power; the Indian National Congress saw the culmination of decades of anti-colonial nationalism as it held the political reins of an independent India; the Muslim League carved out of India a separate sovereign Islamic state, Pakistan.

The uncertainty about the boundary allocation exacerbated the mayhem and communal violence that was rapidly spiraling out of control. The massive dislocation was set into motion as soon as rumors about the partition of India along religious lines began to circulate. People were on the move, uncertain if where they would settle down would eventually belong to India or Pakistan. In this context, the dominant rhetoric of India's “nonviolent” path to independence obscures the magnitude of the violence of the Partition. Britain no doubt strove to appear efficient while handling the transfer of power

to the two nations; the newly independent nation-states marked their independence with celebrations. For the victims and survivors of the Partition, however, the violently attained “freedom” was a shattering experience.

In what follows I consider the ways in which the official narratives of the Partition are dramatized at Wagah, the border in Punjab that cuts Amritsar in India from Lahore in Pakistan. Moving away from the role of print culture as the modality through which the nation is imagined, here I consider performance as crucial in affectively sustaining the imagined community. The Retreat ceremony dramatizes the power of the state through performative practices that subtly insert hegemonic power into the bodies of its onlookers. Through a consideration of the mimetic practices of the border ceremonies, I interrogate the production of the border as the marker of national differences and argue that the drama at Wagah inadvertently highlights the nonidentity within the national political subject.

Bordering on drama

The Radcliffe Line cuts Amritsar in India from Lahore in Pakistan at the Wagah border. Amritsar and Lahore, “twin cities” prior to British colonization of Punjab, 36 miles apart, were now strategic border towns of the two new rival nations.³⁶ The Punjab region witnessed the mass migration of approximately 5.5 million Hindus and Sikhs from its western (Pakistani) area, and 6 million Muslims from its eastern (Indian) area.³⁷ Ian Talbot reminds us that

almost 40% of Amritsar’s houses were destroyed or damaged and its Muslim population fell from 49% on the eve of the Partition to just 00.52% in 1951. 6000 houses were damaged in Lahore and its Hindu and Sikh population who formed over a third of the population departed for India ... the cities’ proximity to the border meant that they received large numbers of refugees. There were a million in Lahore alone in April 1948, two-fifths of whom were housed in camps. ... Refugees formed two-fifths of Lahore’s population, while Amritsar suffered the greatest physical destruction of any Punjabi city.³⁸

The 1,500-mile border, which runs through the provinces of Sindh (Pakistan) and Rajasthan (India) and touches on Gujarat (India), can be crossed at two points: the pedestrian crossing at Wagah, typically inaccessible to Indian and Pakistani citizens, and the train track a few miles south at Attari. The red line inscribed by Radcliffe's "calm, judicial pen" is rendered visible at Wagah through elaborate theatrical, architectural, and bureaucratic practices of state.³⁹ The checkpoint at Wagah is 15.5 miles east of Lahore and 17.5 miles west of Amritsar. The elaborate scaffolding, barbed wire, steel gates, and uniformed border guards contribute to the highly structured production of national difference.

The 10-mile drive from Amritsar in India to the Wagah border appeared uneventful at first.⁴⁰ As my taxi speedily rattled along, I gazed at the congested roads teeming with signs marking the end of a long day. In the cold December afternoon, cycle-rickshaws carrying schoolchildren competed with angry busdrivers and irate motorcyclists. Along the way were signs of an earlier time: The striking 300-acre Khalsa College building, founded in 1892, lay adjacent to the newer sprawling campus of Guru Nanak Dev University established in 1969. As we approached the border, the many faces of a bustling city gave way to the solitariness of the Grand Trunk Road, which grew quieter and more forlorn. Occasionally, a large, gaudy film billboard would suddenly interrupt the seamless gray road that wound its way ahead of me.

The languorous streets were flanked on either side by mustard and maize fields, resplendent in the sun. On closer scrutiny, I discerned military tanks lurking behind the tall fields. My taxi driver, Chetan Singh, informed me that the gently sloping hillocks in the distance were in fact camouflaged barracks.⁴¹ Intermittently, all the bright greens and gold of the countryside gave way to fields with rotted corn. The recently planted underlying landmines made harvest impossible; consequently, crops turned rancid on the stalks. Red signs of warning were posted along the way. We were approaching the border.

Chetan Singh suggested that I visit the Attari Railway Station in the town of Attari, named after Sardar Sham Singh Attariwala, Maharaja Ranjit Singh's governor of Kashmir who died in 1846 at the

battle of Sabraon during the First Anglo-Sikh War.⁴² Formerly a driver for the Immigrations Office, Singh spoke fondly of his interaction with Pakistani officials. When we arrived, I was struck by the ghostly and deserted look at the station. The Attari Railway Station consisted of a massive shed with a corrugated tin roof that covered a wide platform. A steel mesh fence separated the central platform into two sections, in order to divide the passengers traveling in opposite directions. "India: The World's Largest Democracy" exclaimed a large, tattered poster, pasted on a wall. The Samjhauta Express, a cheerless, bleak Northern Railways biweekly train, has the distinction of being the only train in the world that covers the shortest rail route of just under 2 miles, between Attari in India and the Wagah Railway Station across the border; the train returns to Attari the same evening. The train was operated by the Pakistan Railways for six months of the year and by the Indian Railways for the other six months, demonstrating the careful arithmetic and mimetic relationality at play in the relations between the two nations.⁴³ Following the Shimla Agreement, the train was started on July 22, 1976, and ran between Amritsar and Lahore, covering a distance of about 26 miles. Due to security reasons, Indian Railways decided to terminate the service at Attari, where bureaucratic surveillance practices, customs, and immigrations take place.⁴⁴

If Wagah spectacularizes the power of state through highly theatrical border rituals, then the railway station at Attari allows us to consider the technologies of border surveillance. Spectacle and surveillance offer competing techniques of national governmentality to insert the hegemonic power of the state into the bodies of its citizens.⁴⁵ The government functionaries are important players in the bureaucratic machine; the delays, harassments, intrusive interrogations, and suspicious attitudes of the customs officials attest to the material production of the border through fastidious and intimidating processes.⁴⁶ Further, the minutiae of immigration measures, forms to be filled out in triplicate, customs restrictions, and security checks all contribute to the aura of the gravity of borders. In the words of travel-writer and novelist Stephen Alter, "Their illegible signatures and the smeared patterns of rubber stamps, bearing national insignia, are all part of an effort to give the border some kind of shape, to make it real

and understood."⁴⁷ The iterative bureaucratic and ceremonial procedures at the railway station inscribe the hegemonic power of the state on the bodies of its citizens.

In his travelogue, *Amritsar to Lahore: A Journey across the India-Pakistan Border*, Alter captures the palpable tensions and power dynamics within the railway station at Attari. After the complicated immigration procedures, he passes through the metal detectors to reach the other side of the platform. The railway journey was unnecessarily protracted with short spurts of activity followed by long periods of delay. Prolonging the time taken to traverse such a short distance deliberately stretched out the conceptual space between the two nations. The ensuing sense of physical and mental strain attempted to make the passengers believe that the two countries were much farther apart than they really were.⁴⁸ Several travelers complained that the visceral power of the state manifests itself in the harassment and intimidation, the deliberate fastidiousness and unpleasantness that makes travel between the two nations an arduous and complex affair.⁴⁹

After our brief stop at the railway station, we got back into the taxi and drove to the Wagah border. The Grand Trunk Road runs from Amritsar in India to Lahore in Pakistan and cuts the border post at Wagah. Previously known as Sher Shah Suri Marg after the Moghul ruler (1540–1545) who originally constructed the route, it established a sophisticated administrative and communications system. The road was subsequently renamed Grand Trunk Road after British colonization of the Punjab. Sher Shah Suri Marg was the main artery that connected the breadth of the territory and ran from Sonargaon in Bengal to Peshawar in the northwest of Pakistan.⁵⁰

The taxi pulled over at a somewhat deserted parking space. Walking toward the closed gate that admitted visitors, I observed the vendors – sedentary as well as itinerant – for whom the border was serious business.⁵¹ Several stalls served refreshments, including tea, tobacco, popcorn, and groundnuts. Others sold souvenirs of India, trinkets, and gift items. Some young boys besieged me with postcards of the ceremony and miniature Indian flags. Several of these trinkets and postcards reiterated that India was the world's largest democracy. Even a year after the attacks on the Indian Parliament House in

December 2001, business was slow. Trade between the two countries had come to a standstill, and few people crossed the border except diplomats of the two countries and “foreigners,” conferring a strange sense of kinship to the citizens of either nation.

The border outpost consists of an elaborate complex of buildings, roads, and barriers with electrified barbed wire on either side. India has fenced hundreds of miles of its border with Pakistan, consisting of two 8-foot-high barbed-wire fences with razor-sharp concertina wire running in between. Facing the Indian border, another signboard relentlessly reiterates, “India: The largest democracy in the world welcomes you.” Across the Indian border, I discerned an impressive Pakistani seating arena. The Pakistani Baab-e-Azadi (Gate of Freedom) was built in 2001 as a memorial to the Muslims who were killed during 1947.

Soon after Independence in 1947, the border post consisted of a few whitewashed drums and a rubble of stone. “Ours was a difficult task,” writes Brigadier Mohinder Singh Chopra of the Indian Army, “there were no pillars or markers to suggest which was our land and which theirs.”⁵² At the behest of brigadiers of the Sixth Royal Battalion, Mohinder Chopra of India, and Nazir Ahmed of Pakistan, a few tents were pitched on either side. Further, two sentry boxes painted in the two countries’ national colors in addition to a swing gate, to regulate the refugee traffic, were also set in place. Two flag masts were erected on either side of the border, and a brass plaque, commemorating the Partition, was installed. On October 11, 1947, the Wagah border was formally established after the brigadiers and former regimental executives officially signed and endorsed the establishment of the border post. The ceremonies commenced in 1959.

Radcliffe’s boundary was materialized by the architectonics of government that separated India from Pakistan. It appeared to stretch out endlessly, but the Zero Point is the only place where one was allowed to cross. A thin white line drawn on a tar road signified the Zero Point. A brick gateway flanked either side of the border. The Indian gate had a large sign that read: “*Mera Bharat Mahan*” (My India Is Great), and the Pakistani side had an Urdu inscription: “*Pakistan Zindabad*” (Long Live Pakistan.) The two gates separating India and Pakistan were painted with the colors of the respective flags. A few

feet ahead of us, in Pakistan, was a Pakistani guard looking nonchalantly at the eager and curious faces on the other side.

After a scrupulous body inspection, the guards let in the hundred or so people cheerily assembled at the gates. Two guards escorted us on a long, meandering route behind the army barracks to the Zero Point. We were then escorted away from the barbed wire and toward the military edifice where we were asked to sit down. The theatricality of this event was further affirmed by the newly constructed "viewers' gallery" that allowed the spectators to organize themselves in a more orderly fashion. The border police then warned us that cheering slogans should be limited to three: "*Bharat Mata Ki Jai*," "*Hindustan Zindabad*," and "*Vande Mataram*." We were explicitly warned not to jeer at the Pakistanis.

As we were being seated, the invisible stereos started blaring out old patriotic songs from popular Hindi movies.⁵³ The music was carefully chosen to evoke nostalgic memories and elicit a particular emotional response from the audience. The songs played on the emotions and attachments of the audience and sonically reinforced shared cultural memories. Ravi Vasudevan reminds us, "images and sounds do not only course around us, they also reside, affectively, in us. They are layered in the space of memory, where public and personal archives intermesh, where for example, music provides a soundtrack that traverses public history and personal biography. Within the immediacy of audio-visual experiences rest other images and sounds that clamour, contest, and dialogue with their own histories."⁵⁴ In this case, the music was carefully selected to suggest a benevolent Nehruvian patriotism and was drawn primarily from early socialist-inspired Hindi cinema of the 1950s and 1960s. It steered clear from more recent jingoistic numbers churned out by the Hindi film industry. As old Hindi favorites such as "*Meri Desh ki Dharti*" and "*Wo Bharat Desh Hai Mera*" blared out of the stereos, there was a clear attempt to revive an idealized nostalgia that reinforced the harmonious, affective dimensions of patriotic fellow-feeling. This was the house music as the audience settled down with their teacups and paper cones of piping hot groundnuts. The Pakistanis chose to play more religious and devotional music.

The audience consisted primarily of young Sikh men, but there were some Sikh and Hindu families there as well. Many of the young middle-class men, couples, and families were on a religious pilgrimage to the Golden temple at Amritsar, and included Wagah as part of their itinerary.⁵⁵ I also noticed quite a few non-Sikh Indian and foreign tourists. The Pakistani audience organized themselves into separate groups of men and women, but I could not discern much more than that.

A group of about fifty uniformed schoolboys between the ages of ten and thirteen arrived with their teachers. What followed made vivid the risks of politically indoctrinating the young into unthinkingly imbibing national ideologies. At first, they belted out a few patriotic songs, adhering to those of Hindi cinema in the 1950s. Their songs reiterated a Nehruvian patriotism, consonant with the recorded music, and affirmed the importance of rising above religious, ethnic, and regional divisions. What followed after the singing was the prologue to the real show. Two adolescent Sikh boys consecutively carried a huge 10-foot flag of India and vigorously ran up to the gates, swirling it in a show of insolence toward Pakistanis. Their flagbrandishing mirrored identical moves by their Pakistani counterparts. The Pakistani contingent, however, consisted of young adults skilled at the art of brandishing their flags. High-spirited audiences cheered the adolescent schoolboys as they sprinted with the flags, which turned out to be rather unwieldy. After about fifteen minutes of pre-Retreat warm-ups of flag brandishing, the guards directed the schoolboys to sit down in the audience.

The categorical production of docile and patriotic citizens through performative practices encourages the citizen-viewers to behold the grandeur of the state while participating through programmed responses of sloganeering and cheering, thus inscribing on the citizen body itself the repressive rhythms of the state.⁵⁶ Despite the patriotism that some of the audience displayed, many more chuckled at the hapless antics of the schoolboys getting entangled in their flags. There was a healthy dose of humor, cynicism, and curiosity in the audience that December evening.

If the schoolboys demonstrated the politicization of children through pedagogical and somatic inculcation of a patriotic subjectivity,

a small group of about six Shiv Sainiks in the audience disrupted the carefully composed rhythms of civic nationalism. It appeared that these young men, brandishing saffron scarves, were no strangers to the rituals at the Retreat ceremony. They were there with the express intention of provoking the audience. The pre-ceremonial rituals of flag-brandishing were punctuated by their belligerent cheers. They began their sloganeering almost immediately. Although many tried to ignore these rabble-rousers, some in the audience watched their belligerence with a scornful amusement. In the words of Thomas Blom Hansen, there is something “profoundly excessive” in the public style of Shiv Sena, which combines “visual, theatrical, urban, violent, masculine performances” into a new politics of presence.⁵⁷ This style of claiming public space through dress, speech, gesture, and comportment ensured the visibility of the Shiv Sainiks. They cultivated and promoted the identity of their group through their iterative somatic and embodied performances; their excessive manner attempted to incite passions, influence opinions, and convert Hindu audiences into their fold.

The hordes of spectators goaded the soldiers on and cheered their own side as they would at a cricket match. The rabble-rousers barely even looked at the performance. They wound their way through the audience shouting patriotic slogans. It was impossible to ignore them as their presence intruded into the aural and visual fields of perception. The Sainiks audaciously inserted themselves into the secular space of the civic ceremony deploying the body as an instrument of defiance against the disciplinary regimes of institutional power.

The agitators drew on and refracted the Retreat ceremony's ideal of masculinist nationalism. They frequently taunted the less vocal male audiences: “*Chup kyon ho? Agar chup hi rehna hai to ghar pe choodi pehen ke baitho!*” (Why are you silent? If you want to stay silent then wear bangles on your hands and sit at home.) Using clichéd insults, these rabble-rousers accused the audience of effeminacy, unwittingly excluding women from the scene of national belonging, while simultaneously engendering the fraternal imagined community.

Throughout the Retreat ceremony, the Shiv Sainiks kept up their sloganeering. As the ceremony progressed, they began to

introduce new slogans; two were especially interesting. The first, "*Chatrapati Shivaji ki Jai*," or "Long Live Shivaji," referenced the historical Maratha leader Shivaji, who fought against the Mughal rulers, and circulates as an icon of Hindu nationalism in contemporary India. Given that the majority of the people in the audience were, in fact, from the Sikh community, this was an especially clear marker of the ways in which the Shiv Sainiks assimilate heterogeneous religious identities into an imagined, uniform community effected through the slippage from Hindu to Indian identity. The fraternity of the "imagined community" invoked here then clearly excludes women and religious minorities but nevertheless claims to represent them.

The second moment was when the agitators began to deride Pakistan and started shouting, "*Pakistan Murdabad*" or "Death to Pakistan." The guards immediately responded to the disobedient act and warned them to be quiet; the raucous youth reverted to the sanctioned slogans for a while to appease the guards. The unruly members of the audience routinely played up as well as against the magnificence of state power. In this way, their belligerent patriotism alternatively reified as well as challenged the state's power. The hooliganism illustrates the ways in which live spaces constitute communities through processes of identification as well as intimidation. Through acts that toy with state power, the rowdy youth perform their allegiance to the nation not in the passive and obedient register of dispassionate spectatorship but through affective performances that flouts institutional authority. By capitalizing on emotion, the Shiv Sainiks tap into the affective vacuum of secular public culture and turn passionate and sensuous fellow-feeling toward their own political ends.

Further, such moments reveal the potentially disruptive power of live performances in public spaces and point to the constitutive unknowability that makes up live performance.⁵⁸ By introducing liveness as an analytical category, I am less concerned with its temporal economy and questions about its nonreproducibility.⁵⁹ These energetic debates have generated rich insights, but my interest here is to reclaim the spatiality of liveness. Live performance in public space draws us out of our secure, individualistic viewing practices into different – sometimes dangerous – spatial configurations of "contact zones,"

thereby exposing our vulnerability. The agency of the audience and the performers to interrupt or change the performance is crucial to "liveness," unlike in mediatized live events where the audience is "screened out." Here, liveness works not as an unexamined celebration of community but rather as an exploration of how such contact zones offer opportunities for spontaneous or planned action that interrupts totalizing powers of state representation. The particular contingencies of live action – its unpredictable provocation, response, and reaction – all contribute to its disruptive power. Liveness, then, invokes an electrical metaphor: just like a live wire, the current between performer and spectator goes both ways and can be deadly.

