Bhadraloks and Enmity in Selected Bengal Partition Narratives

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Abstract

After 1947, the Indian nation-state often sought to explain the brutality during Partition as an uncivilised throwback to mediaeval barbarity. Another stream of Partition history writing focuses on stories of Hindu victimhood, offloading the entire responsibility for the savagery upon the Islamic 'others'. However, neither of these versions addresses what Joya Chatterji calls a 'gaping void': one still 'does not know' why and how such ferocious riots took place at all, overriding the unity among the communities. The proposed study will partially bridge this void by analysing the communal role played by upper-caste Hindu Bhadraloks in the riots on the country's eastern border. The study reveals that beginning with rationalising the Partition of Bengal and the exchange of population as logical solutions, Bhadraloks wove insidious narratives to homogenise the intra-group caste differences to scapegoat lower castes in the Partition riots, wilfully inserted an 'enemy image' in the quotidian experience of the Hindu community, and aroused fear of Muslim tyranny by manufacturing 'trustworthy' disinformation regarding Hindu victimhood. These covert orchestrations, this paper argues, have irrevocably altered the ways of remembering the harmonious past of undivided India, imposing a forceful post-Partition identity over the Hindus based on enmity towards 'others' in India.

Keywords: Eastern border, Partition, Bhadralok, Hindutva, Enemy image, Identity formation

Introduction

One of the key reasons why the Partition of India has astonished so many scholars is the cataclysmic clash between the two communities. Joya Chatterji is among these academicians. She has wondered "why people who had lived cheek by jowl for so long fell upon each other in 1947 and its aftermath, with a ferocity that has few parallels in history" (Chatterji 2014,

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311). Considering the existing scholarly work on Partition, Chatterji admits that "there is a gaping void at the heart of the subject", for one still does not know how and why this savage clash occurred at all.

After the transfer of power in 1947, the riots have often been described as the sole responsibility of the Muslim community in India – a narrative that has been capitalised on for later events. Urvashi Butalia, in her *The Other Side of Silence: Voices from the Partition of India* (first published in 1998), showed how in many moments of communal tension in our time, be it the communal attacks against Sikhs in 1984, the attacks against Muslims in Bhagalpur in 1989, or the demolition of Babri Masjid in Ayodhya in 1992, "Partition stories and memories were used selectively by the aggressors: militant Hindus were mobilized using the one-sided argument that Muslims had killed Hindus at Partition, they had raped Hindu women" (Butalia 2017, 7). This was the situation at a time when the right wing was not in power. The possibility of depicting Hindus as victims, and therefore Islamic others as enemies, has been significantly enhanced now, with the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS)-backed right-wing coming into power. In the new introduction, Butalia writes: "…narratives of Hindu victimhood … during Partition that are increasingly legitimized and presented as 'truth', and are almost coercively and loudly validated by the power of the majority, sometimes even that of the State..." (Butalia 2017, xii). The point is that such efforts are now so rampant that it is almost as though the State is taking up the task of historicising particular communities, one as the victim and the other as the perpetrator.

One reason why 'narratives of Hindu victimhood' have sometimes taken the place of 'truth' is the collective not-knowing, Chatterji mentions. Without much substantiation, Partition violence has often been speculatively described as sporadic 'mob fury', spontaneous, sprouting from the 'autonomous subaltern consciousness'. Though not propagandist in a strict sense, this interpretation gives an oversimplified answer to Chatterji's question. Empirical studies do not corroborate such claims. In fact, Suranjan Das, in his study of the 'great Calcutta killing' of 1946 and riots on the eastern border, assumes the clashes to be a 'predetermined set of reflex actions' (Das 1991, 25). But who 'predetermined' the reflex actions and how? How have these 'determining efforts' been collectively and individually remembered and forgotten? What are the impacts of this complex memorialisation? In other words, how are these past efforts registered in the collective memory that constructs our present and, by extension, our individual, collective, and national identities? Answers to such questions will partially bridge the 'gaping void' Chatterji talks about, throwing light on our collective not-knowing from two perspectives: first, how communal Bhadralok[1] narratives fostered the violence that ultimately made the Partition seem 'inevitable', as though no other option was left; second, how narrative memory and identity based on enmity and retaliation towards the 'others', during and after the organised violence of Partition, have shaped the way pre-Partition undivided India is seen, in retrospect, from a post-colonial present.

In the first decade of the twentieth century, it was the Hindu elite's sense of religious and cultural plurality, inclusiveness towards 'others', and a distinctly Hindu idea of nationhood (Sarkar 1973) that elevated them to the leadership of the entire Bengali community. And the 'settled' fact of the first partition of Bengal in 1905 was made 'unsettled' through strong nationalist resistance. But in the aftermath of the Poona Pact, constitutional reforms, and communal awards – and in continuation of that, the formation of a provincial government[2] – they (the Hindu elite) constantly slithered from cross-communal nationalism towards narrow sectarian interests and communal politics in the third and fourth decades of the century (Chatterji 2002). Unlike their role in the Swadeshi movement, the Hindu elite's major contribution during Partition, as this paper will demonstrate, was to harden the rift between the two communities and to embed the communal divide more firmly within the quotidian experience of the non-elites. This was done to achieve a land where the Hindus would be the absolute majority, unlike the undivided Bengal, where they believed they were under threat of economic relegation, political disempowerment, and cultural disenfranchisement under Muslim majoritarian pressure.

Das has shown that the Hindu rioters involved in the eastern border violence consisted mostly of people from the lower strata: rickshaw pullers, guards, goalas (milkmen), etc. Upper-caste Hindus strategically refrained almost completely from the performative production of violent actions and were negligibly affected by the clashes (Das 1991). Understandably, there is a lack of empirical evidence of the organised communal contribution of Hindu elites in goading the rest of the community into rioting. This paper argues that this physically unaffected section played the role of a narrative creator, passively organising the inhuman brutality by infusing a strong antagonistic hatred in the daily lives of the performative producers of the event. Further, I will explain how the insurgent memories (along with hatred, animosity, and fear) of past actions cast a long shadow on our present, creating individual, collective, and national identities based on retaliation.

Evidence that could help answer how the violence was made possible is unsurprisingly missing. I argue that one reason for this gap in empirical informational archives is that critical points of identity difference prevailed over the points of similarity in the realm of consciousness through a sustained process led by Bhadraloks. The points of similarity previously existed in the lived experiences of both communities. The transformation from 'living cheek by jowl' to 'fell upon each other' can be traced in their past inter-community relationships and subjective engagements. Therefore, instead of empirical data and facts, memory narrativised in cultural artefacts becomes my natural field of exploration. I argue that the way the animosity was aroused and the 'enemy image' wilfully entrenched within quotidian life seem to be beyond the arena set by history as a discipline. It can trace the facts of the organised, institutionalised efforts behind the communal politics but how that was felt is more available in the way that past is remembered and represented.

Literary fiction would seem to be the natural choice for such an exploration, as it represents the past in the form of narrativised memory, but the challenge is that historically, the eastern border clashes have not yielded much literature. With Bengal Partition literature consciously choosing to celebrate the remaining harmony as opposed to the western border Partition that is habitually presented as a spectacular dance of death, there is a meagre number of literary representations of clashes in this part of the country. This results from a political stance adopted by the Progressive Writers' Association and the Communist Party,[3] members of which were influential in Bengali literary circles during the 1940s. Consequently, primary resources would have been lacking if this study were solely based on fiction. I will, therefore, closely 'read' popular political viewpoints published in Bhadralok-preferred magazines during 1946–47 and a few literary texts as memory narratives, precisely because they allow me to ask not what actually happened but how happenings were narrativised during and after the clash.[4] An exploration of such narratives can help unfold how subjective control over memory was wilfully exerted by the narrators and how that impacted the understanding of the clash by millions as rationally a right step and helped to homogenise the community, attempting to create an identity based on hostility.

Subjective Control of Narratives by Bhadraloks

Desh is a fortnightly journal concerned with aesthetics, culture, business, agriculture and contemporary political affairs in Bengal. In the pre-independent past, it had served as a status emblem for middle-class Bhadralok readers. I will interrogate one regularly published column, '*Banglar Katha*', originally written in Bengali in 1946–47 by Hemendranath Ghosh, a political analyst.[5] The column discussed the political backdrop of Muslim League rule in undivided Bengal, the functioning of Congress, and other matters of then-contemporary political affairs. I have selected this column because it analysed contemporary political affairs from a predominantly upper-class, caste-Hindu perspective. The tone was measured; it did not seek to disseminate hatred against the 'other' community directly, something we find in Bhadralok narratives in the pamphlets of that time. Instead, his objective, I argue, was to orchestrate a situation where Partition would look like the only logical solution.