The juxtaposition of the schoolboys and the Hindu agitators offers not only a moment to consider the competing performances of politics at play that evening but also the pedagogical and somatic inculcation of political ideologies. While the boys in their school uniforms performed a civic, Nehruvian nationalism, the unruly Shiv Sainiks seized on a militant, heteronormative Hindu register. While the latter subscribed to a culturally exclusivist and aggressive brand of Hindu nationalism, the former evoked a kind of civic nationalism that produces citizens with strong national sentiment but also with confidence in liberal values of "equality" and "composite" culture.⁶⁰ While the Shiv Sainiks' display of Hindu cultural nationalism gained legitimacy through rhetoric and practices of religious intolerance and exclusion within the nation, the civic nationalism of the schoolboys evoked allegiances based on abstract citizenship rights and democratic equality.⁶¹ Although there was a strong, all-encompassing anti-Pakistani sentiment that united both factions, blurring the distinctions between cultural and civic nationalisms, the civic nationalists purportedly locate the "anti-nationals" outside India, and the Hindu cultural nationalists position "the enemy" both within and without the nation.

The performances of the Shiv Sainiks on the one hand, and the students on the other, index mimetic modes of evoking sensuous fellow-feeling in the audience through an aesthetics that subsumes difference into sameness.⁶² The powerful performative claims made on empathy by both civic and religious nationalisms is premised on

dissolving the affective distance between the actor and the spectator, so they become one with the performance. This empathetic dissolution of difference is in stark contrast to the inadvertent mimetic doubling of the Retreat ceremony, which foregrounds the doubleness and nonidentity of the political subject.

The flag-brandishing prologue set the stage for the mimetic play of the soldiers. The piercing Hindi music stopped abruptly as the bugles picked up the pitch, announcing the beginning of the “invented traditions” at the India–Pakistan border.⁶³ A dozen of the choicest military men from both India’s Border Security Force (BSF) and the Pakistani Rangers (PR) performed a ritual that reiterates the militancy and machismo of nationalism.⁶⁴ One Pakistani and one Indian soldier appeared simultaneously from their respective army barracks at the call of the bugles. The BSF soldiers wore khaki uniforms: ornate red, yellow, and black cummerbunds around their waists and vivid, tall, impressive turbans with tassels. The PR soldiers wore long military green *kurtas* over matching pants; they also wore cummerbunds and tasseled headgear.

A militant demonstration of martial prowess followed: The soldiers glowered at each other, stomped their feet, and shook their weapons in a highly stylized fashion. A ceremonial parade marks the beginning of the proceedings. From about thirty yards across the border, the soldiers belligerently goose-stepped toward the other. A few yards short of the white line separating India and Pakistan, the soldiers stopped and performed a one-quarter turn in perfect harmony. Both groups now stood at attention, bodies perpendicular to the border, chests distended as they stared piercingly at one another over their near shoulders. Next, a lone sentry marched out along with his Pakistani counterpart; two more border guards joined him. They approached a higher official and requested permission to open the gates and lower the flag. In a loud, clear, and staccato voice, the officers responded: “*Ijaazat di jati hai*” (Permission granted). Several border guards joined in and the ceremony proceeded with coordinated stamping, wheeling, shouted commands, and saluting. They approached the respective gates, unlocked them, and with great power swung the gates open in one, swift motion. They briefly



Figure 2.1 A Pakistan Ranger and an Indian Border Security Force soldier marching during the Wagah border ceremony. Photo: AP/Aman Sharma.

shook hands and then proceeded to lower their respective flags that were placed high on poles planted at the foot of the gates. Buglers on either side played in perfect unison as both flags are lowered simultaneously and were then folded and carried away to their own stations. The commandants of both sides finally saluted each other, very briefly shook hands, and shut the respective gates with a ferocious crash.

The semiotic excess of this performance of nationalism hardly needs to be belabored. The composition of the event with the house music, flag-brandishing prologue, and arena seating, frames it as nationalist theatre. Furthermore, the plethora of signs – for example, the iconic representation of the encoded soldiers' bodies as actors, civilians as audience, the corresponding stage settings on either side, the identical use of stage props (including weapons and flags), and finally the significance of the flag coming down as curtains marking the end of the show – all circulate within a theatrical economy. The hyperbolic performance of consummate nationalism is also unsurprisingly the performance of a robust masculinity. Both nation-states appropriate an ideal of martial masculinity to affirm their potency to protect their motherland; the male body of the performing soldier inscribes militarism with patriotism and patriarchy. The Retreat ceremony derives its performative idiom from imperial systems of displaying power, which themselves were invented traditions carefully crafted to symbolically assert the authority of Britain over India.⁶⁵

In addition to drawing on imperial iconography of power in India, the uniforms, music, and military drill also draw on the symbolic genealogies of Britain's Beating Retreat ceremony, referred to as Watch Setting as early as 1554, which symbolically enacts the culmination of the day's fighting, a return to camp, and the mounting of the guard for the night.⁶⁶ The Beating Retreat ceremony continues to be performed in England as a major event in the army's ceremonial calendar, delivering an evening of spirited marches as well as hymns and anthems.

Given that the Retreat ceremony at Wagah derives from the wartime rituals of its British predecessor, it becomes significant to ponder the extent to which the border rituals symbolically enact a state of permanent, quotidian war between India and Pakistan. For the two nations symbolically at war the retreat suggests a temporary cessation of hostilities for the evening to be resumed again the next day. The border rituals aesthetically represent the nation as one at war and performatively inscribe, sustain, and perpetuate a narrative of antagonistic hostility between the two nations. The location of the Retreat ceremony at the Wagah border, which cuts Amritsar from Lahore, is

also significant: The chaos, panic, and bewilderment that characterized the massive forced migrations is reshaped into a crisp, structured ceremony that keeps alive a particular account of the Partition in order to legitimize state monopoly of violence.

The Wagah border rituals dramatize the national mimicry between India and Pakistan. The competitiveness and one-upmanship that shapes the relations between the two nations converge on ideas of identity and difference. This national mimicry, however, is amply demonstrated in other arenas as well; for example, in May 1998, Pakistan carried out six nuclear tests in response to India's five. Thus, the logic of this national mimicry extends to the more dangerous nuclear race between the two countries, explicitly dramatizing what is at stake in the serious play of theatre that at once marks and troubles the notion of national difference.

Performance offers a crucial political technique in the affective constitution of publics. We considered the rhetorical strategies of high politics as well as the spectatorial performances that make visible the authority of the state. These performative practices insidiously inculcate the compulsory narratives of the state within its audience. The hyperbolic display of nationalism during the border ceremonies at Wagah oscillates between high realism and parody. The power of the parodic mode derives from its manipulation of a recognizable norm, citing it with a twist that resignifies the action.⁶⁷ The inadvertent parodic performance of the border guards denaturalizes the affective realism of patriotism and exposes its construction as artifice and theatre. The gradual accretion of symbolic and gestural language, done in the competitive spirit of one-upmanship, steadily turns the seriousness of militaristic might into a parody of uber-patriotism. The inflated and highly exaggerated performative idiom dramatizes the absurdity of the extreme antagonism between the two nations and offers an opportunity to read the border ceremony against the grain and meditate on the histrionics that undergird political performances. Haunted by its own inadequacy, the border rituals require magnified and exaggerated performances to establish and augment their authority and reveal themselves as anxious performances of nationalism.



Figure 2.2 Soldiers glare at each other at the Wagah border. Photo: AP/Vincent Thian.

The Wagah ceremony displays the magnificent power of the state at the same time that it dramatizes the antagonism between India and Pakistan. According to anthropologist Richard Murphy, the identical gestures of the soldiers across the border acquire a mirror effect through a logic of binary opposition. Drawing on theories of Lacanian psychoanalysis, he observes, “The mirror stage at Wagah is a dramatic illustration that Pakistan is defined as that which India is not. . . . On close examination this definition collapses into a dance of similitude: while the border ritual enacts difference, it also illustrates the fundamental similarities that Pakistani nationalist discourse seeks to deny.”⁶⁸ Murphy suggests that the rhetoric of difference melts into a “dance of similitude” and confounds Pakistan’s two-nation theory that held Hindus and Muslims as incommensurable ethnic groups.

While the identical mirror play of Lacanian psychoanalysis dissolves the Retreat ceremony’s play of national difference into a dance of similitude, I argue that the familial trope of twins can offer

important insights into the constitution of political subjectivity. The border ceremonies inadvertently reflect popular Partition discourse that casts the event in the image of twins, violently separated at birth by the nation's founding fathers. This image circulated widely in representational public spheres, including newspapers, political cartoons, and popular Hindi cinema.⁶⁹ It holds accountable the founding fathers of both nations (Jinnah and Nehru) and divests the innocent newborn nations – and by extension, “the common people” – of complicity.⁷⁰ By casting the people as guiltless victims of the founding fathers' political games, sundered by overwhelming political forces, these popular representations also forestall an examination into the violations perpetrated by “ordinary people.”

The Retreat ceremony expressed through identical moves and gestures uncannily evokes the image of twins mimetically reinscribing kinship as the terrain on which the antagonistic politics of state is played out. Furthermore, the trope of twins disallows dissolving difference into identical mirror images and pushes us to consider the nonidentity within dialectical images that contain the incommensurable contradiction of being similar and different simultaneously.

Nationalisms are structured around the dialectic of identity within the nation and difference without. However, the trope of twins makes vivid the doubleness that complicates unifying certitudes of national identity and difference. The border rituals at Wagah unwittingly stage the drama of the twins separated at birth, thus reinforcing the mimetic relationality rather than the oppositionality between the two nations. Doubles disallow the dissolution of self and other by holding multiple selves in nonreducible constellation with each other. Brecht's idea of the doubleness, the nonidentity between actor and character in his epic theatre, is instructive here: “The actor must show his subject, and he must show himself. Of course he shows his subject by showing himself, and he shows himself by showing his subject. Although the two coincide, they must not coincide in such a way that the difference between the two tasks disappears.”⁷¹ Paying attention to the mimetic doubleness prevents us from collapsing difference into sameness, and resisting the empathetic aesthetics of civic and religious nationalism.

In addition, the exaggerated theatricality of the antagonisms between both nations opens up the possibility to read the border display itself as a parody of patriotism. The aggressive posturing of the Shiv Sainiks further demonstrates the heterogeneity rather than the uniformity of the nation's imagined community. Finally, diverse audience responses at Wagah introduce a disjunctive temporality that uncannily doubles and disorders the monological state performance of the Partition.⁷²

As the resounding bugles marked the end of the ritual performance, the flags were lowered and the two iron gates were shut with a colossal clamor. The bemused spectators slowly began to disperse. The audience was now permitted to go up to the gates and glimpse the other side of the border. About 15 feet separate the two gates. Several of the audience left after the display, excited and invigorated by the spectacle. Many continued to linger at the gates, staring into the other nation. Likewise, many of the Pakistanis on the other side, too, gathered at the gate looking toward us.

In conclusion, I turn to two vignettes that illuminate competing modes of avowing friendship across the border. In his book *The Falcon in My Name: A Soldier's Diary*, Major General K.S. Bajwa recalls meeting his old friend Captain Zulfikar Ali of the Pakistan Army across the border at the Wagah checkpoint. Ali and Bajwa were close friends as army cadets in Dehradun under the British Guards in pre-Independent India. They met by accident after the 1971 India-Pakistan War when Bajwa was coordinating the repatriation of Pakistani prisoners of war through the gates at Wagah. As he recalls, "Both brigadiers now, it took us only a few seconds to rush into a warm embrace, oblivious to the touchy dignities of the victors and the vanquished.... We both laughed and years of the invisible barrier fell away.... Then I became acutely aware of the hostile glares of an adversary posture from his people from across the border and we parted.... We had relived for fleeting moments the bonds of human friendship that knew no geographical barriers."⁷³

Consider now an account from Suketu Mehta's essay "Reflections: A Fatal Love." Mehta recounts the story of Harjeet Singh, whom he met in Lahore in 1997. Singh told him about the

madness that overcame him for one day in August 1947. "We killed one third of the people in that village. About 50 to 60 men were killed in those few hours." Mehta notes that Harjeet Singh was "weeping profusely by now, his handkerchief going now to one eye, now to the other." Harjeet Singh continues, "I don't get angry on anybody else but myself. I did not sleep all that night, I did not stop thinking about it for a single minute. That's the worst memory for me."⁷⁴ At the Wagah border, Harjeet Singh met one of his former Muslim friends. Suketu Mehta describes Singh's frequent visits to Wagah as a compulsive attempt to assuage his guilt:

Harjeet Singh went forward . . . beyond the fence and his friend came forward to meet him. They embraced each other; what could be said? How does one condense the highlights of three decades? . . .

Then the soldiers separated the two men and his friend went back into Pakistan and Harjeet Singh started walking slowly back into India. He was stopped by agents from the Intelligence Bureau, and they asked him, "Who were you talking to?" "To my brother," Harjeet Singh answered. How can that be, they demanded, he was Sikh, the man who came to meet him was Muslim. "I said that is exactly what I mean, he is my brother. He has land on that side, I have land on this side, that's why we're separated." The Intelligence men said, "Don't fool us." I said, "I have told you what I told you, I have said what I have said, he is my brother."⁷⁵

These accounts frame cross-border friendship divergently, the first invoking the call of abstract humanism, the second insisting on incommensurable particularities. In the first account the soldiers impulsively embrace each other but withdraw when they become aware of hostile glances that tacitly rebuke them for transgressing the bounds of patriotic duty. Their withdrawal from each other, despite their obvious affection for each other, suggests their commitment to the higher imperatives of patriotic duty. Although cognizant of the political realities that pervade this encounter, Major Bajwa temporarily transcends them and invokes an abstract human friendship that

knows no geographical barriers. However, the evasive and neutral vocabulary of universal humanism lacks the power through which to mount a pointed, robust critique of narrow nationalisms because its abstract categories of liberal humanism refuse to take seriously the given-ness of political identities.

Whereas the first account proffers a humanizing imperative to dissolve differences in the service of a higher, abstract ideal of human friendship, the second approaches friendship, acutely aware of the particular contingencies that shape these encounters and position them as distinctive political subjects. In the second instance, Harjeet Singh acknowledges the particularity of given political identities at a given historical moment, and then proceeds to challenge it anyway. For Singh there is no turning away or disavowal of the given-ness of their political identities at this historical moment. Rather it is through acknowledging the “political facts” of their identities, insisting on their kinship, that they powerfully refute the narrative of implacable hostility enacted at the border.⁷⁶

Harjeet Singh’s challenge to the given citizen role acquires its particular affective force from his sense of betrayal. The traumatic memory of the Partition emerges from the horror that people were more attached to abstract ideals than to their friends, their kin, their neighbors. Singh’s powerful affirmation: “Yes, he is my brother” derives its power from an earlier denial of this friendship, which he sacrificed at the altar of the abstractions of nation and religion. Both accounts expose the limits of hegemonic political ideologies: While the first affirms friendship in the idiom of abstract humanism, the second offers an account that negotiates difference and particularizes friendship.

Political friendship acquires its power to critique antagonistic nationalism not through a disavowal of difference in the name of abstract humanism but through recognition and refutation of the given roles of identity taxonomies. Cognizing the contradictoriness of political subjectivity – “Yes, I am a Sikh; yes, he is my brother” – discloses the *doubleness* at the heart of political subjectivity that is denied by the unifying discourses of civic and religious nationalism, and of abstract humanism. The mimetic relationality, the proliferation

of doubles, turns not on the principle of identity but of difference. Mimetic semblance does not dissolve difference into sameness but rather exposes the doubleness of the self, the nonidentity of the self within the self, thus dispersing the deceptive coherence of civic and religious nationalisms. This allows the work of building solidarities across differences, rather than dissolving plurality into a specious unity.

In Chapter 3, we travel from the western border at Wagah across the breadth of the nation to the eastern border in Bengal. Looking at the Partition cinema of Ritwik Ghatak allows us to return again to the trope of twins, which structures the non-sensuous similitude between person and place in riverine Bengal. Not only does the intimate bond between the twins provide an analogue to the kinship between the two Bengals, it also offers the occasion to consider the ways in which mimetic relationality exposes the nonidentity at the heart of the national subject.

3 Ghatak's cinema and the dis coherence of the Bengal Partition

I am frightened of an abstraction that is willing to ignore living reality.

Rabindranath Tagore

In his Partition cinema, which comprises *Meghe Dhaka Tara* (1960), *Komal Gandhar* (1961), and *Subarnarekha* (1965), avant-garde Bengali filmmaker Ritwik Ghatak disperses the unifying certitudes of Partition narratives. Introducing interrelated motifs of cross-gender twins, secular and sacred topos, visual and sonic disruptions, and gestus, Ghatak demonstrates the nonidentity of the purported sovereign national subject. Ghatak demonstrates the nonsensuous similitude between place and person through the trope of nonidentical twins; the relationship between the twins is analogous to the bond between the twin Bengals.¹

Through the trope of twins, Ghatak explores the larger theme of partitions and unions in his cinema. By insistently depicting two orphaned siblings as analogous to the partitioned East and West Bengal, Ghatak forwards kinship as the terrain on which the Partition played out its antagonistic politics. Whereas dominant representations of the Partition cast the event through the fraternal metaphor of twins, Ghatak foregrounds gendered inequities through his depiction of cross-gender twins. No sense of parity structures the relationship between the pairs; indeed, Ghatak reflects on the gendered disparities that the sibling pairs suffer in the wake of Partition.² The predominance of orphans, sibling disunions, missing mothers, and incestuous

Rabindranath Tagore, *An Anthology*, 171.

unions in his cinema exposes kinship as deconstructed and fraught with betrayal and desertion. The crisis of kinship constitutes the ground on which larger spatial, social, and psychic displacements are played out in Ghatak's cinema.

Thematically, Ghatak's mode of narration concatenates and brings into relief mythological and modern epistemes. In his films, mythological and modern abstractions converge on "the public woman," whom Ghatak depicts as clerical employee in *Meghe Dhaka Tara*, stage actress in *Komal Gandhar*, and singer-prostitute in *Subarnarekha*, respectively. The significant feminist scholarship on the Bengal Partition has cautioned us against flattening out the gendered dimensions of the Partition by recuperating instances of feminist agency, particularly in Bengal, that enabled women to emerge into the public sphere as breadwinners. Ghatak's depiction of this breadwinner offers a nuanced portrayal of the promise and peril of entering into the public sphere as a gendered laborer.

By braiding competing epistemes – Brechtian-inspired epic narrative with Tagorean romanticism, modernist expressionism with Hindu mythology – Ghatak plays with form to disorient his viewers. Through the interweaving of secular and sacred tropes, Ghatak conjoins Brechtian epic with Bengali mythological epics and offers a narrative that resists the programmed pleasures and reassuring closures of social realist cinema. As a result, Ghatak's trilogy achieves formal and thematic dis coherence through the tropic structuring of mimetic siblings, dialectical juxtaposition between mythological and public womanhood, and visual and sonic disjunctures. Together these tropes multiply, disperse, and dis coherence the unified subjects of social realism. Ghatak follows Brecht's advice to eschew the naturalistic model of an "integrated work of art" and rather pursue a mode of presentation where various elements on stage dis coherence and mutually alienate each other.³ This methodology reflects Ghatak's vision of the Partition itself – its repeated and unpredictable incursions into the everyday reveals precisely its incoherence and the inability to bring this event to a comforting closure.