Bhadraloks were under the deep influence of nationalism since the nineteenth-century Bengal Renaissance. As a product of the colonial educational system, they adopted a rational, argumentative approach but surreptitiously weaving a rationale to legitimise their narrow sectoral group interests. Under the veil of logic and reason, they were struggling to establish that the bifurcation of what used to be a pluralistic space along communal lines was lawful and justified. When Pakistan became a certainty in Indian politics, the division of Bengal became almost a rightful demand in the Bhadralok narratives. Hemendranath Ghosh refers to the terrible clash in Punjab:

Punjab has set a motion. People are brutally being butchered there. But significantly, even after so much sacrifice, many Hindus, unlike in earlier instances, are not giving up their just demand for land. Just like Punjab, Bengal, too, is our motherland. For Bengal, this is not merely to observe but also a learning point (Ghosh 1946, 761).

The Bhadraloks seemed to forget what ethnographer-administrator H.H. Risley had said during Bengal's first partition: "Bengal united is a power; Bengal divided will pull in different ways … One of our main objects is to split it up and thereby weaken a solid body of opponents to our rule" (Ghosh 1947a, 76).

While, during the first partition, the same middle-class Bengalis did not allow the colonial administration to successfully 'weaken a solid body of opponents', the overt shift of stance during the second partition was influenced by the bloodbath in Punjab. It is not that the idea of keeping Bengal united as a land based on linguistic and cultural unity was totally absent, but the Bhadraloks were not ready to listen to it. For instance, we can look at their response when H.S. Surawardy and Sarat C. Bose proposed a united Bengal. Without a division, achieving a Hindu majority land was impossible, so most Bhadraloks refused to listen to Sarat Bose. Ghosh writes:

> Mr Surawardy previously made it clear that Hindus and Muslims are different in every aspect. So, if he now says Bengal is indivisible, why on earth should we believe him?

> … In America, the states are smaller than what Bengal will be after its division. Likewise, why can't we imagine the western part of Bengal joining India and the eastern part joining Pakistan? Whether it remains part of two nations, India and Pakistan, or comes up with two more tiny nations, Bengal must be divided. That is the only key to securing a space where we are the majority (Ghosh 1946b, 762).

Ghosh's rationale was clear. He was not arguing against Bengal going to Pakistan or India after Partition. He advocated that the western part of Bengal, where Hindus were the majority in most districts, must be separated from the eastern part. To convince his readers, Ghosh asserted that united Bengal meant the domination of Muslims:

> Sarat Bose's proposed united Bengal is a stupid idea. We don't know why Sarat Babu has suddenly turned into a spokesperson for the Muslim League and why he can't understand that independent sovereign Bengal, or whatever he calls it, will be a state where 'they' would be the majority. Sarat Babu might not have a wife or sister, but we do. We don't want them to suffer in the hands of Muslim goons in the name of being united (Ghosh 1946b, 778).

Sarat C. Bose's objective, however, was anti-communal. If partition was inevitable, he proposed that it could be done not based on communal identity but by keeping a linguistic community together. He foresaw that a split of the map considering communal identity as the determining category would make it impossible for India and Pakistan to retain their pluralistic nature of the past. As a solution, he proposed a nation based on linguistic unity which, most likely, would not be governed on the basis of communal identity and difference. Unlike Sarat Bose, Bhadraloks prioritised their sectarian interest over plurality.

However, for Bhadraloks, Hindus were an undifferentiated community. Ghosh writes:

> … Beverly said, while concluding the census report, that the Muslims in Bengal were lower-caste Hindus in earlier times; lower-caste Hindus are wild and, therefore, reproduce more. It is also true that they are polygamous. Beverly calls them barbaric, but we would not support this. Now, if their customs don't change and if the government persists in giving shelter to Muslims from Bihar – if the Bengal Governor cannot find anything wrong with this – then even in Bengal, Muslims will be predominant soon. What political power will remain for us if Muslims acquire that? It would disenfranchise our culture over political, economic and academic institutions (Ghosh 1947b, 214).

When Ghosh talks about the disenfranchisement of culture over political, economic and academic institutions, it inherently means upper-caste culture (because none of the sectors he mentions had even minuscule imprints of the lower-caste population). But when he discusses Hindu-dominated districts in the Western part of Bengal, as mentioned earlier, he refers to the entire community. Here, Hindus become a monolithic community, bereft of any hierarchical division. He continues, "Considering all these (the rationale for keeping 'our' culture strong), a group of people are now demanding a segregated Hindu-dominated state in the western part of Bengal. Above and beyond any doubt, their proposal is more than worthy of consideration" (Ghosh 1947a, 77).