Inspired by Brecht, Ghatak's epic style avoids centralizing the dramatic action.⁴ Like Brecht, Ghatak takes a cohesive narrative plot

and shreds it into several animated, lively individual pieces. Ghatak himself reveals his preference for a centrifugal narrative: "I have joined the different phases of the narrative, one to another, to make a story of fateful coincidences . . . the author is not concerned with telling a story but more concerned with attitudes as they evolved with the events. Such coincidences, even if they occasionally appear incredible, would not really jar as long as there is a verisimilitude to it all."⁵ The idea of "fateful coincidence," two things occurring simultaneously, recovers the sense of the nonunitary present in a manner that complicates the telos of individual agency within a progressive historicist frame.

Although Ghatak borrows his repertoire of images from Tagore's pastoral romanticism, the sonic register insistently subverts its harmonizing closures.⁶ The various sound effects that Ghatak uses, from whiplashes to discordant notes, rupture the sense of utopic nostalgia set up within the diegetic frame. In *Subarnarekha*, Sita counsels her son, "Listen, and you will see," when he inquires about rice fields in rural Bengal, and this advice on nonidentical sensuous registers offered by the eye/ear provides a clue on how to unpack his films. Ghatak exploits the aural soundscape to render discoherent the soothing narrative closures of social realism.

In all three films Ghatak portrays characters who have lost their ground – both literally, as refugees, but also metaphorically. What are the implications of this perpetual disorientation? What larger comment does Ghatak make about the loss of certitudes when people are literally and metaphorically deterritorialized, pulled away from the familiar sustenance of home, family, geography? It is to these questions that this chapter will turn.

Ritwik Ghatak

Ritwik Ghatak was born on November 4, 1925, at Jindabazar, Dhaka, the cultural heart of East Bengal. The Partition of British India suddenly turned Ghatak into a foreigner in his own country, and like many thousands of refugees, his family moved to Calcutta in West Bengal. His films depict the sudden loss of power that middle-class migrant Bengalis experienced in the wake of the Partition. The son of a magistrate in rural East Bengal, Ghatak and his twin sister were

the youngest of nine children. Ghatak migrated to Calcutta and joined Calcutta University in 1948 to complete his studies.

As a member of the Communist Party and the left-wing Indian People's Theatre Association, political theatre exerted a significant influence on Ghatak's cinematic imagination. He was drawn to Brecht and translated *Life of Galileo* and *Caucasian Chalk Circle* in addition to acting in and directing numerous plays. In 1955, he joined Filmistan Studios in Bombay as a script writer, but he soon returned to Calcutta. He completed a total of eight feature films, four short films, and four documentaries. In 1965, Ghatak took over the position of vice principal of the Film and Television Institute of India, India's premier film institute. He inspired a whole generation of avant-garde Indian filmmakers, including Mani Kaul, Kumar Shahani, and Ketan Mehta, among others. In 1976, at the age of fifty, Ghatak died prematurely of alcohol-related disease and tuberculosis.

The traumatic events of the 1940s – World War II, the Bengal famine, and Indian Partition crucially informed Ghatak's artistic imagination. As he writes,

We were born into a critical age. In our boyhood we have seen a Bengal, whole and glorious. Rabindranath, with his towering genius, was at the height of his literary creativity, while Bengali literature was experiencing a fresh blossoming with the works of the Kallol group, and the national movement had spread wide and deep into schools and colleges and the spirit of the youth. Rural Bengal, still reveling in its fairy tales, *panchalis*, and its thirteen festivals in twelve months, throbbed with the hope of a new spurt of life. This was the world that was shattered by the War, the Famine, and when the Congress and the Muslim League brought disaster to the country and tore it into two to snatch for it a fragmented independence. Communal riots engulfed the country. The waters of the Ganga and the Padma flowed crimson with the blood of warring brothers. All this was part of the experience that happened around us. Our dreams faded away. We crashed our faces, clinging to a crumbling Bengal, divested of all its

glory. What a Bengal remained, with poverty and immorality as our daily companions, with black-marketeers and dishonest politicians ruling the roost, and men doomed to horror and misery! . . . I have not been able to break loose from this theme in all the films that I have made recently.⁷

Ritwik Ghatak assembles his narratives from the wreckage of violence left in the wake of World War II and the Partition. He was not the first Bengali filmmaker to turn to the Partition as the subject of his cinema; Nemai Ghosh's *Chinnamul* (1950), which offered Ghatak his first role as an actor and assistant director, portrayed the experience of Partition refugees. The film failed at the box office, and Nemai Ghosh left for Madras to work as a cameraman. Since Pakistan had a general ban on all Indian films, Ghatak's films were not screened in his birth city.⁸

The three films that I consider here, *Meghe Dhaka Tara*, *Komal Gandhar*, and *Subarnarekha*, often called Ghatak's Partition trilogy, discohere the unified narratives of Partition by pointing to mimetic doubles, symbolic concatenation between mythological and public woman, and sonic inversions that rupture the harmonizing closures of social realism. The films shuttle between the romantic pastoralism of the Bengal countryside and the urban squalor of modern life in post-Partition Bengal. Against the vista of a lost idyll, where all certitudes of family, friendship, and home have crumbled, appear twin-like orphans, a brother and a sister, tentatively holding hands. Ghatak dramatizes the relationship between the two Bengals through the metaphor of twins separated at birth. Undermining the idea of two coherent, independent nation-states of India and Pakistan, Ghatak points to the profusion of mimetic doubles in his films. For Ghatak, then, the promise and betrayal of mimetic kinship fuels the dark undercurrent of the antagonistic politics of the Partition.

***Meghe Dhaka Tara* (1960)**

Ghatak's *Meghe Dhaka Tara* (The Cloud-Capped Star), is based on a story by Shaktipada Rajguru, a Bengali novelist who moved to West Bengal after the Partition. My analysis of the film focuses on two

interrelated themes in Ghatak's Partition cinema: the idea of the public woman who, by entering the gendered precincts of the public sphere, played a pivotal role in establishing a sense of financial independence. I also consider the public woman as one half of a pair of twins, a recurrent concern in Ghatak's cinema, which enables him to use tropes of kinship to establish the affinity between person and place in Bengal.

The public woman

Born on the same day as the benevolent mother-goddess Jagaddhatri, Neeta mimetically embodies the generous and munificent daughter. The symbolism of the benevolent mother-goddess converges on the material particularity of Neeta, the film's central character. At once compassionate goddess and public woman, the iconic mother and the never-to-be-bride, Neeta's asexuality oscillates between competing representations of woman.

How do we unpack the dis coherent images of mother-goddess and public woman? What particular cultural, social, and historical associations does this image evoke for its viewers? The religious and gendered iconography of the resistance to the Viceroy of India, Lord Curzon's attempt to partition Bengal in 1905 laid the groundwork for the Swadeshi anticolonial movement in Bengal. Jasodhara Bagchi observes the ways in which the Hindu imagery of Bengal as the three-eyed mother-goddess gained cultural legitimacy in the wake of the first Partition of Bengal in 1905 and provided the foundation for community divisiveness.⁹ By narrating regional solidarity through particular cultural idioms, Bengal was invisibly structured as Hindu province. This further positioned non-Hindus as outsiders enfolded within a benevolent Hindu cosmogony. The naturalization of Bengal as Hindu region, reinforced by nation, community, and family, festered for a long time before 1947.

Ghatak reaches into this reservoir of images and mythologies, while simultaneously complicating them by aligning them with alternative tropes. After migrating to Calcutta as refugees from East Bengal, Neeta, the eldest daughter, provides for her erstwhile well-to-do but now-impoverished family. Like the goddess Jagaddhatri,

Neeta supports her beloved elder brother, a promising musician; her athletic younger brother; her seductive and conniving younger sister; her father, a former school teacher; and her mother, an embittered, devious woman.

Ghatak portrays the men in the family as particularly unmotivated; their languor oscillates from a depressive inertia to shrewd self-interest.¹⁰ Ghatak etches out the effects of genteel poverty on the somatic rhythms of the men: The father finds nostalgic recourse in repeated literary references to Yeats and Shakespeare – his stuttering literary references feebly attempt to recover a sense of home in poetry. The father's loss of phallic authority is portrayed through four successive images: He is displaced from his home to a refugee camp; he loses his legs in an uncanny accident; he witnesses his son descend from his class/caste privilege and join ranks with working-class laborers, and he observes his daughter endure the depredations that her own family heaps on her. The Yeats stutter suddenly gives way to a Zola-esque non sequitur: "I accuse!" exclaims the father, pointing a finger at the camera. This diegetic rupture awaits its full elucidation until *Subarnarekha*, Ghatak's final film in the Partition trilogy, in which the protagonist, Iswar, turns the accusing finger toward himself and insists on his complicity in the perpetuation of injustice toward women in post-Partition Bengal.

The elder son, Shankar, neglects to provide for the family and instead focuses on his enduring love for music at a time when all else seems to be in flux. In addition, Neeta's boyfriend, Sanat, also leans on her income to support his scientific research. Unwittingly, each character exploits Neeta's labor power to serve his/her own ends. Neeta's labor and exploitation by her family eventually rob her of her very life, as she succumbs to terminal tuberculosis – a disease that Ghatak well knows was also referred to as "consumption." Neeta is consumed; her labor gradually depletes her as she expends her life energy in supporting her loved ones.¹¹ Her labor production causes wear and tear; her work, which keeps her family alive, consumes her.

The emasculation of these men inverts the gendered dynamics of patriarchal, middle-class Hindu society. This inversion of gendered authority creates a preposterous family, as it apparently endows Neeta

with phallic authority. Ghatak's portrayal of preposterous domestic arrangements intervenes into nationalist discourses that imagined the nation itself as family.¹² Neeta's cannibalization by her family allows us to see how her family "employs" Neeta to repair their broken lives. In *Meghe Dhaka Tara*, however, the materialist critique is interrupted by archetypal images, most significantly that of the mother-goddess. Ghatak juxtaposes the archetypal images with gender inversions within the family to reinforce the distance between powerful female deities and their overwrought everyday counterparts. This convergence of archetype and gender role reversal demonstrates the contradictory demands placed on women in everyday life.

Several feminist scholars of Partition have warned against totalizing depictions of the sexual violence that marked women's bodies as bearers of community and tradition. Their important work has reminded us that the social dislocations produced in the wake of Partition also enabled some women to emerge into the public sphere as laborers who secured the main source of income for their families. For example, Jasodhara Bagchi notes, "The historic assertion of the refugee-woman as the tireless breadwinner changed the digits of feminine aspiration of the Bengali bhadramahila and altered the social landscape irrevocably."¹³ Likewise, Urvashi Butalia observes, "Just as a whole generation of women were destroyed by Partition, so also Partition provided an opportunity for many to move into the public sphere in a hitherto unprecedented way."¹⁴ In a similar vein, Tanika Sarkar notes, "Partition thus paradoxically intertwined great loss with new beginnings – a complex motion of history which is obscured in the conventional focus on the victimhood of women ... forced into new public and political roles and identities, they also came to possess spaces that had been denied to them in more secure and sheltered times."¹⁵ Gargi Chakravartty details the experiences of refugees from East Bengal and echoes the voices of aforementioned critics when she writes, "Too often, women's experience of Partition becomes a story of loss and victimhood, of violence and oppression."¹⁶ The contributions of these feminist scholars foregrounds the ways in which the cataclysmic event of the Partition also opened up many opportunities for women.

Recounting the stories of several refugee women from East Bengal who took on the responsibilities of financially supporting their families, Gargi Chakravartty writes,

The economic responsibility had so far been with the male members; it was always assumed that sons were to be the bread-earners of the family. Now daughters began to shoulder the burden, facilitating a major breakthrough in the attitudes of a patriarchal society . . . it was not a smooth transition. The older generation found it difficult to accept their daughters taking up office jobs and there was resistance; at most, family seniors would accept women working in the teaching profession. . . . Young girls from dislocated families of East Bengal were forced to ignore the social stigma and plunge into white-collar jobs; frequently, they went to college for graduation, not to groom themselves as future brides or housewives, but rather to qualify for jobs as clerks, typists, stenographers, sales girls etc.¹⁷

In Chakravartty's analysis, the post-Partition turmoil created the conditions for daughters to take the place of sons, consequently emancipating them from the weight of familial and cultural orthodoxy. Although Chakravartty's intervention affirms how the Partition enabled the emancipation of women from patriarchal strictures, her interviewees evince a less assured relationship to "liberation." For example, Hena Chowdhury, a migrant interviewee, holds the social and economic ruptures produced in the wake of the Partition accountable for her elder sister's inability to get married. As she puts it, "Partition was *responsible* even for this."¹⁸ Likewise, Sabitri Chattopadhyaya, another migrant interviewee, reiterates a similar sentiment, "Yes, what I definitely lost out on was having a family of my own. Every woman desires, at some stage to set up a home with a husband, children and others. I was no different."¹⁹ These comments suggest a complex negotiation with the idea of "the public woman": while averring that their emergence into the public sphere benefited them economically, in their own analysis these women suggest that becoming the breadwinner comes at the cost of family life.

Ghatak's cinema creatively intervenes into the binaristic paradigm of oppression/liberation by representing the subjections that inform Neeta's subjecthood. His portrayal of Neeta does not rehearse normative liberal ideas about inherent yearnings for agentive freedom; his depiction of the public woman does not resurrect her as the sovereign subject of liberal humanism who emerges from patriarchal shadows into the bright light of public life. Likewise, Ghatak portrays Neeta's mother in a complex manner; she is caught between her instinct toward self-preservation and the preservation of her family on the one hand, and her feelings for Neeta, which swing from shrewd manipulation to remorse.

In addition, the symbolic archetypes inform and illuminate the shifting subject positions within Ghatak's female characters. Several film scholars have observed the way in which the feminine principle in *Meghe Dhaka Tara* is split three ways: the cruel mother, the sensual sister, and the nourishing protagonist, Neeta. For example, Ashish Rajadhyaksha has noted:

The woman protagonist is split in three ways. Going beyond Neeta, it extends to the other women as well, so that the mother takes on the cruel aspect, the one with the most tenacious grip on life. Geeta is the sensuous female – the woman, as C.G. Jung describes in the social anima, who “feels where a man thinks.” Neeta, the third, is the nourishing force, the provider, the preserving, and nurturing heroine . . . when a woman takes on the role of all three, she becomes a towering, super-human force, corresponding then with the enormously powerful archetype of the Great Mother, to use the term by Erich Neumann.²⁰

However, an overemphasis of archetypal symbolism in the depiction of these female characters subdues Ghatak's sharp materialist critique. Reading Ghatak's characters entirely through archetypes reinforces stable interpretations and underestimates the critical force of his disjunctural depiction of post-Partition female subjectivity. In his portrayal of post-Partitioned female subjects, Ghatak concatenates archetypal symbolism with historical materialism. While drawing

out archetypal symbolism within his female characters, Ghatak also insists on their everyday material travails. The complex and contradictory portrayals of these women do not allow them to petrify into altogether symbolic archetypes.

For instance, Ghatak's depiction of the mother does not ossify her into the "cruel archetype." Rather, he masterfully demonstrates that despite the mother's empathy toward Neeta, her circumstances have forced her to behave in a manner in which Neeta's aspirations must be sacrificed for the survival of the family. This is most clearly exemplified in the scene where the mother witnesses the younger sister seduce Neeta's fiancé. Momentarily, the mother's face signals her remorse for the heartbreak that this sororal betrayal portends for Neeta. In this manner, Ghatak eschews freezing his characters into archetypes by delineating subjectivity itself as relational and contradictory. Unlike the coherent and stable characters in social realism, Ghatak's characters constellate complex and discontinuous selves depending on the particular social circumstances.

The convergence of mythological abstraction and everyday particularity produces a discoherent subject, a thematic concern, which is formally reinforced by the noncontinuity of the editing. Through the discontinuous filmic narrative, Ghatak discards conventional, uniform, linear narrativization.²¹ By constellating Hindu sacred mythology to the quotidian everyday, Ghatak offers us juxtapositions that rupture the unified liberal subject of social realism and shocks us out of our habituated and complacent modes of perception. Through destabilizing juxtapositions of sacred and secular tropes, Ghatak's disjunctural depictions expose not only the contradictoriness of post-Partition gendered subjectivity but also rupture the historical continuum and throw light on the heterogeneity and non-unitariness of the present.

In addition, Ghatak suggests that the story of Neeta is not unique. "Thousands of Nitas emerged in the lanes and bylanes of refugee colonies," writes Gargi Chakravartty. Ghatak connects Neeta's story with her double, an anonymous figure who uncannily conveys Neeta's *gestus*. As she walks to work in the sweltering heat, Shankar mistakes the stranger for his sister. Again, the closing image of the film depicts a Neeta-like woman on her way to work, when her slipper

snaps, rehearsing the identical opening scene when we see Neeta hobbling along with her broken slipper. In citing Neeta's gestus, Ghatak eschews the romantic, individual hero, and depicts the proliferation of similar public women. Neeta is inconceivable as a singular and autonomous character, situated outside the frameworks of history, society, and politics. In this way, Ghatak's film charts the banality rather than the singularity of the gendered violations in post-Partition Bengal.

Mimetic doubles

While the figure of Neeta constellates the prosaic clerical employee with mother-goddess, Ghatak also takes pains to demonstrate her twin-like kinship with her brother. Neeta's bond with her brother is played out against the vital, natural landscape. Ghatak reinforces the mimetic relationality between person and place by juxtaposing the story of the siblings – here Neeta and her brother – with that of the twin Bengals. Through natural rather than territorial tropes, Ghatak establishes the nonsensuous similarity between person and place. Clearly inspired by, and struggling with, Tagorean romanticism, Ghatak depicts a lush, verdant riverine landscape that resounds with music. Nature does not guarantee succor, however; the indifference of the unmoving mountains in the final scene, for instance, depicts the growing estrangement among kin; as Neeta's family gain prosperity, they become increasingly indifferent to her suffering. Her family's coldness toward her is mimetically reflected in the same mountains, once a source of solace to her.