Did this Hindu-dominated space ever have political, social and cultural rights for the entire Hindu community, including non-Bhadralok lower castes? Since Hindu elites were often landowners with an opposite class interest with the lower castes, the answer may seem obvious. Ghosh did not stand with the colonial administrative measure of giving lower-caste people political power either. He opposed H.H. Risley's decision of 'safeguarding' backward people back in 1901 – initially Muslims and later extended to Hindu lower castes. Be it the reaction in 1901, when the proposal surfaced, or when, in 1910, E.A. Gait finally implemented classificatory measurement of the colonial census, the Bhadraloks were always against lower-caste political empowerment. Sarkar, in fact, criticises the nationalist history for not registering the 'arousal of a storm' in high-caste circles after 1910, when the colonial census ensured some rights for lower castes (Sarkar 1998, 382).

Ghosh expressed outrage about the violation of lower-caste women in Noakhali and Tripura by the Muslims. This seems surprisingly empathetic. While Bhadraloks associated the lower-caste Hindus with 'wildness and polygamy' and proximity with Muslims, which they feared could eventually lead to the disenfranchisement of their culture, they could not publicly support Beverly's tagging of them as 'barbaric'. This explains the inherent contradiction in their narratives concerning lower castes, as pointed out by Sarkar above. Such a contradiction indicates their ability to moderate their attitude towards the lower castes astutely. I will return to this topic in the discussion on homogenisation.

Organised Communal Efforts: Bhadraloks and Lower Castes

One of the reasons why Bhadralok narratives on the first and second partitions of Bengal were so radically different from each other is their communal turn during the second. Both through the Congress and the Hindu Mahasabha, the majority of the Bhadralok elites gradually moved towards Hindu communal politics during the third and fourth decades of the twentieth century. Joya Chatterji writes: "A large number of Hindus of Bengal, backed up by provincial branches of Congress and the Hindu Mahasabha, campaigned intensively in 1947 for the partition of Bengal and for the creation of a separate Hindu province that would remain inside an Indian Nation" (Chatterji 1994, 01).

Bhadralok participation in creating the communal rift involved but was not limited to narrative construction and campaigning. This is evident from Subaltern historians' finding of a "significant transformation in the internal elements of nationalist consciousness" so that what "was generative of slogans of Hindu–Muslim fraternity in an earlier era … could now [during the second Partition in 1947] generate with equal ease the spectre of Muslim tyranny" (Chatterjee 1997, 34). Building on that, in the following section, I will identify the presence of institutionalised communal politics by interrogating the narratives in the texts.

If we consider 'nationalism' as a term to bracket everything – "from Hindu dominance at one extreme to varying degrees of intercommunal fraternisation to insistence on the separation of religion and politics altogether" (Chatterjee 1997, 36) – it will not only blur the definition of nationalism but will also keep the memories of changing shapes of caste domination within the communal fold, the mechanisms to weave animosity, and the cold-blooded planning of riots unexplored and silenced. Talking about memory wars, Samuel Sequeira writes:

> While governments with competing ideologies and agendas try to 'own' and mould history, individuals and groups also vie for a place within the national narrative. Very often, this process involves the use and abuse of power and violence. This violent and forceful character of inscribing memory in historical writings stems from the role played by social actors who wield social, political and economic power and by

those that are involved in archiving, narrating and legitimising these memories through the process of cultural representations and social practices. As an outcome of this struggle, some memories and identities find adequate recognition and representation while others are subjugated, ignored, lost, suppressed and often forcefully erased in order that a particular narrative gets its dominant place (Sequeira 2019, 133).

Given the post-2014 scenario, it is likely that memories of the upper-caste Hindu involvement in Partition clashes and their narratives have been 'subjugated, ignored, lost, suppressed … and forcefully erased'. Such efforts also highlight those narratives that either explain Partition riots as an aberration, erratic, and inexplicably irrational or offload the entire responsibility to the 'other' community, replacing the memory of them as perpetrators with reconstructed narratives of Hindu victimhood.

Bhadralok attempts to rationalise violence against the 'other' community sprouted from the propagation that the 'self' was under 'threat'. Sarkar traced two transitions in the path of Hindu communalism:

> A genealogy of Hindu communalism … would have to think in terms of two transitions … from an inchoate 'Hindu' world without firmly defined boundaries to the late-nineteenth century constructions, in the context of more integrative colonial communication structures, of ideologies of unified 'Hinduism'; and then a further move in some quarters, roughly dateable to the mid-1920, towards aggressive Hindutva postulated usually upon an enemy image of a similarly conceived Islam (Sarkar 1998, 363).

The difference between 'Hinduism' and 'Hindutva' is, thus, marked by the presence of an 'enemy image' in the latter. This, we argue, brought an intra-community transformation within the collective quotidian experience of the entire Hindu religious group. Such a significant transformation – one which untied the pre-existing inter-religious harmonious bond at the grassroots – cannot plausibly be explained as an outcome of mere rationalisation and legitimation of the imagination of the 'Other'. Remarkably, twenty-six lower-caste representatives voted in favour of Partition in the Bengal Assembly, while only five voted for United Bengal (Chatterjee 1997). What brought the majority of the lower castes over to the Bhadralok fold – mostly landowners and caste oppressors – to indulge in brutality against Muslims, with whom they had historically shared class proximity?

Homogenisation

My interrogation of cultural texts bearing public and private memories will explain how Hindutva aggressively pulled the strings, with the help of Bhadralok, to homogenise the internal differences that historically existed within the Hindu community. Nabendu Ghosh's

'*Trankarta*' (The Saviour) is a rare short story written in Bangla that depicts the riots' lived world.[6] The story begins with a chilling description of a riot-torn urban city space:

> The frightening news of the riot has reached this locality, too; the clash is taking place. The roads are empty and claustrophobic. Even the street dogs are not visible. Only a few desperate teenagers are smoking at the crossroads and talking among themselves. The adjacent locality is burning, people are being butchered and beheaded, and heads are being thrown on the side of the streets. Young women are being abducted, their breasts lacerated, and their bodies ruined and violated! Babies are being smashed to death on the ground. It is the resurrection of a primitive barbarism out of the gloom of hell – just in the nearby locality.

The news and rumours of horrific events reaching the Hindu Bhadralok locality have petrified people who have stopped venturing out of their premises, worried about their own and their family's survival amidst the 'resurrection of a primitive barbarism'. The focus then shifts to the domestic space of a Bhadralok family, where Boses have gathered and are talking among themselves in English, the rulers' language. They are considering a move to Bhawanipur, comparatively safe for the Hindu community, in their personal car. However, one of them, Mr Bose, is against moving out: "Well, you can lose your life on the road before reaching there." Rather, he prefers to organise a defence committee meeting to decide security measures for the 'community'. No lower-caste representative is invited to the meeting. The narrative keeps oscillating between the domestic space of the Bose family and the slum dwellers, mainly poor working men and women, to delineate the degree of dissimilarity between them, where one is necessarily ashamed of the other's existence.

> At the end of the elite and Bhadralok locality… a few people lived in a slum, maybe two hundred people, Dom by caste. They think of themselves as connected to this locality. Their homes are more like pigeon-holes. Somehow, they carry on with their way of life. They work as sweepers, clean the roads, clean the drains … They hardly manage to have rice, even if full of tiny pebbles; they quarrel amongst themselves in the light of lanterns, their shadows bigger than their tiny and godforsaken existence.

Their 'tiny and godforsaken existence' is nothing but an utter embarrassment to the 'elite and Bhadralok locality'. The difference between them involves not just caste but also economic, cultural, educational, and status disparities. Although inhabitants of the same locality, they live in two different worlds – religious identity is hardly a unifying thread over their unsettling juxtapositions.

The meeting begins with Mr Bose, as the meeting president, opening the discussion:

We all know what has begun in this city since yesterday. This is not the right time to say much, nor will I make my speech very long. The only thing I need to clarify to you is that it is a horrific time for us, particularly the Bengalis. We need to get organised and hold the line against our foes – this barbarism of the Middle Ages. We must fight and stop it [spoken in English], which means we have to restrain abnormal activities in our locality. Now we must forget race or caste, the distinction between the elite and the commoners, or the question of untouchability. The one thing we must remember is – we are Hindu.

The protagonist here proposes to forget internal differences between castes and prioritise their common religious identity. The meeting results in the unanimous decision that the lower-caste people, the Doms, need to be bribed and deceived through their leader, Jhogru, to draw them into the riots for the security of the 'community'. Riot as a historical configuration sharpens the self-interest of all the groups. In other words, every group is made to believe that their interest is served by participation in the riots. Following the meeting, Jhogru is called, and Mr Bose requests him to take a seat to make him feel as though he (Jhogru) belongs to the community fold. This description resembles Ambedkar's statement, 'A caste has no feeling that it is affiliated to other castes except there is a Hindu-Muslim riot' (Ambedkar 2014, 50).

Further interaction between Mr Bose and Jhogru is as follows:

'Tonight, they will arrive!'

'Yes, sir.'

'We are Hindu, so are you!'

'Certainly!'