Music weaves person to place, and Ghatak's use of Tagore's music, Rabindra Sangeet, is particularly appropriate to demonstrate this sense of embeddedness and love for the countryside.²² The musical structuration of songs within the Rabindra Sangeet repertoire reinforces the narrative dialectic between structure and play: The *dhaung* offers scope for improvisation but within the foundational structure of melody and variations of musical flourish. Formally, Tagore's Rabindra Sangeet drew inspiration not only from the high classical traditions of *ragas* and *dhrupads*, but also from the music of the Bauls, traveling folk performers from Bengal.²³ The folk music of

these mystic minstrels motivated Tagore. He appreciated the Bauls' intimacy with their gods, their syncretic religious practices, and their sense of play and ease as opposed to the reverential distance and orthodoxy of institutionalized religion.²⁴

Lyrically, Baul folk music suffuses the filmic narrative with songs urging the goddess Durga to return home. According to Ghatak, "The traditional songs that circulate in Bengal at the time when Uma is supposed to return to her in-laws' home have been used as part of the music in *Meghe Dhaka Tara*, just as wedding songs are profusely scattered throughout *Komal Gandhar*. I desire a reunion of the two Bengals. Hence the film is replete with songs of union."²⁵ The terrain of kinship and home provides the ground on which to rhythmically reinforce thematic concerns with unions and partitions between people and places.

Meghe Dhaka Tara opens with a shot of a large tree and a gurgling brook. The elongated musical notes of the *meend* reinforce Shankar's indolence and set it against the energetic pace of his working sister, Neeta, as she walks briskly toward him. He sings and the notes of Rabindrasangeet fill the air, fusing music and nature, while lyrically introducing the imagery of the hills, a theme that is returned to in the film's closing scene, which we discussed earlier. Later, Shankar renders a haunting version of the popular *khayal* in *Miyan Ki Malhar*, "*Karim Naam Tero*," which forewarns of storms that lie ahead.²⁶ Shortly thereafter, Neeta's health begins to deteriorate. While the narrative charts Shankar's growth from his tentative *hansadhwani* at the beginning of the film to his robust, full-throated song at the end, we simultaneously witness Neeta's regression as she collapses from overwork and loses her voice – her very breath – as she succumbs to tuberculosis.²⁷

Shankar's protest against Neeta's exploitation occurs just before the Rabindra Sangeet that brother and sister sing in unison. Invoking the image of the powerful storm, they sing, "The night the doors to my room came crashing down." The song interweaves erotic and religious imagery in the lyrics that call on its singer to "open out the emptiness of her home and life, and herald the arrival of the man she has waited for." The pathetic fallacy here augurs the impending storm in Neeta's



Figure 3.1 Neeta prepares to leave home. *Meghe Dhaka Tara* by Ritwik Ghatak. Courtesy National Film Archives of India.

life. A photograph captures the image of Shankar and Neeta, twin figures holding hands, standing against the immense hills. The clouds gather in the darkening storm outside, and the photograph crashes to the floor as the *raga* swells. The song heightens their bond with each other and estranges them from the rest of the family. The image of the twins, captured in the photograph, reinforces the nonsensuous similitude between person and place, and emphasizes the mimetic relationality between the twins.

The Rabindra Sangeet evokes the mood of romantic pastoralism, but this is sonically undercut by the sound of whiplashes, an aural refrain throughout the film. The musical scene closes with the sound of a whiplash, an aural signifier that resembles the non-diegetic sounds that signal Neeta's humiliation at the discovery of Sanat's infidelity. After discovering her sister and her boyfriend together, Neeta rushes downstairs from his apartment to pulsing sounds such as the whiplashes that we will hear later. She clutches her throat as if the sound were choking her very breath.

Neeta's health deteriorates, and she is moved to a sanatorium in the outskirts of the city, near the hills. She hears news of her family's many accomplishments from her brother, who continues to visit her. The film ends with a heart-piercing, Munchian scream. "I want to live," cries out Neeta, and her voice resounds, booming back from the unmoving, indifferent hills – a destination she once dreamed of as a utopic home. If nature had once channeled the sacred energies of the cherished landscape, Neeta now inhabits a disenchanting world. No sonorous music resounds through the hills; only her own desperate voice ricochets back to her.

Ghatak's acerbic portrayal of the public woman, the female breadwinner of the family, locates the gendered violence of the Partition not in spectacular instances of overt sexual violence, but in the banal interstices between private and public life. Although the Partition did provide spaces for women to leave their homes, take up jobs, and support their families, it also robbed some of these women of their sexual desires. The portrait Ghatak paints of the public women who took on the burden of supporting their families punctures the humanist triumphalism that denies the familial, sexual costs that some of these women had to bear.

In addition, through Ghatak's use of cross-gender twins, *Meghe Dhaka Tara* illustrates the disparity that undergirds the relationship between the pair: The divergent fortunes of the cross-gender siblings ensure that the success of the brother is erected on the squandered hopes of the sister. The post-Partition life of the public woman does not halt gendered disparities. In the process, Ghatak makes public the ignominies of "the private" as the very terrain on which fierce competition ensues over material resources. Here, intense manipulations, subterfuges, and betrayal among kin reveals the impossibility of romanticizing any idea of home.

Komal Gandhar (1961)

Komal Gandhar (The Gandhar Sublime or E-Flat), Ghatak's most hopeful of the three films made on the Partition, was produced in 1961. The filmic narrative evokes traumatic memories of the 1943 Famine and the 1946 Noakhali riots through its portrayal of refugee

migrations in the wake of Partition. In situating itself against these traumatic events that orphaned the two protagonists, the film returns to themes explored in *Meghe Dhaka Tara*: the public woman and non-sensuous similarity between person and place explored through twin protagonists. Ghatak reinforces his point about the Partition of the two Bengals by evoking the twin-like relationship between Bhriгу and Anasuya – both orphan figures – whose tentative union at the end of the film offers hope for a future that unites those who have been sundered by the border.

Theatre offers the exemplary paradigm in *Komal Gandhar* in which to situate Ghatak's political argument about the mimetic relationality between the two Bengals. Bhriгу and Anasuya belong to rival theatre groups but come together in an effort to make socially relevant art. Theatre and family, and theatre as family, are the tropes that Ghatak employs to make his case for imagining kinship across the border. Each of the films in Ghatak's Partition trilogy unfolds at the narrative intersection of art, grief, and history: in *Meghe Dhaka Tara*, the elder brother eventually gains recognition for his talent, but at the cost of his sister's life; in *Subarnarekha* (which we will examine in greater detail later) Abhiram writes fiction to capture the grief of the current historical moment while Seeta plays the *tanpura*. The turn to art to assuage grief in *Meghe Dhaka Tara* and *Subarnarekha* reveals artists who withdraw from the world in order to immerse themselves in their art. By contrast, *Komal Gandhar* uses the frame of theatre to suggest that it is not in withdrawal from society and into reflective art but rather in artistic sociality and political solidarity that the work of poesis must be undertaken.

Cultural production in general – and theatre in particular – was an important source of *communitas* for the refugees in West Bengal. The Indian People's Theatre Association (IPTA), the theatre branch attached to the Communist Party of India was a significant cultural organization with pan-Indian roots, and a critical resource that used dramatic means to raise questions about social justice. No longer confined to the four walls of a building, IPTA theatre activists vigorously sought nonelite, indigenous, and folk forms and eschewed the conventions of bourgeois proscenium theatre. As Jasodhara Bagchi and

Subhoranjan Dasgupta have observed, "The cultural movement of the IPTA was a direct response to the hunger and death of the people of Bengal in the 1943 famine, a perverse enterprise of the British government towards the war effort."²⁸ Gargi Chakravartty also notes:

Theatre occupied a prominent space in the life of these colonies, thereby further enriching a general trend towards theatrical activity characteristic of the time, popularly known as Group Theatre movement. . . . Since the staging of Nabanna during the Bengal Famine period, IPTA workers, spread themselves far and wide breaking down the four walls of the auditoria. A large number of refugee women joined the Group Theatre Movement – cultural activities helped in nurturing a cultural identity, and second, economic need brought women towards theatres, clubs, jattras, and the cinema.²⁹

Several schools, clubs, and *mandirs* sprouted within the refugee colonies and these social/institutional spaces offered some relief from the claustrophobia of the one-room houses. Cultural organizations surfaced even within homes. For example, arriving from Barishal in a refugee ship, Pritilata recalls her days in Shahidnagar Colony in the 1950s: "Shab Peyechhir Ashar (name of a Calcutta club) was very popular. We performed the Broto Chari Nritya (a kind of folk dance) there," and its message of social commitment, resonated through the lanes and bylanes of the colony.³⁰ Thus the cultural work not only reflected the concerns of the dispossessed but also supplied the frameworks within which refugees sought systems of social and emotional support.

An artist across many mediums, Ghatak wrote, performed in, directed, and produced numerous plays on the stage and in the streets for IPTA,. His significant influence with IPTA is evident in his play *Dalil* (Document), which was voted best production of the IPTA All-India conference in Bombay in 1953. Following differences with IPTA, Ghatak formed his own theatre group, Group Theatre, and staged his play *Sei Meye* in 1969 with patients from a mental asylum, where he had also resided for some time.

In *Komal Gandhar* Ghatak chronicles the ideological rift within IPTA, which ultimately led to its collapse. He exposes

the petty politics that enter into and eventually disintegrate this cultural institution. A brief history on IPTA will help to situate some of the conflicts that Ghatak attempts to depict in his film. In 1942, a group of young artist-activists in Bombay and Calcutta formed an informal organization called the Indian People's Theatre Association. Recognizing theatre's potential to rouse people into political action, and given the political ferment of their times, the theatre activists began staging plays to mobilize popular opinion. Inspired by "the Little Theatre Groups in England, the 1930s Works Progress Administration (WPA) theater project in the United States, the Soviet theaters, and the strolling players in China who staged antifascist plays to protest Japanese exploitation," IPTA was cosmopolitan in its narratives, methods, and beliefs, while simultaneously drawing on indigenous theatre forms of the places where they traveled and performed.³¹ By 1944, the IPTA had established regional presence in Malabar, Andhra Pradesh, United Provinces, Assam, Punjab, and Delhi.

Bijan Bhattacharya's *Nabanna* (Bountiful Harvest), directed by Sombhu Mitra (in which Ghatak assayed a role), indicts British colonial governance for the Bengal Famine and was critical in granting artistic and political legitimacy to IPTA. The subsequent plays took on various issues regarding social injustices at home and abroad: the war in Europe, the rise of fascism, increasing repression from British imperialism, and the heightened politics of the nationalist movement, in addition to speaking up against repressions faced by disenfranchised groups, including landless peasants and workers, among others. As Som Benegal puts it, "Whatever the origins of the I.P.T.A., it clearly directed its messages to the masses rather than to the bourgeoisie" and "took up issues of social abuse, religious bigotry, political oppression and economic exploitation."³²

However, competing interests between those who valued creative experimentation on the one hand, and those who valued social justice through theatre on the other, began to splinter IPTA. The tensions between those who wanted to develop a more robust and vital artistic technique and perfect the formal craft of their theatre, and those who were suspicious of formal perfection at the cost of

revolutionary content, eventually disintegrated IPTA.³³ Ghatak portrays this divisiveness in *Komal Gandhar*.

The film begins with a staging of *Dalil* (A Document), a play that Ghatak himself had written and directed in the 1950s. Bhrigu, the protagonist of *Komal Gandhar*, serves as artistic director to the theatre company, Nireeksha (Probe). *Dalil*, the play within the film, is set against the Partition of India in 1947 and centers on a family forced to leave its homeland in eastern Bengal. The film portrays the petty jealousies and competitiveness that cause Nireeksha and rival group Dakshinapath to part ways from a formerly single company. Anasuya, the star performer of Dakshinapath, does not subscribe to the petty quibbles of her fellow actors and decides to work with Nireeksha.

In *Komal Gandhar*, Anasuya portrays the consummate public woman: She is a theatre actress; an orphan; her fiancé resides in Germany; her aunt accuses her of associating with actors of poor reputation; her own fellow actors accuse her of “flirting” and warn Bhrigu to be careful of her. As in *Meghe Dhaka Tara*, here, too, Ghatak juxtaposes the public woman against mythological figures. If in *Meghe Dhaka Tara* the symbolism of Jagaddhatri, the benevolent daughter, abrades against the material, embodied travails of Neeta, then in *Komal Gandhar* Kalidasa’s Sakuntala chafes against his female protagonist, Anasuya.³⁴ In this way, Ghatak concatenates mythology and history; the narrative account is interrupted by the mythological story of Sakuntala, and as in *Meghe Dhaka Tara*, the mythological elements rupture the continuum of linear historicism.

In Kalidasa’s play *Abhijñānaśākuntalam* (Of Shakuntala Recognized by a Token), Sakuntala attempts to revive King Dusyanta’s lapsed memory of her through a ring, a token that he presents her with before taking leave of Sakuntala and the forest. In *Komal Gandhar*, too, material objects serve as repositories of memory (*smara*) – thus the diary of Anasuya’s mother and the gold medal of the grieving mother are handed over to Bhrigu, the surrogate son and the keeper of maternal memory. The mementos do not merely trace an alternate familial genealogy but also rupture the unitariness of the present by materially introducing an uncanny object that discloses the specters of the past. By accepting the precious possessions from Anasuya and

the grieving mother, Bhriḡu now serves as witness to the dispossessed dimensions of refugee subjectivity. Bereft of mother and son respectively, the refugee women appoint Bhriḡu as surrogate brother and son through material tokens that disclose the precarity of self-possession.

In addition to the mythological trope of Sakuntala, the sound design incorporates many Baul marriage songs, interweaving mythology and folk narratives of unions and separations. As with Neeta in *Meghe Dhaka Tara*, Anasuya is not unique or singular: For example, her characteristic posture, her gestus in Brechtian terms, reminds a passing political activist of his dead sister.³⁵ Ghatak demonstrates that Anasuya is not a romantic heroic protagonist but is rather one among many whose life was disordered by political history. The semblance of his sister, which the passerby glimpses in Anasuya's gestus and comportment, reinforces the ways in which Ghatak connects Anasuya's story to other public women in post-Partition Bengal.

Interjecting the mythological story of Sakuntala into *Komal Gandhar* makes visible the thematic concerns of self-absorption and sociality within the larger context of art and politics. In an important moment in the film, Anasuya rehearses the scene from Kalidasa's acclaimed Sanskrit play in which Sakuntala prepares to leave the forest to join King Dushyanta, but the entire forest comes alive and clings to her, refusing to let her go. Even the deer tugs at Sakuntala's sari to prevent her from leaving home. Anasuya's attempts to perfect the scene frustrate Bhriḡu, the director. He urges her to use her own "emotional memory" to arrive at the authentic affective register.³⁶ In a Stanislavskian vein, he urges Anasuya to rummage through her repository of traumatic memories and relive the pain of losing her home. Just as she is deep in thought, a little urchin repeats the scene in the play; he tugs at her sari, begging for alms. A later scene in the film again reinforces the juxtaposition of Sakuntala's story with that of Anasuya: She idly plays with the prop deer from the Sakuntala production while discussing her plans to leave home and join her fiancé, Samar.³⁷ The superimposed images of the mythological character and the public woman disintegrate the coherence of Anasuya as she is caught in the conflict of choosing between France to join her fiancé and leaving her home in Bengal.

In addition to counterposing myth and history, Ghatak returns to his evocation of sonorous nature and its mimetic constitution of the people in the region. Ghatak launches his critique of the narrow-mindedness of nationalist rhetoric that reduces the love of country to an acquisitive desire for territoriality. In a significant scene, the Nireeksha theatre group travels to Lalgola, a town by the Padma River. The players enjoy their break from rehearsals by the watching boats race along the glistening river. The boatmen's songs, offered to the river goddess, fill the air. In opposition to the static, rooted, and territorial claims of identity, Ghatak looks to the fluid, shape-shifting form of the river as the mode through which to narrate his love for place.

In Ghatak's films, the return to expansive nature from the stultifying refugee camps in the city does not offer any comforting closures.³⁸ The sonic register consistently undercuts the pictorial plenitude with sounds of whiplashes, outside the diegetic frame. *Komal Gandhar*, translated into "E-Flat," suggests that the account is never fully conveyed by ocularcentric modes of apprehension. The cacophonous soundscape disallows any harmonizing romance of the Partition. Even as the narrative moves toward a tentative union, the sonic register abrades against any easy closure.

Bhriгу and Anasuya wander off and reminisce about their childhood in East Bengal, which lies just across the river. The two orphans share their profound grief: Bhriгу affirms his attachment to East Bengal, "Why should I leave? Leave my fertile land, the Padma River, why should I go?" Anasuya recalls, "My mother died during the Noakhali riots. She was like a flame." Later in the film Anasuya discloses that Bhriгу's spirit reminds her of her mother's. "She had your eyes, Bhriгу," recalls Anasuya to Bhriгу, suggesting that he is almost her mother's son, almost her twin.³⁹ The metaphor of joining and disjoining that runs through the film evokes the image of Ghatak's beloved Bengal – disjoined and out of joint. The silver, glimmering Padma River flows like a mirror that simultaneously cuts and reflects the two Bengals.

BHRIГУ: This is a foreign country, across the river Padma. I can never go there. The rail track used to connect us, now it ends here abruptly and divides us from the other side.



Figure 3.2 Mimetic doubles: Bhrigu and Anasuya reflect the relationship between person and place. *Komal Gandhar* by Ritwik Ghatak. Courtesy National Film Archives of India.

ANASUYA: What happened to our Bengal?

BHRIGU: We had good lives, now we're suddenly destitute.

ANASUYA: I am so alone.

The camera pans to take in the vast sweep of the countryside and follows a railway line that is abruptly cut off as it reaches East Bengal. In the words of Ghatak, "When the camera suddenly comes to a halt at the dead end of a railway track, where the old road to East Bengal has been snapped off, it raises (towards the close of the film) a searing scream in Anasuya's heart."⁴⁰ In this scene the separation of the two Bengals triggers Anasuya's breakdown – her realization of how "alone" she is, how she longs for solace in togetherness. "East Bengal looks like a small green girl, smiling sweetly," she says, displaying tenderness for what was technically Pakistan, a country born from the violence of the Partition. Barely any words are spoken in this scene; the heavy silence conveys the depth of their melancholic grief for home.

Ghatak affirms that the union of the two Bengals cannot be located within a nationalist consciousness but rather within a regionalist one. It is the concrete sensuousness of *desh* (region), the familiar and beloved region that Ghatak yearns for, not the abstraction of nation. His contemporary, Satyajit Ray, also remarks that Ghatak is above all a Bengali filmmaker, an observation that does not provincialize Ghatak's cinema, but rather establishes Ghatak's love for the riverine place of his birth. Ghatak indicts the ways in which love for place is manipulatively inscribed as narrow nationalist aspiration for territoriality. He repeatedly portrays the sense of alienation among his protagonists as a consequence of being torn asunder from the life force of a dynamic embeddedness in which they lived prior to the Partition.

Unfortunately, the reception of *Komal Gandhar* confirmed the narrative of petty bickering that the film attempts to expose. Ghatak was deeply hurt when he discovered that his former friends sabotaged its screening.⁴¹ The rumor that hired goons, ostensibly by both the Communist and Congress Parties, were planted among the audience to disrupt the screening by sobbing loudly during funny scenes and breaking into uproarious laughter at the serious ones, still circulates in Calcutta today. In the words of film critic Partha Chatterjee: "The audience was alienated and the viewer-ship fell dramatically after a promising run in the first week. The film had to be withdrawn. He, being the co-producer, had to share the burden of the financial loss. It broke him. His descent into alcohol began soon after."⁴²

***Subarnarekha* (1965)**

Subarnarekha, a film that juxtaposes urban squalor and Tagorean pastoralism, concludes Ghatak's Partition trilogy. Ghatak completed *Subarnarekha* in 1962 and released it in 1965. The film follows the fortunes of Iswar, the upright liberal Brahmo Samajist who, along with his little sister, Seeta, lives in a refugee colony. Iswar takes Abhiram, a destitute boy, under his wing after some hoodlums abduct his mother for illegal squatting in the refugee colony. When his friend Rambilas solicits Iswar's skills as manager for his iron foundry, Iswar decides to leave Navjivan colony in Calcutta for Chhatimpur in rural Bengal. His

friend Harprasad, the leader of the refugee colony, is disappointed that Iswar's self-interest trumps his sense of social responsibility.

Years pass, and Abhiram and Seeta, who frolic along the banks of the Subarnarekha River like twin siblings, find that their fondness for each other has blossomed into romantic love. Abhiram turns down Iswar's advice to leave for Germany to train as an engineer. He chooses instead to leave for Calcutta with Seeta to eke out a living as a novelist. Against the wishes of her brother, Seeta turns down the marriage proposal already secured by Iswar and marries Abhiram instead. Iswar's intense, almost incestuous attachment to Seeta underpins his violent rejection of Abhiram as her potential spouse, but he masks his sexual jealousy by deploying prevalent rhetorics of caste inferiority.

Abhiram's artistic dreams do not come to fruition – his novels are deemed too nihilistic and depressing. Now working as a bus driver, Abhiram gets beaten to death by a mob after he accidentally kills a child. This leaves his wife, Seeta, and their child, Binu, destitute. Seeta takes to prostitution as a means to survive, but her first customer turns out to be her brother, Iswar, who lands at her door following a drunken evening with his friend Harprasad. Seeta kills herself. Iswar tries to convince the court that he is responsible for his sister's death but, much to his distress, is exculpated. The final scene depicts Iswar and Binu, Seeta's orphan son, walking together toward the Subarnarekha River, in a tentative search for home. As in his earlier films, *Subarnarekha* dramatizes the costs of territorial nationalism by demonstrating the violence of sundering what belongs together. The film displays the non-sensuous similitude between person and place, between twin Bengals.

Like the other characters in the trilogy, Ghatak etches out Brechtian protagonists: There are no singular, autonomous heroes in Ghatak's Partition oeuvre. Iswar is not the bildungsroman hero but rather one character among many, a refugee struggling to overcome the odds that history has placed against him. For instance, early in the film, we see Iswar as surrogate for the former manager at the iron foundry. In filling the vacant position, Iswar did not predict that his fortune would mimic that of his predecessor, whose mental stability comes undone in the wake of his daughter's elopement. Ghatak confirms the substitutability of his protagonists when he defends the plot

of *Subarnarekha*: "Take for instance the brother's turning up at his prostitute sister's. If we keep in mind the narrative's thematic thrust, we realize that any prostitute the guy visited would still turn out to be his sister. Here that point has been expounded mechanically: the aim is to allude to the general through the particular."⁴³

By dramatizing the divergent life choices that Iswar and his doppelgänger, Harprasad, make, as Partition refugees Ghatak exposes the competing pulls of liberal self-interest on the one hand and Marxist sociality on the other. How does one proceed with life after it has been rent asunder by traumatic historical events? Does one hold on to liberal self-interested motives or work with socialist aspirations to rebuild community? *Subarnarekha* displays the tension between liberal and Marxist normative aspirations through the themes of self-absorption and social relationality. The film opens with Harprasad's speech: "Life is not lived for oneself but for the other. The person who limits himself with his own interest is incapable of love."

The filmic narrative pivots around this tension between self-absorption and social responsibility as illustrated by the competing choices made by Iswar and his dark double, Harprasad. *Subarnarekha* suggests that neither position can offer any guarantee against further misfortune. The film traces how two men who chose different paths end up with similar fates. The choices are grounded in different ethical matrices – Iswar chooses by the logic of liberal self-interest, Harprasad is guided by the rhetorics of community activism. Both find that their loved ones – Iswar's sister and Harprasad's wife – commit suicide as a result of extreme poverty and desperation.

Here, too, Ghatak is discontented with telling a linear, historical story and takes pains to generate dialectical images through competing registers of history and mythology. Consider, for instance, a powerful scene early in the film: Two orphan children, Seeta and Abhiram, frolic along the banks of the river Subarnarekha, amid the abandoned ruins of an aerodrome. Playing in the middle of the material remainders of recent historical events of World War II, the children innocently turn the wreckage into their playground, turning the site of ruin and destruction into their generative playing field. Ghatak describes the scene: "A little boy and a little girl, fascinated with

wonder and lost amidst the ruins of that aerodrome, have gone searching for their forgotten past. . . . The two innocent creatures would not know that it is several such ruins of aerodromes that *lie behind the disaster that looms over them*. Still they play in the midst of destruction and ruin. How frightening their innocence is!"⁴⁴

As Seeta walks away from the abandoned airstrip, she runs into a *bahurupi*, dressed as Kali, the destructive goddess.⁴⁵ Terrified, she runs away. By juxtaposing the incongruous figure of the *bahurupi* against the banality of war detritus, Ghatak offers us a flash of illumination: we dread the *bahurupi* performer, while we normalize destructive technologies of state violence. According to Ghatak, "I sought the Bohurupée out. . . . In the film I have drawn on this theme of Mahakala in several ways to underscore the hollow values of modern life rent asunder from its moorings in the puranic tradition."⁴⁶

In addition to the sudden cinematic rupture created by the figure of the *bahurupi*, Ghatak also layers the social realist account of the character Seeta with the archetypal resonances of the mythological Seeta. Just as the archetype of Jagaddhatri layers over the character of Neeta in *Meghe Dhaka Tara*, and the story of Sakuntala informs the character of Anasuya in *Komal Gandhar*, here the narrative of the mythological Seeta underlies the story of the historical character of Seeta. Each film delivers its moment of shudder: Neeta's scream, "I want to live," which resounds in the hills surrounding the sanatorium; Anasuya's sudden breakdown at the Padma River; and Seeta's brutal suicide. All three expose the power of violent abstractions, constellated through a sacred-secular topos, as they converge on the body of the public woman.

Evoking the multiple displacements suffered by the mythological Seeta, Ghatak also points to the modern abstractions that perpetuate violence against women. He portrays the inability of the liberal justice system to indict a society that continues to brutalize its women. Iswar desperately pleads guilty to the court, but his plea is turned down. He is unable to convince the court of his role in the dehumanization of women. Ghatak demonstrates the continuity between Seeta's suicide and Iswar's trial and reveals the complicity of the justice system in the cruelty toward women.

The convergence of modern and mythological abstractions on the female is exemplified in the scene where little Seeta, on her arrival at the iron foundry, first hears the story of the mythological Seeta. Ironically, the former manager, whose own life story portends that of Iswar, narrates the story of Seeta's gendered displacements. The convergence between the character and the mythological figure is brought to its culmination at the end of the film, when, on recognizing her brother as her first customer, Seeta commits suicide. Seeta's death at the threshold of prostitution evokes the many accusations that the mythological Seeta suffered after her abduction by Ravana. In addition, as Erin O'Donnell has pointed out, Seeta's story is shadowed by the Sati mythology in the Puranic tradition.⁴⁷ Here Daksha, intoxicated by the heady perfumes of a magic garland, makes sexual advances toward his own daughter, Seeta. Ghatak exposes the precarity of kinship in his depiction of the incestuous undercurrents between Iswar, the inebriated brother, and his sister, now a prostitute. The dominant national account that narrates the nation as family and conversely posits the family as the building block for the nation comes undone. The shadow of incest falls on all three films but is most explicitly dramatized in *Subarnarekha*. Through the specter of incest, Ghatak not only reveals the rule-bound cultural dimensions of normative kinship but also exposes kinship as fragile, precarious, and susceptible to social rearrangements. Ghatak puts the reigning heterosexist imaginaries that figure nation as mother into crisis by making vulnerable the norms that structure kinship.

Secular violence

For Ghatak, modern war is the telos of instrumental rationality: "The ruins . . . lie behind the disaster that looms over them." It is this preposterous logic of the "before-behind" that Ghatak explores in a narrative that refuses the linear teleology of progressivist historical narratives. The preposterous here is akin to what Harprasad refers to as the *bibhatsa rasa*, the *rasa*, or pleasure, of disgust. Much like the Benjaminian "angel of history," the before-behind offers up a vista of time, abrading against what Benedict Anderson has

described as the "simultaneous empty homogeneous time of the nation."⁴⁸

By foregrounding the detritus of war, Ghatak exposes the ways in which state violence has been normalized in modern society. Ghatak makes Harprasad the most articulate critic of modern society's moral bankruptcy. In a scene toward the end of the film, Iswar and Harprasad indulge in a drunken binge; the men refer to alcohol as regenerative *amruth*, sacred nectar. In his inebriated state, Harprasad remarks: "The way is like a sharp razor's edge. That's what the sages tell us. They didn't see the atom bomb. Never. They haven't seen the war, haven't seen famine. Haven't seen the riots, haven't seen the country divided. The hymn for worshipping the sun is unnecessary."⁴⁹ This scene signals the preposterous modern world through a number of sonic reversals: the *malhar raga*, suggestive of generative monsoons, plays against the downpour in the filth and gloom of Calcutta; a classical Hindustani Khayal melody plays in the midst of gambling; Sanskrit *shlokas* are recited in the nightclub; and finally the sonic juxtaposition of Patricia from Federico Fellini's *La Dolce Vita* when Iswar arrives at his sister's doorstep against the squalor of her life; the dis coherence of image and sound produces a shudder of horror, which culminates in the expressionist portrayal of Seeta's suicide.

The partitions between the sonic and visual juxtapositions sensuously alert us to the multiple disorientations produced in the wake of the Partition. In the words of Ghatak, "Literally in *Subranarekha* the problem that I have taken up is that of the refugees. But when I use this word, 'refugee,' or displaced person, I do not mean only the evacuees of Bangladesh. In these times all of us have lost our roots and are displaced; that's my statement. To elevate the term 'displaced' from merely the geographic to the more generic sense has been my intention."⁵⁰ Ghatak illustrates the many ways in which these two men have lost their material and moral ground. The mimetic figures of Iswar, Harprasad, and the former manager are deterritorialized by the loss of the women in their lives. In the absence of these women, they no longer recognize themselves.



Figure 3.3 Kinship in crisis. *Subarnarekha* by Ritwik Ghatak. Courtesy National Film Archives of India.

Ghatak carefully etches out the powerful bond between Iswar and Seeta early in his film. In an intensely intimate scene between the two siblings, Iswar tells Seeta that she reminds him of their mother: “Your style of scolding reminds me of her,” he says, “the same stiff neck, same frown, same walk even. Sometimes, I get startled. I feel like I am being scolded by my mother.” Seeta strokes Iswar’s hair, “I am your mother.” Iswar raises her chin, her slender head poised upon his fingers, “You won’t leave me like our mother did?” he asks. Seeta remains silent. This scene, at once erotic, incestuous, and intimate, offers a moment to witness the ways in which the self is composed like a palimpsest, full of traces left by others. Her decision to marry Abhiram against the wishes of her brother, then, literally pulls the ground from under his feet. Her departure from his life leaves Iswar forlorn, disoriented, and orphaned. He stumbles through a preposterous world, one that leads him, at the end of the film, to seek out the sexual services of his sister.

Against the ravages of an impoverished migrant life and the vortex of gloom and destruction, the glimmering Subarnarekha River serves as a utopic idyll. When they arrive from the refugee colony, Nabajeevan, to the iron foundry, the assistant remarks to little Seeta that beyond the Subarnarekha is a beautiful land with big butterflies. Iswar chides the assistant for telling lies. Nevertheless, this idyllic image of an imagined home across the river impresses itself on Seeta's mind. The desolate orphans summon the memory of the Subarnarekha to help them get through the depredations of life. Their utopic idea of home, a desperate fiction, is rooted not in territory but in the imagination, and it is summoned through the power of music.

As with his earlier films, Ghatak juxtaposes the disenchantment of urban life against the embeddedness of person and place in rural Bengal.⁵¹ Seeta's early Krishna kirtan songs narrate the aching desire for a reunion between the twin-like Radha and Krishna and metaphorically evoke the twin Bengals separated by an artificial border.⁵² Seeta, a trained musician, sits out in the fields playing on her *tanpura* and singing songs of Krishna kirtan. The songs that Seeta sings evoke the unmarried, non-hierarchical relationship between Radha and Krishna, a playful and joyous relationship, where roles are reversed and re-reversed in celebration and delightful abandon. Here there is no hard dividing line between the one and the other, "there is an implied interchangeability and flow."⁵³ Set against a horizon of hills and rivers, Seeta's love song to her twin, full of desire and yearning, transforms to a desultory tune in the slums of Calcutta where she sings, plaintively, to entice customers.

The Rabindra Sangeet offers a repeated refrain in the film. Seeta sings the song "*Aaj dhaaner khetey*" as a happy and carefree child, and later she sings the song to her own son, Binu. After the death of his father, Seeta comforts her son and assures him that they will move to a new home:

BINU: Where's the new house?

SEETA: When I was your age, a person showed it to me. The winding river, and blue, blue hills; up above the butterflies flutter around and sing songs.

BINU: Have you been there?

SEETA: No, I've only seen it from afar.

BINU: I will go to Subarnarekha.

Iswar is tormented because he is unable to rid the song from his head and is taken aback when Binu breaks into the same song after his mother's death. As Chidananda Dasgupta has observed, "Time and again, Ghatak's films take us to the brink of despair, and retrieve us – often with a Tagore song."⁵⁴ Through the sonic register, Ghatak exposes the ways in which the past suffuses the present: Seeta lingers in Binu's song as a ghostly presence, flickering between memory and specter. Ghatak also takes this a step further, however, and like Tagore, seems to ask, "Who are you in the deep recesses of my inner being?" "Who am I," he seems to ask, "if I am composed of traces of you?"

The lingering traces of the nonidentical, persisting in gestus, in expression, and in music points to a proliferation of specters that undoes the autonomous, sovereign subjects of the Partition. The spectral traces confound not only the progressivism of historical time but also the rational confidence in the absolute autonomy of partitioned subjects. Ghatak evokes porous and indistinct boundaries between the past and the present, between the self and the other. The dissolution of borders separating partitioned subjects affirms the enigmatic traces of the nonidentical that compose the self. In each of his Partition films, Ghatak explores the ways in which grief disperses the boundedness of the sovereign self.

As they walk toward the distant hills, enveloped in fog, Binu asks Iswar, his uncle, "Mother used to say that big, colorful butterflies play among the flowers by the Subarnarekha River. Is it true?" The story has come full circle. Iswar, however, has shifted from an understanding of mimesis as falsehood to an understanding of the sustaining power of mimetic homes in the imagination. "Yes, it is true," he affirms to his young nephew. Truth is released from the prison house of rational empiricism; the film charts Iswar's growth by revealing his shifting conceptions of truth from a Brahmo-Samajist rationalist idea of truth to a passionate appeal for a juridical acknowledgment of truth to a more supple understanding of truth – one that recognizes

the power of the imagination as a force for truth. The Subarnarekha beckons the two orphans, the weary uncle and the hopeful boy, and they walk toward it in their search for home. In each of his Partition films, Ghatak offers an idea of home, rooted not in territoriality, but in the powerful terrain of the imagination.

4 The poetics and politics of accommodation

The world will endure even when I am gone, Someone will
remain who bears my likeness.

Nasir Kazmi

Mohan Rakesh's short story "The Owner of Rubble" begins with a melancholy moment.¹ Abdul Gani, a frail and elderly man from Lahore, steps off the bus from Lahore with tear-stained eyes and a toothless smile. After seven years, he is again in his beloved hometown, Amritsar. He looks around him; Amritsar, "a place of wonder and surprise," is both familiar and strange.² His gaze, illumined by his memory, caresses the contours of his cherished city – the same bustling marketplace, a new cinema, a vanished neighborhood. It was seven years ago, in 1947, on a hurried and manic night, that Gani took flight from home. Where was it now?

Searching for his home in a city of strangers, Gani comes upon a crying child. Her elder sister, in an effort to placate the child says, "Stop crying, you little devil! If you don't that Muslim will catch you and take you away!"³ This remark, at once banal and bigoted, triggers memories of Partition when thousands of women and children were abducted.⁴ The sister's strategy to silence the child digs deep into the traumatic repository of the Partition. Soon, a rumor circulates that a Muslim was trying to kidnap a child. Women and children rush indoors, quite literally rendering Gani the outsider. Unmindful of these quotidian partitions, Gani tentatively hobbles along to find

Kazmi, "Daem abad rahegi duniya/Hum na honge koi hamsa hoga," in *Generations of Ghazals*.

his home. He arrives, guided by memory and strangers, at a heap of stone and ash. His home was burned down during the Partition riots.

In an uncanny moment, Gani turns questioningly to Raka, a local hoodlum, lying regally by the rubble. Raka is startled. Does the old fool know that Raka killed his family, that he deployed the rhetoric of religion in order to acquire Gani's newly constructed house? Unfortunately for Raka, someone set the house on fire, and now Raka's plans, too, smolder in the rubble.

The very windows that were shut as the screams of Gani's son and his family echoed in the streets are now pried open to witness the confrontation between victim and perpetrator. The silent witnesses at the windows watch keenly as Gani intuitively looks away from Raka. He stoops down to examine the remains of his home, standing beneath the charred frame of the door, at the cusp of an inside and outside, ironically symbolizing the breakdown of the border separating the home from the world.