'If Hindus do not stand by Hindu, who would save us, Jhogru?'

'Of course, no doubt about it.'

'If they arrive, would you fight? We – look, we too certainly would join you. We would fight together.'

Suddenly Mr Bose notices that Jhagru is the only one in the meeting standing. He enthusiastically pleads:

'Hey! Why are you standing? Please be seated!'

Jhogru is dazzled; he has never got such a warm welcome before. He says:

'But, sir!'

'Nothing, Nothing! Don't be shy. Be seated.'

'I burn bodies, sir! I am a Dom.'

'Dom?' Mr Bose's eyes pop. 'So what? You, too, are human. Sit, brother.'

He comes up to Jhogru and holds his hands to guide him to a stool. Jhogru has no idea about Mr Bose's intentions and is struck dumb. This had never happened to him, even at the peak of a celebration when he was filled with cheap liquor, *dheno*. But today, he is in the uncharted territory of being recognised (by higher castes) and is overwhelmed.

Here, the intent does not seem to be to bribe; rather, Mr Bose, an archetypal, anglicised upper-caste Bhadralok figure, decides to call Jhogru 'brother', and the magic happens. Jhogru, 'overwhelmed', is made to believe that he and his community truly belong to the broader Hindu community. Thus, Mr Bose draws Jhogru and his folks into protecting the 'community' by joining the communal clashes. The story ends with Jhogru dead after saving the Bhadraloks that night and Mr Bose moving to Bhawanipur, a safe place. Mr Bose feels no guilt. He believes he has compensated the loss with some fifty rupees given as a 'bribe'. In this story, the upper caste succeeds in scapegoating the lower castes.

In another short story, *Ijjat* (The Honor), written by Narayan Gangopadhyay, the protagonist from a lower caste, Jagannath Sarkar, has elevated his social status to a Brahmin. He acts what he feels is the rightful duty of a Brahmin – to arouse fear of Muslim tyranny – and promises to bleed the 'enemy', if needed.

> Taking pride in being Bramhin, Jagannath has grown almost half a foot of *Tiki* at the back of his head. That was oscillating, he said: No! This requires action; a measurement must have been taken. If this grows any longer, we must remember that – everyone would be bound to wear Kolma. Taruni Mandal replied: Then what, might is right!' Jagannath was looking for acceptance of his own stance; he yelled, of course! Who would fight for us? It must be made clear – that even if I have a single drop of blood remaining in my body – I would resist it with all my possible force.

Earlier, Jagannath did not belong to the Bhadralok community. Despite keeping a half-foot *Tiki*, he feels insecure about his new-found elevated location. He believes that carrying forward the hate narratives of Bhadralok will help him permanently secure his position. Hence, he tries to go to the extent even Bhadraloks cannot. He says he can shed the enemy's blood. He becomes a person who not only narrates but promises to perform necessary actions as well.

Jhogru, the character in Nabendu Ghosh's short story, thought participating in violent action might let him and his caste integrate with the community. The same is the case of Jagannath, who thinks creating narratives like Bhadraloks and performing violent acts will make him indispensable to the community. Jhogru and Jagannath are not positioned in the same hierarchy,

but their participation against the enemy, the 'Other', can potentially earn a better position in the Hindu community, at least in their imagination.

One of the major objectives of Hindutva communalism is to bring different caste groups under a common umbrella despite their hierarchical differences. Studies in social history have shown such a line was not fortuitously adopted on the eve of Partition. Sumit Sarkar has mapped the transition from Hinduism towards Hindutva (Sarkar 1998). He found in the Adhikari-bheda[7], one of the doctrines of caste division (dated mid and late nineteenth century), the explanation of the division of caste as placing everyone in the appropriate place in the social hierarchy within a unified system. However, contrary to the Adhikari-bheda's suggestions, when E.A. Gait's proposal of politically empowering lower castes in 1901 came up, a section of upper-caste Hindus raised issues such as Muslim tyranny, the disintegration of Hindu society, and the decline of Hindu numbers relative to Muslims through books and pamphlets. For example, *Hindu: A Dying Race* (1909) by U.N. Mukherji suggested unification as the only way out under the circumstances of Muslim growth and Hindu demographic decline based on census data and prediction, 'a purely derivative discourse' (Sarkar 1998, 387).