"The Owner of Rubble" converges on home as both concrete and conceptual ground to consider how displaced people such as Gani inhabit a disjunctive temporality, neither securely at home in the new nation nor fully severed from the old. The story illuminates the polarization of the neighborhood into insiders and outsiders and interrogates the forms of sociality that Partition disrupted and engendered. The real or potential radical severance from place offers a moment to consider home not only as a site of stability and refuge but also as one fraught with betrayal and cruelty. The repressions inherent in the making of national identity compel minority and refugee subjects on either side of the border to confront the unhomeliness of home.⁵

Although Muslims, Sikhs, and Hindus were the primary players in the dramas of the Partition, it is instructive to consider the role played by other religious minorities. For example, Bapsi Sidhwa's novel *Ice-Candy Man* explores the ways in which the minority community of Parsis in Lahore negotiated the ethnic violence during the Partition; the Parsi child narrator, Lenny, unwittingly colludes in the capture of Ayah.⁶ Likewise, Manto's short story "Mozel" reveals the sartorial disguises that were assumed to confound religious identities; here, a Christian woman puts herself at risk to assist her Sikh friend during

the riots.⁷ These narrations illustrate that Parsi and Christian minority communities, among others, often served as witnesses and sometimes as active collaborators who facilitated or thwarted the designs of perpetrators.

In this chapter, I specifically address the ways in which Hindu and Muslim minority communities configured questions of displacement, national belonging, and gender. By looking at two performance texts, M.S. Sathyu's film *Garm Hawa* (1973) and Asghar Wajahat's play *Jis Lahore Ne Dekhiya* (1988), I argue that home, property, and the idea of accommodation provide an urgent lens through which to consider the anxieties regarding belonging in the partitioned subcontinent.⁸ These texts demonstrate that the dialectical tension between nation and migration is negotiated along the vectors of region, religion, and gender. I explore how mimetic doubleness disturbs the symmetries of insider/outsider and unsettles the spatial and social binary divisions of the Partition, illustrated in Mohan Rakesh's "The Owner of Rubble."

Dominant narrative constructions of the nation foreground the "natural" link of person to place. This troubled the incorporation of refugees into India and Pakistan and cast the minorities as potential migrants with divided allegiances. The trope of roots, uprootedness, transplantation, hybridity, and other botanical metaphors pervade Partition discourse.⁹ Liisa Malkki argues that, through the abundance of botanical metaphors, the relationship of people to place is naturalized in discursive and representational practices. Everyday discourses construct the nation, as well as culture, as inherently rooted in place, reflecting "a sedentarist metaphysics" in scholarly and in everyday, thinking.¹⁰ Because of these sedentarist habits of thought, displacement itself is constructed as aberrational, with uprootedness connoting a pathological condition signaling a loss of moral character.

In the case of Partition refugees – despite the state's efforts mounted to rehabilitate displaced people – dominant representations in the public sphere continued to cast them as threatening orderly civic life. For example, Jawaharlal Nehru, the first prime minister of India, expressed his sadness at the revival of increasing communalization in postcolonial India thus: "All of us seem to be getting *infected*

with the refugee mentality or worse still the RSS mentality. That is a curious finale to our careers."¹¹ M.K. Gandhi also spoke extensively about the "shortcomings" of refugees and rebuked their errant ways, including their proclivities to the black market, petty thieving, bribery, and acts of violence and chided their failure to be "sober, responsible and industrious citizens."¹²

As figures of national incorporation or abjection, refugees and minorities were uneasily accommodated in dominant nationalist narratives. Whereas the refugees' iterative constitution as citizens in the new nation-state required a permanent displacement from their homes, minorities were often viewed as potential immigrants. Religion and region played a key role in the formation of citizenry: The assimilation of Hindus and Sikhs into India was less thorny than was that of Muslims, whose motivations for staying in India were deemed suspect. The parallel was also true: A Muslim's choice to stay back in Pakistan was considered obvious, but a Hindu's choice to stay in Pakistan posed much more of a problem.

The new nation-state of Pakistan created in 1947 consisted of two geographic masses of land – West and East Pakistan, separated by many hundreds of miles of Indian territory. The overwhelming ethnic, cultural, and linguistic differences between the "two Pakistans" undermined the myth of Muslims constituting one nation. The alienation and bitterness of the Muslims of Bengal fostered a secessionist movement in Bangladesh, led by the Awami League, agitating for East Pakistan's autonomy. On March 25, 1971, General Yahya Khan, president of Pakistan, launched an attack on Bangladesh. On December 3, 1971, Indira Gandhi, the Indian prime minister, launched a full-scale intervention to crush West Pakistan and secure Bangladeshi independence. On December 16, the Pakistani regime agreed to an unconditional surrender, and Bangladesh was established as an independent nation-state under the Awami leader Sheikh Mujib ur Rahman

Garm Hawa, made in the year following this major war between India and Pakistan, is a meditation on the 1947 Partition. The proximity of the 1971 war once again brought to the surface questions of refugees, minorities, gendered violence, and incipient nation formations. The 1971 war confirmed that the Muslims did not constitute

“a nation” and made apparent the bigotry toward Bengalis in West Pakistan. Made in the wake of the 1971 war, the film enables a consideration of the fraught negotiations of those who must choose either to live in their homeland as minority subjects or leave as refugees for a new nation-state. In many ways, depicting the 1947 Partition also enables Sathyu to reflect on the questions that arose in response to the 1971 war; refugee migration and gendered violence were central to the upheavals in both 1947 and 1971.

Gender and minority in *Garm Hawa*

M.S. Sathyu's debut film, *Garm Hawa* (Hot Winds), was released in 1973. *Garm Hawa* captures the conflicted negotiations that Muslims, who chose to stay back in India as minority subjects, experienced during Partition. The filmic narrative politicizes the geography of the local community in Agra by examining the classed and gendered tensions of post-Partition Muslim communities in India.

Garm Hawa is based on an unpublished short story written by controversial Urdu writer Ismat Chughtai, an important feminist voice of the Progressive Writers' Association (PWA). The PWA, established in 1937, was a leading literary organization that wielded considerable influence during India's independence struggle. Kaifi Azmi, who adapted the story for the screen, was also a prominent figure in the PWA, and Indian People's Theatre Association (IPTA). “I was born in enslaved India, have lived in independent secular India, and God willing, I will die in socialist India,” declared Azmi, who fervently held on to a Nehruvian vision of a socialist and secular nation.¹³ IPTA (which I discussed in Chapter 3) was formed five years after the PWA and was also a left-wing cultural organization that fostered artistic responses to the political issues of the day. Founded in Bombay in 1942, IPTA was dynamically engaged in the anticolonial movement. The director, M.S. Sathyu, was affiliated with IPTA and continues to be involved in theatre, film, and cultural activism.

Garm Hawa imbibed the formal and aesthetic features of PWA and IPTA, especially its advocacy for social change through the genre of social realism. *Garm Hawa* deviated from dominant portrayals of Muslims in the “Muslim social” genre of Hindi cinema such

as *Mughal-e-Azam* and *Pakeezah*, which employed lyric realism to evoke and sometimes mourn, in nostalgic tones and in heightened verse, the passing of the rich poetic and expressive traditions of Urdu from public life.¹⁴ Unlike the images of cultured leisure that the “Muslim socials” proffered, *Garm Hawa* crafted its artistic idiom from the everyday, the marketplace, the banal world of commerce and daily cares.

Garm Hawa was shot entirely on location in Agra. The film was held up for eight months by the Censor Board, which feared that *Garm Hawa*, in the political climate of the 1971 war, would evoke memories of sectarian violence and trigger communal tensions. After some deliberation, the film was released to high commercial and critical acclaim. The film steered clear of the violence of the Partition and instead focused on the question of migration – real and imagined – that haunted the nation’s Muslim minorities. Ironically, the very film that was expected to provoke communal tensions was eventually awarded the National Award for Best Film on National Integration.

The film explores a Muslim family’s experience of Partition and examines their ambivalence about whether to stay in India as minority subjects or migrate to Pakistan as *muhajirs*, the term for Muslim refugees in Pakistan. The plot revolves around Salim Mirza (played by veteran Balraj Sahni), a well-to-do middle-aged shoe manufacturer in Agra, whose family has been in the leather business for generations. Thus far, his business has prospered because of his diligence, compounded by the fact that high-caste Hindus consider touching leather inauspicious and have stayed away from the business.¹⁵ Post-Partition India, however, rewrote professional mores in north India, and several upper-caste migrant populations rapidly took to the trade in order to find means to survive, disordering earlier forms of communities through their lack of adherence to caste proprieties. The desperation that many high-caste migrants experienced forced them into occupations that were traditionally considered inferior to their caste. The Partition altered the caste-dictated professional landscape of the new nation-state and rendered the traditional occupations of certain castes and classes open to eager and desperate migrants. *Garm Hawa*

illustrates how this changing professional physiognomy deals a blow to Mirza's business and consequently to his family as well.

In circumstances exceedingly hostile to Indian Muslims, Mirza's elder brother, Halim – ostensibly a fierce advocate of the Muslim League – secretly leaves for Pakistan with his wife and son, Kazim.¹⁶ Halim Mirza, unlike his brother, is portrayed as an opportunist who took to his heels, reneging on his allegiance to Indian Muslims. His performance of zealous patriotism is constantly foregrounded in the film as artifice and as theatre – for example, his declamatory speeches, punctuated by the ringing sounds of applause. Through various nondiegetic techniques, the film highlights the constant theatrics of his behavior. His departure is read as a betrayal of India's Muslims, who are left to fend for themselves in a dire and forbidding political climate. The understanding remains, however, that Halim's son, Kazim, once settled, will return to marry Salim's daughter, Amina, with whom Kazim has been in a romantic relationship.

Garm Hawa explores how the specter of real and imagined migrations haunts the Muslim minority subject. Salim's eldest son, Bakr, leaves for Pakistan in frustration when he encounters unrelenting professional discrimination against Muslims. His youngest son, Sikander, a fresh, first-rate graduate, cannot find a job, as Muslims are viewed suspiciously as potential migrants to Pakistan. The wedding of his beloved daughter, Amina, to Kazim, who sneaks across the border to India, is called off when the police arrest and deport him.¹⁷ After her failed courtship with Kazim, Amina gets romantically involved with Shamshad (Mirza's sister's son, whose father skips the border to escape his debts). He, too, eventually, leaves for Pakistan and marries another woman. Amina, in abject despair, commits suicide.

To make matters worse, Salim Mirza gets embroiled in a minor scuffle as a result of which he gets injured and his factory is set on fire. Hounded by other traders and accused of being a Pakistani spy, Mirza finally decides to migrate to Pakistan. On the way to the station, the family's *tanga* (horse-drawn carriage) is obstructed by a huge procession of young activists. In the final scenes of the film, Mirza decides to stay on in India and fight for secularism and class equality by joining

the protesting masses. He gets off the *tanga*, hands the house keys to his wife, and joins the protest.

The film opens with a series of photographs of key political figures: Gandhi, Jinnah, Nehru, and Mountbatten, interspersed with images of migrating masses on trains, ships, and *kafilas* (foot convoys). The relay of photographic images concludes with a profile of Gandhi as the picture “falls” – in three brisk, abrupt frames – to the gunshots that shatter the image. The aural soundscape evokes unions and leave-takings through wedding songs on the one hand and sounds of trains on the other.

The opening image depicts the figure of Salim Mirza standing, unswervingly, against the backdrop of a train that slowly begins to move. After visually establishing the dialectic between stillness and motion, nation and migration, the opening dialogues underscore this theme. “Why are these trees uprooted?” asks the driver of the cycle rickshaw that is taking Mirza home. “These hot winds” (*garm hawa*), “they will uproot even the sturdiest trees,” he responds. “Even the remaining few will soon succumb to its pressure.” The “hot winds” signal the gathering momentum of strident ethnic nationalisms. The image of the train captures the imminence of massive dislocation, and its haunting, aural reverberations return, intermittently, to punctuate the film. Ironically subverting the colonialist image of the train as the purveyor of the industrial modernity that united the length and breadth of the diverse nation, the Partition transformed its image into a foreboding emissary, an uncanny reminder of the “gifts” of slaughtered bodies sent across in trains by Muslims in Pakistan and Hindus and Sikhs in India.

The plot revolves around Salim Mirza, an upright Muslim citizen, and portrays the material and emotional hardships that he endures in partitioned India. As a patriotic Indian citizen, Mirza is committed to its secular ideal and is reluctant to leave. The film, however, reveals the ambivalent ways in which Muslim men are configured as national subjects. In the filial metaphors that equate the nation with the mother, the Indian son emerges invisibly structured as Hindu and upper caste. Relegated to the status of minority citizen, the Muslim male subject emerges not as the natural son of the

nation but rather as the minority subject who needs the protection of the state.

In *Garm Hawa*, the figure of Salim Mirza, patriot yet pariah, represents both the outcaste son and the minority citizen who requires the paternalistic support of the state. Capturing the prevailing ambivalence towards the Muslim patriot, *Garm Hawa* dialogically refracts the dominant political rhetoric surrounding Muslims at that time. Muslims in post-Partition India were frequently exhorted to prove their patriotism. Pandey recounts an occasion when “the renowned Socialist leader, Dr. Ram Manohar Lohia, speaking at a public meeting in Delhi on 11 October 1947, urged [India’s Muslims] to ... ‘surrender arms and ... be loyal citizens of India, ready to fight, if need be, against Pakistan or any other country.’”¹⁸ Likewise, Govind Ballabh Pant, Congress chief minister of Uttar Pradesh, in a speech to Indian Muslims again underlined their need to perform their loyalties to the Indian nation-state, as their status as Muslims marked them out as a vexed category: “Indian Muslims should ‘realize clearly’ what loyalty to the nation would mean if Pakistan invaded India,” he declared. “Every Muslim in India would be required to shed his blood fighting the Pakistani hordes and each one should search his heart now, and decide whether he should migrate to Pakistan or not.”¹⁹ Gandhi also echoed the fears of the changeability of Muslim allegiance: “They must understand that if they are to live with the Hindus as brothers they must be loyal to the Indian Union, not to Pakistan.”²⁰

Whereas public discourse surrounding the question of Muslim allegiance to the Indian nation positioned the minority as potential refugee with dual national fidelities, *Garm Hawa* explores the ambivalence toward Muslims that laced both professional and private attitudes. Through clever filmic technique, M.S. Sathyu plays into and manipulates the audience’s sense of us and them, majority and minority positions, in the post-Partition state. Interrupting conventional realist identification with the protagonist, Sathyu instead sets up a mimetic relationality between the spectator and the invisible, empowered citizen.

At three key points in the film, the audience is positioned uncomfortably as the empowered, “natural” son of the nation. In the

first such moment, Salim Mirza goes to take a loan from the Punjab National Bank. Rather than showing Salim Mirza's dialogue with the official, the camera positions the film audience in the banker's position: Salim Mirza pleads to *us*. By suturing the gaze of the spectator to that of the privileged Indian citizen, Sathyu achieves a remarkable tension, positioning the audience to see, even to enact, the quotidian workings of discriminatory practices against minorities. This technique is repeated when Salim Mirza interviews to move into a new house; here, we occupy the position of the landlord. Finally, we are identified with the interviewer during Sikander's job interview, in which he is told, "Why don't you go to Pakistan? It'll be easy for you people there."

By rendering invisible the empowered positions of the banker/landlord/employer (privileged through their positioning as Hindu, upper-caste, male subjects) and fusing the audience's perspective with that of the decision makers, Sathyu compels his audience to mimetically inhabit the position of the privileged citizen and evaluate his own complicity in the financial, territorial, and professional disempowerment of the minority citizen. In all three cases, the ideal national subject undemocratically denies the Muslim his legal rights by rehearsing the conceptual slippage of Muslim from minority citizen to potential refugee. Forcing the audience to mimetically occupy these positions of power, Sathyu exposes "our" complicity in the routine discriminations that Muslims encounter in their everyday lives.

If Muslim men in India trouble the logic of the nation as family, then Muslim women were simply invisible in the emergent national imaginaries. *Garm Hawa* presents a poignant account of the ways in which Muslim women negotiate their relationship to place through patrilocal kinship. Sathyu's depiction of the three women – grandmother Daadi, mother, and daughter Amina – and their relationship to home is a telling indictment of the gendered entitlements of the new nations in making.

Consider, for instance, the grandmother's attachment to her home. The home, for Daadi, is not merely a place of residence for the living but, more importantly, an enclosure that entombs the dead. When Daadi first hears about the possibility of being evacuated from

their property she cries out in alarm, "Your father's bones are buried here. I won't leave." Likewise, when the family moves out of the house, Daadi hides in the lumber room to avoid leaving. As she is physically lifted and carried away from her mansion, she cries, "How am I going to face him on Judgment Day?" The film depicts the violence of internal migrations where one does not need to travel across the border to become displaced. For Daadi, leaving home is tantamount to abandoning her husband, a violent act of betrayal and desertion. Daadi is unable to reconcile such a powerful relationship to home with the instrumentalist logic of "evacuee" property.

Daadi rejects the empiricist logic of the state's intervention into their family property: "Who is going to make me leave my *haveli* [house]? I only gave birth to two sons. Who is the third *haqdar* [claimant]?" Daadi looks both backward at her spectral husband and forward to her sons as the legitimate owners of her property. When the Mirzas finally move to their cramped new house, Daadi occupies the upstairs room so she can look at the *haveli* from there.²¹ As she gets more frail and sickly, Daadi insists on visiting her beloved *haveli* one final time. A *doli* (bridal palanquin) carries her to her home, and sounds of wedding music accompany her arrival and rehearse the scene of her wedding. Once on the soil of her former floor, Daadi's wistful gaze caresses the contours of her *haveli*, the aural soundscape teeming with voices from her past. Then, suddenly, she dies, and the soundscape resounds with the screeching sound of a train.

Daadi's relationship to her home signals the competing notions of property at play in conceptions of accommodation, ownership, and belonging. Her relationship to her *haveli* is mediated through her husband and sons. Women's dependent status on men not only made patrilocal residence normative for citizenship, but also made women themselves figure as movable property.²² Vazira Zamindar explains the predicament:

Women were not entitled to autonomous citizenship because Article 5 of the citizenship laws by which their "domicile" was vested in that of their father or husband. Because permits were issued to both individuals and households, women,

often incorporated in households, moved between the two states without directly engaging contestations of citizenship. However, with the onset of the passport system [in 1952] when women applied as individuals for passports their legal status as dependants became of importance.²³

If Daadi is physically displaced from her *haveli* as a result of the “evacuee” clause, for Amina home itself is the scene of her displacement. *Garm Hawa* depicts the mimetic relationality between Daadi and Amina: Amina figures as Daadi’s double –her deformed shadow. The sound of the impetuous train indexing the real death of Daadi also portends the social death of Amina as a rejected bride. This scene of Daadi’s homecoming in a *doli* is deliberately juxtaposed with the subsequent scene where Shamshad leaves for Pakistan on the train. The juxtaposition of Daadi’s arrival at her home and Shamshad’s departure to Pakistan also presages Amina’s failure to be a bride and signifies her social and personal estimation as a failed woman. It is no coincidence, then, that most of Amina’s interaction with all characters in the film revolves around the question of her wedding. Similarly, the scene of Amina’s burial invokes Daadi’s plaintive voice: “Everyone is leaving. No one even wants to carry a fistful of earth for my burial.” The corresponding image reveals Salim Mirza’s fist slowly pouring soil onto her grave. Salim Mirza buries his daughter, while his mother’s words reverberate in his memory; the mimetic doubling disperses the unity of the funeral scene.