While Sanskritisation was initially proposed as an important step for lower-caste upliftment by a dogmatic section of the Bhadralok community, Digindranarayan Bhattacharji's *Jati-Bheda* (1912) came out with a sharp anti-caste argument and suggested abandoning Sanskritisation. Bhattacharji found it was making the hierarchy stronger instead of reducing it as upwardly mobile Namasudras and Mahisyas were distinguishing themselves sharply from Chandals and Kaivartas (Sarkar 1998, 384). Beginning with Mukherji and Bhattacharji, most of the leading lights of Hindutva, including Shraddhanand, Savarkar, Hedgewar and Golwalkar[8], advocated for the reduction of caste barriers and unification of the community by using Hindu religious identity as a cultural thread and Bharatvarsha as a place of indigenous origin, along with an anti-Muslim thrust. In the second decade of the century, this became the official line of the Hindutva-espousing RSS and Vishva Hindu Parishad (VHP), with the RSS leader K.S. Sudarshan later commenting, "difference, in fact, could be celebrated as so many flowers making up the single garland of Hinduism" (Sarkar 1998, 387). While homogenisation of internal differences was a step advocated and implemented by the RSS later as the mechanism to ensure the lower castes 'fell on' Islamic others, it can be said to have initially sprouted from Bhadralok brains as the solution for Hindu demographic decline and need for lower-caste elevation in the context of Bengal at the beginning of the twentieth century.

Building on Sarkar's observation that the 'link between demographic decline and need for lower caste upliftment did play a significant role in the turn towards Hindutva in the early 20s' (Sarkar 1998, 387), I argue that during the second to fourth decades of the twentieth century, a sustained process was underway on the part of communal Bhadralok narrators to

convince the rest of the upper-caste community about the need for inclusion of lower castes. This unity also depended on the "sustenance of the notion of Muslims as an ever-present, existential threat" (Sarkar 1998, 388). Like the rationalisation narratives I discussed in the previous section, homogenisation narratives were also tailor-made for the Bhadralok audience; the objective was to reconfigure their perspectives towards lower castes in the changed circumstances.

Rumours, Manufactured Information and Ethics of Enmity

Another important factor that made violence possible was misleading people with manufactured information about deaths, rapes and counter-attacks. Exaggerated figures of casualties and much-amplified threats of further attacks drove people into action. As the city of Calcutta remained segregated into Hindu and Muslim neighbourhoods from Direct Action Day (16 August 1946) up to the Declaration of Independence, news items about happenings in other places were fabricated. People, utterly panicked, ran to safe places where a large number of people from the same community lived. Frightened people hardly verified the information reaching them. Tapan Raychoudhuri, in his autobiography, *Bangal-Nama*, recalls how the scenario before the riots created phantasmagoria, where the difference between 'truth' and 'false' became narrow. He talks of people being fed manufactured narratives, with even newspapers full of false news:

> We learned that thousands of Hindus were being butchered in Rajabazar and Park Circus. They howled – innumerable Hindu women are also being raped in broad daylight. Someone brought a substandard newspaper to our frightened place which most people believed to be true. I still remember the name of that newspaper which was unknown to me. The sale of the newspaper, we heard, went up to a few thousand during those horrific days. Later, I investigated how the editor himself wrote those narratives of Hindu victimhood from his drawing room. As it was not safe to go out, the brilliant man composed the history of the Calcutta riot out of pure imagination. It was not fabrication; rather, an insane mind manufacturing truths (Raychoudhuri 2007, 248).

Printed newspapers containing 'news' regarding attacks, counter-attacks and brutality were pressed into service to manufacture disinformation. The increase in sales that Raychoudhuri mentions indicates the high, large-scale consumption of those manufactured narratives. If disinformation is presented through a trustworthy medium, such as a printed newspaper, instead of merely verbally, the impact would be stronger. Along with newspapers, leaflets were circulated to call for action. Ishaan Mukherjee, who has worked with empirical evidence of the Calcutta riot, quotes one original leaflet: "The outraged mothers and sisters must be avenged. The souls of the dead Hindu brethren remain unsatiated … This dark Diwali *needs to* be coloured with the blood of the Pakistani Muslims" (Mukherjee 2017, 275). (my italics)

This leaflet depicts two of the major thematic building blocks of enmity: blaming and revenge. It tries to reconfigure the violent acts within the permissibility of ethics, presenting it as the performance of duty, an act of necessity. Such necessary actions, in the form of sacrificial 'blood-letting for building a strong nation', I have argued, were particularly assigned to lower castes. But some leaflets addressed to Bhadraloks. The leaflet, '*Andhakarachchanana Dipaboli K Pak Muslimer Rokte Ronjito Koria Tulibar Daitto Loite Hoibe*', presents a Sanskritized *sadhu* Bengali (opposed to *chalti* or colloquial language) marked with Tatsama[9] words, which proves the caste and educational status of the writer who, it can be plausibly argued, was of Bhadralok origin. Paul Brass has observed: "In the last days of British Raj, it was not only the case that violence occurred as a consequence of Partition, but violence was a principal mechanism for creating the condition for Partition" (Brass 2006, 76). As this paper finds, in the eastern part of the undivided nation, a certain section of Bhadraloks adopted all possible narratives to paint violence as a 'principal mechanism' to create 'the condition for Partition'. It involved but was not limited to the depiction of such violent actions as courageous acts, divine and godly, for the sake of safeguarding religion, family and society.