If the relationship between Daadi and her property is conserved through her role as wife and mother, then Amina, through her failure to inhabit either of these roles, is uneasily accommodated within normative patriarchal frameworks. She finds herself “excessive,” an idea elaborated during the scene in which the family moves to a smaller house, and the mother asks Amina and Sikander to share a room. Amina quarrels that the house is too small, in response to which Sikander quips, “The house is not too small; you are too much.” Sikander’s innocent teasing raises the unpleasant reality that within the Muslim Personal Law in India – in both Hanafi and Shia law – women receive half the share of their male brothers, so Amina

as an unmarried woman within the parental home drains her family's resources. A mounting sense of unhomeliness haunts Amina, who suddenly exceeds her shrinking world and finds herself displaced while at home.

The escalating unhomeliness comes to a crisis when Amina realizes that Shamshad, too, has betrayed her. The film does not vilify her fiancés – each is revealed as caught within the particular political exigencies of his time. Indeed, Kazim and Shamshad appear twin-like, almost substitutable. For Amina, however, the repeated betrayal by her fiancés – who are, significantly, also her cousins – constitute a humiliation that she is unable to endure. The betrayal by kin slips through the cracks of the grand official narratives of the need to avenge the violated women of Partition. These ignominies, enacted within domestic spaces, point to the crisis in the stability of kinship, the terrain where the antagonistic politics of the Partition was played out. The clandestine betrayals by men from the same family destabilize the secure bonds of kinship and undermine the homology between nation and family.

In a particularly poignant scene, Amina wears her bridal clothes and ornaments, which often constituted the dowry and a significant portion of women's movable property.²⁴ She gazes at her own reflection in the mirror. Shamshad, wearing the groom's headdress, approaches from behind. The mirror momentarily unifies Amina and Shamshad displaying the spectral traces of loved ones across the border that compose Amina's sense of coherent selfhood. She turns to look at him but he vanishes.

The uncanny doubleness of the image, which dissolves as she turns around to face Shamshad, evokes the spectre of Daadi's dead husband; the spectral traces of those not immediately present constitute the selfhood of both women. This particular topography of the self, composed of enigmatic, spectral traces of the other, undermines the bureaucratic, institutional mechanisms by which Partition sought to institute and reify national difference. Amina slits her wrist with a blade. The blood encircles her wrist like the red bridal bangles that, like wounds, drain her of her very life, collapsing her wedding with her death.



Figure 4.1 Amina turns back to look at her beloved who vanishes from the mirror. *Garm Hawa* by M.S. Sathyu.

Amina's death is triggered by the romantic betrayals that disable her from embodying given notions of gendered ethnic ideologies. This is in contrast to both Mirza and Sikander, who love their nation and choose, despite the odds, to struggle for its secular-socialist ideals. Amina's conjugal rejection by both men indexes her social death, disabling any identification with the nation. If the Muslim woman's relationship to nation is configured via her conjugal relationships, then Amina is literally unaccommodated within the new nation.

The sense of unhomeliness, experienced by the minority community of Muslims who persevere in India nonetheless, also produces alternative elaborations of community. Where the filial metaphor must construct the Muslim as the interloper, Sathyu illuminates other modes of sociality, animated by the restless energy of the young, disenfranchised citizens. Whereas Mirza continually declines to join activists in rallying for government support for jobs, equality, and food, his son, Sikander, considers it pivotal to support and enlist in such protests. Sikander forms his own community of friends, consisting of

other disillusioned youth; they coordinate protests against the state, animating the new forms of sociality. At the end of his tether, Mirza finally relents and agrees to go to Pakistan. The film visually captures his anguish as he resolves to leave home: The scene takes long shots of Salim against his beloved Agra, the Taj Mahal, and his front door – images that nostalgically romanticize Salim’s sense of belonging. When the Mirzas are in a *tanga* riding the dusty, crowded streets of Agra as they leave for the station, they run into hordes of protestors clamoring for better employment, better wages, and food. Sikander longs to join this crowd and enlist in their struggle against structural inequities rather than leave the country. Having forged relationships with a larger community, Sikander and his friends strive to fulfill the thwarted promises of a secular and socialist nation-state. He looks meaningfully at his father, who encourages him to join his friends. As Sikander gets off the *tanga* to join the crowd, we hear the feeble murmurings of his mother, calling out his name. Salim Mirza looks out into the crowds with a wistful sadness and then gathers himself together and says, “I am sick and tired of a life spent in isolation.” Choosing the life of activist relationality over a wounded solipsism, Mirza climbs down from the *tanga* and asks the driver to return to his house. Again, we hear his wife’s incredulous sigh, “Oh, Allah!” Salim Mirza hands the keys back to his wife and we see a shot of her fist unfurl to take the keys. Salim chooses to stay back, build coalitions, and fight to reclaim his right to be at home in the new nation. Although both Salim and his wife are constructed as imperfect national subjects, the film idealizes Salim’s patriotism, while it disapproves of his wife’s desire to leave.

The film concludes as Mirza walks into the crowd of thronging protestors to the poetic verse of Kaifi Azmi:

Jo door se karten hain toofan ka nazaara
 Unke liye toofan yahan bhi hai, wahan bhi
 Mil jaaoge dhara mein to ban jaaoge dhara
 Yeh waqt ka ailaan wahan bhi hai, yahaan bhi.

The poem evokes the image of a stream joining the river and suggests that individuals should dissolve their narrow self-interests for

the greater goals and aspirations of nation-building. This utopia of socialist solidarities reiterates the theme of the dissolution of borders separating the self from society (when you merge into the stream, you become the stream) even as it reminds its audiences that the scattering of showers and the portending storm darken the unpartitioned sky on both sides of the territorial border.

The film poetically and performatively suggests the power of counterpublics to bring to fruition the squandered hopes of national independence. The film closes on a socialist, Nehruvian vision of brotherhood, where the Muslim minority subject joins hands with other workers to strive and rebuild an imagined community. Mirza rejects the isolating and disempowering image of a wounded minority; he asserts his rights as a citizen over his rights as a member of a religious minority, a choice vindicated by the National Award that the film received.

Whereas the nation unfurls itself as an imagined community that beckons Salim and Sikander, to Salim's wife it only represents a repressive institutional force, invading her personal life through its coercive strategies. Although applauding Salim's difficult decision to stay back and struggle through activist relationality, the film suggests how such a conception of the public is denied to his wife. His choice to embrace coalitional groups to struggle for his vision of a secular democratic nation consigns her to the gendered privations of the domestic sphere. The public world of political activism is not open to her, and she returns home with dashed hopes of leaving for Pakistan.

Her life is enclosed within the house, and the image of the fingers enclosing the keys especially marks the ways in which both nation and home reverberate as authoritarian and policing institutions for her. She is completely fractured in this final scene, first through her feeble, disembodied protesting voice, and then through a close-up of her hand. The minority woman is not securely accommodated within the national imaginary; she appears only as a trace of her male kin. *Garm Hawa* illustrates the gendered inequities that constitute the Muslim minority's experience of national modernity, which, even as it offered possibilities of coalitional solidarity to the ethnic other, remained conservative in its treatment of the gendered experiences of religious subalternity.

Of routes, roots, and refugees in Lahore

We are all . . . equal citizens of one state. . . . Hindus would [soon] cease to be Hindus and Muslims would cease to be Muslims, not in the religious sense. Because that is the personal faith of each individual, but in the political sense as citizens of the state.

M.A.K. Jinnah²⁵

Expressing his inclusivist idea of Pakistan in his inaugural speech, Jinnah addressed the Constituent Assembly on August 11, 1947, just days before the independence and formation of Pakistan. It is unclear whether Jinnah invokes this secular ideal in his speech in order to quell the mounting religious violence across the borders; to suggest that the grounds of nationhood should not determine the mode of its governance; to secure Muslim economic, cultural, and political interests without espousing a priori virtues of an Islamic state; or if he had influenced religious loyalties to secure a powerful position of leadership. Whatever his motives in urging secular public practice, the Pakistani nation that the two-nation theory gave birth to continued to raise the specter of the illegitimacy of non-Muslims in Pakistan.

Asghar Wajahat wrote *Jis Lahore Ne Dekhiya* in 1988, in the wake of the sweeping changes associated with General Zia-ul-Haq's Islamist brand of politics. Zia was profoundly influenced by his family's migration from Jullundhar to Peshawar. At an international Islamic conference, the president declared: "I will tell you what Islam and Pakistan mean to me. It is a vision of my mother struggling on, tired, with all her worldly possessions in her hands, when she crossed the border into Pakistan."²⁶ By the time Zia took over from Zulfikar Bhutto the position of president through a military coup in 1977, the ground was already prepared for aggressive institutional redefinitions for what kind of Islamic practice was appropriate for Pakistan.²⁷

General Zia's policies attempted to strengthen Pakistan's Muslim identity by legally disempowering non-Muslim minorities. In 1984, a series of judicial reforms entrenched the second-class citizenship of minorities: not only were non-Muslims barred from giving evidence against Muslims in newly established Islamic courts (sharia courts), but any evidence supplied by a religious minority would

count for only half that submitted by a Muslim.²⁸ The very next year, a separate electoral system was restored, which denied non-Muslims the right to vote in territorially demarcated constituencies, curtailing the rights of religious minorities to only elect representatives of their respective communities. In addition, the changes in the public education system, including changes in textbooks, prepared the ground for a systematic ideological shift in normalizing the Sunni Muslim as the normative Pakistani.²⁹ General Zia's presidency also witnessed the formation of the Muhajir Qaumi Mahaj (Refugee People's Movement), launched to protect Muhajirs who, on the ground of ethnicity, were discriminated against for educational and employment benefits. The incendiary tensions resulted not only from Sindhi-Muhajir opposition but also from Sindhi fear of others who had moved into the province, including Baloch, Pakhtuns, and Punjabis.

Wajahat's play emerges at a moment when a culture of anti-minoritarianism entrenches itself through legal-institutional apparatuses of state and when *muhajirs* seek institutional and political channels to express their frustrations at being denied their political rights due to their ethnic difference. At this heightened political conjuncture when the accommodation of minorities and refugees in Pakistan was hotly debated, Wajahat's play makes an eloquent argument for the promise of an alternative imagined community.

When Asghar Wajahat wrote his play in 1988, a full fifteen years had lapsed since the release of *Garm Hawa*, and much had changed in India as well. Most noticeably, the Nehruvian dream of a socialist and secular India, so powerfully captured in the final scene of *Garm Hawa*, had begun to crumble. The late 1970s witnessed the uneasy manipulation of religious symbols in electoral politics. The notion of democracy was reduced to electoral politics. Nehru's daughter and political successor, Indira Gandhi, subtly played into religious sentiments as an electioneering strategy to consolidate a Congress majority in national politics. In the words of Sunil Khilnani, "Indira Gandhi had appeared to be the biggest threat to democracy but, in fact, the effect of her rule was to throw open the state to popular demands and to brand the idea of electoral democracy indelibly on the Indian political imagination."³⁰

Several new political actors entered the fray as representatives of communities, thus reifying collective identifications on political grounds. Conflicts arose between social groups whose identities could be activated for political ends. The alarming rise to ascendancy of the Hindu right in the 1980s was not an atavistic response but was produced as a result of the particular modes of representation that the state employed. The rise of the Hindu right on the one hand, and the coalitions formed between various "backward" and lower-caste groups on the other hand, indicated the political emergence of community identities. In the years between *Garm Hawa* and *Lahore*, these community identities were reified in political arenas and exerted a tenacious hold over the political imagination of the nation. These community identities, invoking the rhetoric of antiquity, in fact demonstrated that they were products of national modernity, not remnants of the past.

Beginning in the late 1980s, passionate identity politics increasingly pervaded public life. Conflict between the state and society also increased. Several of these community groups accused the state of appeasing its political minorities. The Hindu nationalists castigated the state's pseudo-secularist policy of interfering with Hindu religious practices while upholding the Muslim Personal Law. For example, in 1985 the Supreme Court broke with legal precedents and under Criminal Penal Code granted Shah Bano, a divorced elderly Muslim woman, maintenance from her husband. A year later, this decision was annulled because Congress feared alienating its Muslim voters. The verdict was repealed on grounds that the case must be adjudicated according to the special provisions stipulated in the Muslim Personal Law.³¹ Again, in 1990, upper-caste youths condemned state protectionism toward lower- and backward-caste communities by implementing the Mandal Commission recommendations. Further, regional movements demanding greater rights to self-determination also held the state responsible for its partisan allocation of resources and unwarranted meddling within regional affairs. It is important to place these multiple grievances within the shifting frameworks of the Indian state, which witnessed the growing size of the electorate, competing demands on state-controlled resources, and the brisk rise of democratic politics.³²

I met Asghar Wajahat in March 2002, when the pogroms against Muslims in Gujarat had just broken out. Fifty-eight Hindus burned alive when a train in Godhra, Gujarat, was set on fire, allegedly by Muslims. This atrocity was followed by systematic violence against Muslims in the state of Gujarat. Wajahat is a playwright and novelist, as well as a professor of Hindi literature in Jamia Millia Islamia University in Delhi. His fifth play, *Lahore*, has already seen more than 500 productions in Hindi, Marathi, and Urdu, and has played to packed houses in Delhi, Bombay, Chandigarh, Karachi, and Washington, DC, and most recently in Palo Alto, California.³³ The well-known film director Govind Nihalani plans to make a film version of the play.

Whereas Wajahat had explored issues of Hindu-Muslim tensions in his fiction, *Lahore* was his first attempt at tackling the Partition. He alleged that the frequent and shrewd appropriation of the Partition by right-wing organizations in both India and Pakistan rehearsed the founding fictions of Islam and Hinduism as two incommensurable national communities. Wajahat's contemplative musings on his experience as a Muslim minority in India reflected both his sense of humor and irony, something that resonates in his play, *Lahore*, as well.

Asghar Wajahat wrote this trilingual play in Hindi, Urdu, and Punjabi to explore what he calls "the vacuum" in people's lives when they are forcibly uprooted from their homes. In his words, "People can never forget their home."³⁴ Both "evacuee" and "vacuum" share the etymological reference to vacating, or taking leave. It is no wonder, then, that *Lahore* explores both the material repercussions of being an evacuee while still at home and the affective force of a vacuum that fills the life of the refugee.

Whereas *Garm Hawa* examines the construction of the Muslim minority subject as potential refugee, *Lahore* examines the heterogeneous experiences of Muslim subjects in Pakistan. *Jis Lahore Nai Dekhya O Jamya Nai*, the full title of Wajahat's play, is a Punjabi proverb that translates into, "The one who has not seen Lahore has not lived at all." The phrase is spoken by Mai, the only Hindu left in Lahore, a city still reeling from the violence of Partition. In *Lahore*, Wajahat stages the encounter of Mai with a Muslim family from

Lucknow, India, during Partition, to whom Mai's house is mistakenly allotted. The contestation over home that ensues between both parties is the ground on which the plot unfolds and, in the process, brings to crisis notions about belonging and its relationship to property, community, gender, and nation.

Mirza's family – consisting of his wife Begum, their son Javed, and daughter Tanno – arrives from their home in Lucknow to a palatial *haveli* in Lahore, after spending several intervening months at a refugee camp. The Custodial Office in Pakistan deems Mai's *haveli* an evacuee property and allots the house to the Mirzas. On exploring their new home, they unexpectedly chance upon an old woman living in the house, who claims that the mansion belongs to her. The question of property figures centrally in these discussions of home and belonging. In an effort to throw out the old woman, Mirza contacts the Custodial Office, only to find it rife with corruption and bigotry. The officers rebuff him and warn him that he stands to lose the house if he continues to aggravate them.

The Mirzas are desperate to get her out of their house, but despite all kinds of machinations on their part, she refuses to leave. The transformative moment in the altercation occurs when Daadima begins to see the semblance of her granddaughter, Radha, in Mirza's daughter, Tanno. Wajahat depicts the gradual affective trajectory that the Mirzas chart, from plotting Mai's murder, to "winning her over" through an instrumentalist display of affection, to genuine concern over her safety and well-being. Mai's consistent efforts to orient and assist the new refugees in Lahore steadily earn her their favor and trust. The Mirzas traverse the full spectrum when, on Mai's death, Mirza performs the role of elder son and sets fire to her funeral pyre.

The Maulvi, the local Muslim priest, also participates in the funeral. A local Punjabi thug, Pahalwaan, a "son of the soil," so to speak, cannot tolerate this and bristles at the chanting of Hindu prayers by Muslims. The play closes as three masked men enter the Maulvi's place of worship and murder him to the disembodied wails of women, anticipating funeral laments. Unlike the hopeful closing in *Garm Hawa*, which affirms the power of the Nehruvian socialist imaginary, *Lahore* ends on a more sinister note. The different endings

themselves index the changed political scenario in which the Partition was being recast and suggest the rise in identity politics in both India and Pakistan in the intervening fifteen years.

Wajahat charts a trajectory where the Partition's hard, religious polarity between Hindus/Muslim yields to fashion a new filial economy founded on an ethic of hospitality. Wajahat uses accommodation as a material, political, and philosophical signifier to raise questions about home, refuge, and belonging for minorities and refugees in post-Partition Lahore. The question of hospitality, of the ethical proximity between the host and the hostage, is dramatized within the larger social dramas of the Partition and is a theme that we will return to in Chapter 6 on Kashmir.

Wajahat's depiction of a diverse community of Muslims, each with their own conceptions of Islam, powerfully destabilizes the mythology of the two-nation theory. Wajahat undermines the myth of the autonomous religious subjects of Partition through his formal invocation of Nasir Kazmi's *ghazals*, which function to suture the scenes in the play. The dissolution of hardened religious identities augurs the emergence of alternative arrangements of sociality. The dispersal of the crystallized, bounded religious subject reveals the heterogeneity of subjects who inhabit a spectrum of religious positions. Moreover, the mimetic relationality between Hindus and Muslims in this play reveals the persistence of the ineffable trace of the other in the constitution of the self, undoing any absolute binary polarities between religious groups.

Heterogeneous Muslim nation

Arguments for Pakistan ranged across a wide spectrum: Whereas elite Muslims from Central Provinces attempted to restore some of the political power lost to the Muslims after the 1847 rebellion, the impoverished Muslim peasants desired economic emancipation from the repressive demands of the dominant *zamindari* system of rural Bengal's Hindu landowners, and still others, mostly from northwest India, were drawn to idea of a "viable safe haven" for Islam in India.

Lahore powerfully destabilizes the mythology of a monolithic, unified Muslim "nation" by foregrounding multiple ways

of embodying Muslim-ness. By highlighting the perspectives of Muslims, differently situated through vectors of class, region, and sect among others, *Wajahat* offers a palimpsestic picture of Lahore in 1947 through the lens of major redefinitions of Pakistani religious identity during General Zia's regime. Reading 1947 through debates that increasingly define Pakistan through narrow sectarian constructions allows *Wajahat* to critique the untenability of rhetorics that claimed unity and uniformity among Muslims within the subcontinent. The question of Islam, then, is central to the idea of national belonging. In this play, Pahalwaan (the indigenous Punjabi Muslim), the Maulvi (Islamic religious scholar), Nasir (refugee from Ambala), and the Mirzas (refugees from Lucknow) offer competing representations of Islam, illustrating that Muslims did not constitute a homogeneous community.

The Mirzas arrive in Lahore from Lucknow, a city burgeoning with Urdu literary activity and especially well known for the Progressive Writers Association. The character of Nasir, the poet from Ambala, charts a different trajectory of migration, however. In fact, the majority of Muslim refugees migrated from East to West Punjab in the wake of the worst kind of brutality, and effectively evoked the image of the persecuted Muslim fleeing to safety from the terror of religious violence. Whereas the Punjabi migrants were more easily absorbed as a result of their regional knowledge, language, geography, and culture, their Urdu-speaking counterparts, especially from the Central Provinces, exhibited a melancholic nostalgia for the world they left behind.

Wajahat deliberately sketched the Maulvi as a generous and humane scholar with an expansive understanding of Islam to counter the stereotype of Muslim priests as parochial, retrogressive, and playing into communal passions. The figure of the Maulvi recalls Mushirul Hasan's attempt to recuperate the diverse efforts made by religious leaders to counter the demands for a separate Muslim nation. Hasan has reminded us, "Their role should not be written off or relegated to a historian's footnote."³⁵ With just a handful of characters, *Wajahat* portrays a diverse Muslim world differentiated by region, sect, and class among other vectors of belonging. *Wajahat* places this panoply

of characters around the figure of Mai, a solitary Hindu widow turned hostage in her own home.

The symbolic tension between host and hostage gains additional power from the prevailing discourse of the "hostage theory" of religious minorities within both nations, which mimetically tied the treatment of Muslim minorities in India to the treatment meted out to Hindus in Pakistan. According to this logic, Muslim refugees in Pakistan had to be patient with Hindus, for aggression on their part could risk the safety of their Muslim counterparts in India. This formulation made Muslims in Pakistan responsible for the well-being of Indian Muslims. This was not merely sentimental rhetoric as many of the *muhajirs* had in fact left their friends and family behind. As Vazira Zamindar puts it, "To make an argument for Pakistan's duty towards Muslims in India, the diversity of Muslims who remained in India was harnessed to the cause of Pakistan."³⁶

On the other hand, in India, Home Minister Vallabhai Patel responded to concerns about the ill-treatment of "non-Muslims" in Pakistan thus: "It is a rather difficult matter, because the present position is not quite settled, but the non-Muslims coming from Pakistan here are treated as our nationals, as they have left Pakistan with the intention of settling down here."³⁷ Therefore, the official position in India on Hindus and Sikhs left behind in Pakistan was ambiguous: They were only partially inscribed as Pakistani national subjects, their patriotic sentiments being compromised by their religious beliefs.

As in *Garm Hawa*, the interarticulation of soil and self in *Lahore* enunciates a profound physical and psychic dislocation enacted on the increasingly deterritorialized refugee. The imagery of roots abounds in this play through metaphors of renewed mappings of place and identity. For example, Mirza expresses his initial disenchantment with Lahore when he claims, "Nothing can replace what we've left behind . . . do you see any fragrant creepers of the queen of the night here?" He soon alters his opinion, however, and even intercepts his wife's longing for their home by saying, "These are strange times. Such nostalgia will get us nowhere. We have to grow roots here for our children's sake."³⁸ Mirza's counsel to grow roots in Lahore demonstrates that home is not only reconstructed through a nostalgic past but also imagined

through a projected futurity. Mirza's comment reveals that roots can be manufactured and interrogates the naturalization of national rootedness. The scene evinces some of the anxieties that *muhajirs* faced about rhetorics that privileged locality and roots as absolute signifiers of national belonging.

For the *muhajirs*, the parallel with the Prophet's *hijrat* (exodus) offered a powerful moral discourse of the founding of Pakistan through their heroic sacrifice, thus compensating their lack of roots by committing to a project whose definitions of a "natural" Muslim community would soon be challenged. *Muhajirs*, Muslim refugees from India, sought to establish themselves as the "authentic" Pakistanis by comparing their migration to the archetypal Muslim *hijrat* from Mecca to Medina led by Prophet Mohammed to establish the first Islamic community in seventh-century Arabia. According to *muhajirs*, Muslim minorities fleeing India rehearsed a modern account of that historic event; they made heroic sacrifices and endured suffering and hardship, much like their historic counterparts. They argued that *muhajirs* had been at the forefront of the Partition movement and had made considerable *qurbani*, or sacrifice, for the establishment of Pakistan. Thus the *muhajirs* powerfully deployed the Judeo-Quranic myth of *hijrat*, or migration, to make an argument for accommodation within the new Pakistani nation. It is within this sense of moral entitlement that we must place the Mirzas' sense of frustration and exasperation with Mai's insistence on staying in her house.

The juxtaposition of Mai, a Hindu mother, against a Muslim motherland also undermines the genealogical claims of national rootedness. The corporal presence of Mai, the Hindu owner of the house, forges a disidentification between mother and motherland. Mai gradually begins to serve as the surrogate mother for the disenfranchised, migrant Muslim community.³⁹ The idea of the surrogate mother, rather than the symbolic mother, enables us to think beyond the question of ontology and presence, and toward an ethics of proximity. Surrogation allows us to think of the mimetic semblance that lingers and disorders the boundedness of an autonomous self. This "performance genealogy," as Joseph Roach puts it, complicates the ontological certainty of natural national rootedness.⁴⁰

The incongruity of Hindu mother and Muslim motherland dramatically refigures the topography of the national family. It also ironizes the metaphor of the nation itself as an all-encompassing genealogical tree naturalizing the national lineage through organic images.⁴¹ The genealogical family tree evokes the notion of temporal continuity of essence and territorial rootedness. *Lahore* illustrates the gradual way in which Mai becomes the surrogate mother for the refugees in Lahore. Through its anomalous depiction of a universal Hindu mother against a Muslim motherland, *Lahore* disrupts the naturalizing rhetoric of the genealogy of national essence.

The stalemate between the Mirzas and Mai, the Muslims and the Hindu, begins to unravel when Tanno, the Mirzas' teenage daughter, calls out to Mai as "Daadima," or grandmother. As if in a dream, Mai descends from the stairs and gazes at Tanno and sees in her the spectre of her granddaughter, Radha. The semblance of Radha, the trace of her granddaughter, lingers in the address of Tanno. The scene precipitates a rearrangement of the social relations within the house; the substitution of Tanno for Mai's absent granddaughter, Radha, lost to her in the upheaval of the Partition, preempts the importance of surrogation in rearranging sociality in the wake of the Partition.

The scene preempts the denouement, when on her death, the specter of Mai assembles an alternative family. What ethical appeal does the corpse of a Hindu woman make to the Muslim community? How does this urgent sense of ethical responsibility toward a corpse reveal the enigmatic ways in which the self is summoned by the address of the other? Putting oneself in the place of the other – it is this empathic substitutability that we find again toward the end of the play when Mirza plays the role of Hindu son in the cremation rites for Mai.⁴²

In the penultimate scene in the play, Wajahat dramatically captures the empathic substitutability at the heart of ethical practice. The stage is softly lit, and the spectral figures bearing the dead body of Mai are barely discernible. The stage grows brighter and the entire male cast of the play, all Muslim, become perceptible in Mai's funeral procession. Slowly, they begin to chant the accompanying funeral mantra, "*Ram naamsatyahai*" (the word of Ram is truth). The funeral



Figure 4.2 Mai turns to the call of “Daadima,” or grandmother. *Jinnay Lahore Nahin Vekhya* by Sheema Kirmani. Photographer: S. Thyagarajan, Theatre Archives: Natarang Pratishthan.

procession crosses the platform and again the stage plunges into darkness. Mirza enacts the role of Mai’s son in this ritual ceremony, and the Muslim community participates in performing the last rites of her Hindu funeral.

Theatre, more than any other expressive practice, draws its force from the mimetic relationship of substitution, of taking the place of the other, or as Levinas has reminded us, as the “otherwise than being” at the basis of proximity. The staging of the funeral scene mounts a vivid challenge to the idea of national essentialisms through an embodiment of religious difference. The brief scene captures a moment when religious polarities are displaced through a series of surrogations that reconfigures the ethical terrain of accommodation. This scene suggests the importance of shifting from a politics of signification to the ethical terrain of mimetic substitution. The ethic of substitutability – the idea that the one evacuated will be replaced by another – that the mother will be given a dignified burial, if not by her

son, then by his surrogate, rearranges the terrain of identity politics to ethical practices of responsibility. This is the trajectory the play follows; how far we have come from the exclusive identity politics of accommodation at the beginning, to the end where we see the force of responsibility of one toward the other.

Nasir's Ghazals

Lahore recreates the polyphonic linguistic landscape of Lahore by juxtaposing Hindi, Urdu, and Punjabi. The soundscape of Lahore reverberates not only with the three languages, it also throbs with the alternating texture of Pahalwaan's patriotic clamor on the one hand and the melancholy *ghazals* of Nasir on the other. Nasir Kazmi's poetry evokes a deep sense of solitude and is in sharp contrast to the pounding rhythms of group passions invoked in Pahalwaan's jingoistic slogans. These two distinctly different rhythms of exilic solitude and communal ardor sonically interrupt one another.

Nasir's poetry functions as an intertext in this play and relativizes the authorial voice through the incorporation of another voice into the text. Wajahat claims that he wrote very few lines for the poet and took most of them from Nasir's poetry and interviews.⁴³ The interweaving of two authorial registers, the use of three different languages, and the competing worldviews of Nasir, Pahalwaan, the Mirzas, and the Maulvi complicate the uniformity of "the Muslim voice" and challenge the monological authority of the two-nation theory.

Wajahat uses the *ghazals* of the historical poet Nasir Kazmi to suture the narrative.⁴⁴ The *ghazal*, an ancient poetic verse form, derives from the Arabian panegyric *qasida* from the sixth century AD. A poetic form consisting of rhyming couplets and a refrain, the *ghazal* traveled to South Asia in the twelfth century under the influence of the new Islamic Sultanate courts and Sufi mystics. Although prominently written in Persian and Urdu verse, today *ghazals* are written in a variety of South Asian languages.⁴⁵

In India, the *ghazal* belonged to the high literary traditions of the Indo-Muslim elite, the fortunes of which dwindled in the aftermath of the 1857 War of Independence. Suddenly demoted and charged

with accusations of stultifying self-indulgence, the *ghazal* was singled out for exemplifying Muslim decadence. In the words of Frances Pritchett, "The rebellion of 1857, together with its brutal, destructive, and long-lasting aftermath, marked the real end of aristocratic Muslim culture in North India."⁴⁶

Despite their intensely personal content, *ghazals* were often sung at *mushairas*, or symposia where poets gather to perform their works. Indeed, Nasir's poetry was only published in one book collection (in addition to appearing in magazines). His fans mostly knew him through the cultural practice of *mushairas*, where the poet publicly recited his poems. As C.M. Naim has observed, "In Urdu society, poetry is the most public form of literature. Mushairas, or public readings of poetry, are still extremely popular, just as the habit of quoting poetry in everyday speech is as strong as ever."⁴⁷

In his book *Ravishing DisUnitites*, Agha Shahid Ali describes the centrality of the audience in the co-constitution of the *ghazal's* poetic articulation:

The audience waits to see what the poet will do with the scheme established in the opening couplet . . . when the poet recites the first line of a couplet, the audience recites it back to him, and then the poet repeats it, and the audience again follows suit. This back and forth creates an immensely seductive tension because everyone is waiting to see how the suspense will be resolved in terms of the scheme established in the opening couplet; that is, the first line of every succeeding couplet sets the reader (or listener) up so that the second line amplifies, surprises, explodes . . . the audience is so primed, so roused by this time that it would break in with the poet at the end.⁴⁸

Not only is the audience incorporated within the apparently dyadic address, but the spectral traces of former *ghazal* poets also haunt the verse. Kenneth Bryant suggests that intertextuality is key to understanding the multiple textual traces in the *ghazal*. According to him, the tradition of *ghazals* itself is "a kind of text . . . not the product of a single recitation, nor of a single poet; rather, it is an on-going

collaborative endeavor. But like the *ghazal*, this second text is also a serial or at least a cumulative, recitation.⁴⁹

What can Wajahat's use of Nasir's *ghazal* poetry tell us about the Partition? Consider, for instance, this Kazmi poem that appears in the play:

Flowers are separated from their fragrance, this time.
O friends, what sort of air is this, this time.
Petals cry, beat their heads;
there has been a general massacre of flowers, this time.
Who should I show the wound of devotion?
There's a lack of sincerity in the city, this time.
Those were the outsiders, but my friends.
I need a favour from the dear ones, this time.
Friends have parted many a time, but,
a novel scar has bloomed, this time.
I don't feel like listening to the clamour of spring, Nasir.
I've heard something else, this time.⁵⁰

In Kazmi's verse, the predictable expression of romantic love through tropes of nature is upturned. Twisting the conventional motifs of anguished separation and rapturous union, Kazmi offers metaphors that strain the imagination: How do you partition a flower from its fragrance? How do you unite the call of spring with murderous screams? Capturing the violence of partition through sensuous evocations of smell and sound, Kazmi suggests that the Partition sundered those who belong together; conversely it conjoined that which should be kept apart. What kind of preposterous spring is this? Was this the promised generative nation? Wounds, not flowers, blossom in this spring – wounds inflicted by too little faith, and too few friends. This spring is indeed different, the poet cautions, because flowers die and death flowers.

The *ghazals* express powerful emotions of love – even torment – at the separation of the poet from the one he loves.⁵¹ In his lucid analysis of the lyric poetry of Faiz Ahmed Faiz, Aamir Mufti notes the ways in which the *ghazals* resist a “reification of self and other” and “disconcert the self with the recognition of the sameness

of the other, without collapsing the distinction between them."⁵² Similarly, Nasir Kazmi's poems evince the suffering of being torn from oneself, of the absolute noncoinciding, diachronic presence of the other held within the self. For example, in another *ghazal* Nasir Kazmi writes: "A voice repeatedly reminds my heart: I'm not separate from you, listen carefully." The *ghazal* is predicated on this mimetic doubleness – of the otherness of the self.

For the listener the pleasure resides not only in the poetic ingenuity within the rigid structure of the meter but also in the gentle oscillation between experience and expectation: between the haunting memory of former such *ghazals* and the imaginative variation on an established theme. The doubleness of the *ghazal* incorporates the audience into its address. The *ghazal's* rhyme scheme augurs by aural semblance what might be coming and incites the audience to participate in the completion of the verse. The repetition and refrain withhold gratification, tantalizingly inviting the audience to complete what the poet has begun. So, while the content of the *ghazal* is intensely personal and addressed to a lover, it simultaneously constitutes the audience as witness to that address. Likewise, the formal reversion in the final lines of the poem from the first to the third person suggests the torsion of the self, the turning away of the self from the self. The poet is now witness to the fissure within the self and comments in the third person on the constitution of the self through its address to the other. It is the simultaneously private and public character of the *ghazal*, its location at the interstices of solipsistic immersion and audience relationality that gives it its power.

The *ghazal's* formal dis coherence, its thematically independent couplets held together by mesmerizing aural semblance, resists hermeneutic exegesis and disclosure. In its form itself the *ghazal* reveals how two apparently incompatible ideas can be brought together poetically, without one subsuming the other. Formally, the *ghazals* poetically illustrate the possibility of holding incommensurable logics in a way that augments the beauty and sonority of the verse. Its haunting melodies elude and displace the urge to pin down, analyze, and make meaning of the poetry; despite the sometimes obdurate opacity

of the *ghazal*, its nonteleological structure, we sense the fullness of its haunting eloquence and lyrical power.

The doubleness contained within the *ghazal's* poetic form undermines the rhetoric of sovereign religious and national subjects produced by the polarizing discourses of the Partition. Disordering the binary partitions through which the nation is organized, *Wajahat* reveals the indelible trace of the other in the making of the self. The formal dis coherence of the *ghazal* and its composition through the address of the other suggests an ethical mode of accommodation.

Whereas in 1973 *Garm Hawa* could proffer an image of socialist solidarity, in 1988, *Wajahat* reminds us that these fragile visions of alternative communities are too easily snuffed out. Both performances, however, do provide alternative notions of community. *Garm Hawa's* affirmative closing with the image of socialist solidarities and *Lahore's* image of Muslims in a Hindu funeral procession provide images to reimagine new forms of political community. These alternative visions of community reconstitute polarized versions of us/them. By illuminating fragile moments, when a vision of a counterpublic emerges, *Garm Hawa* and *Lahore* fashion new forms of solidarity on the ghosts of violently sundered communities.

These narrations illustrate the ways in which the kinds of loss and suffering experienced during Partition and its multiple violations contribute to the making of new kinds of subjectivities, new versions of self and other, new homes in the world. But these new homes in the world, too, are built on gendered notions of exclusion. While offering new homes and new communities for some disenfranchised citizens, M.S. Sathyu and Asghar *Wajahat* obscure the violence and repressions in the routine and quotidian structurings of home. Like all homes, they constitute bonds of nurture and support for some but also represent conditions of repression and control for others. Although liberating to the disenfranchised male subjects, these masculine solidarities continue to produce newer legitimations and prohibitions for the women in these narratives. It is crucial, then, to heed Gyan Pandey's counsel to "recover a different kind of 'national' past, recalling not suicide and murder ['sacrifice' and 'war'] and the eternally fixed collective subject, but labour and creativity, and varied, internally differentiated

communities, made up of thinking, acting, changing and fallible human beings...and on that basis, struggle to build other kinds of political community in the future, more self-consciously historical and more self-consciously accommodating."⁵³ The precarious image of alternative imaginings of community, predicated on mimetic doubleness, enlarges our idea of accommodation but reminds us that emergent communities are often extensions of homes, offering both their refuge as well as their terror.

While *Garm Hawa* and *Lahore* consider the gendered political economy of property and explore the ways in which the borders of private and public worlds separate women from the imaginaries of national belonging, Chapter 5 addresses the various ways in which women circulate as property of family, community, and nation. Here, the borders separating self and society are both confounded and reconstituted as gendered violence transforms women's bodies into political artifacts. We shall now turn to the question of gendered violence that constituted the experience of Partition for its survivors.