Enmity and the Changed Shapes of Remembering

In Bhadralok's painful memories of the Partition, enmity has lived on and become part of the public discourses that influence personal and collective memory. For instance, *Chere Asa Gram* (in English. the abandoned village) is a collection of life stories that were first serially published in a Bengali newspaper, Jugantar, from 1950 onward and later collected in this book in 1975 by Dankshinaranjan Basu. It recounts the memories of 67 authors of their native villages in East Bengal, from where they migrated to West Bengal. In one such story, the anonymous author says:

> The memory is getting transcended, far from here, distant – towards the unending sea of eternal time when we were so happy! But while we roamed to demand a rehabilitation package on this side, we were attacked to an unbearable extent each day. As any sound is usually followed by its echoes, attacks must also be reciprocated. What we are receiving here – when will they be paid back there? (Basu 1975, 32)

Evidently, the memory of a happy, harmonious pre-Partition past is inseparable from retaliation and hatred during a riot. In other words, it is as though happy memories are not directly accessible from the narrator's present spatiotemporal location, and the violent memory becomes a metaphorical border in the memorial terrain between two periods marked by happiness and inconsolable sufferings. In the literal sense of the word, the border becomes a complex line in the perception of refugees. To them, the border legitimises violence. The memory of their inexplicable loss and the desire to exact revenge as an ethical choice are influenced by their new spatiotemporal context, where Bhadralok narratives dominate the public discourses.

This notion of revenge has been unbelievably powerful. Even after conversion to non-mainstream, reformist chords of the Hindu religion, their hostility towards Muslims does not necessarily go away. For instance, a lower-caste interviewee, Anil Bain, in Manan Kumar Mandal's collection of oral narratives of Partition, recalls:

> … after converting to the Matua religion, many of us were attracted towards education, but the *venom* of communal hatred remained as residue in our psychological plane; maybe for this reason, the majority could not adopt Mahapran Jogen Mandal's theory with much open-mindedness (Mandal 2020, 85; my italics).

Even after conversion to the Matua sect and after the passage of so many years, Bain still feels the 'venom' that was infused during and before Partition by the Bhadraloks. Enmity towards Muslims was not limited to Bhadraloks nor migrating selves; its power extended to converted selves as well. In Anil Bain's case, the national identity has changed after migration, as has the religious identity, but the venom remains.

Similarly, in Anindya Raychaudhuri's work, one of the interviewees, Geeta, a Hindu upper-caste migrant woman, vehemently expresses this animosity:

> We had to leave because of them … I am still *angry*, very *angry* at the Muslims … Not all people are the same. If I see a blind beggar, *I feel like giving* to a *Hindu, not* a *Muslim* – I am *still* so *angry*, very angry. Because we didn't get anything, we lost land and everything there and became paupers. My mother and her three children – we lost everything (Raychaudhuri 2019, 98; my italics).

This choice of seeing the present is inseparably connected to the experience of the 'Other' as enemies in the past, as an outgroup, as hated bodies. Memory as a highly contested space is often influenced by today's personal identities that peripheralise some and hegemonise others, leaving less space for forgetting and forgiving. Sometimes, they become the building blocks for a selectively cropped nationalist narrative. The forms of memory narratives explored here significantly influence the shaping of patterns of remembering. These have produced a new, intolerant way of looking at Muslims not only as the 'Other' but also as the historicised enemy.

Notes

1. "In 1947, Bengal was divided again, following the horrific clash between Hindu and Muslims … The second and definitive partition of Bengal was preceded by an organised agitation which demanded the vivisection of the province on the basis of religion. This movement was led by the very same section of Bengali society that had dominated its nationalist politics since the time of Bengal's first partition: the so-called Bhadraloks or

"respectable people" (Chatterji 2002, 1). Throughout this paper, this category of the Bengal population is referred to as Bhadraloks. A caveat: Bhadraloks were not only stakeholders in nationalist and communal politics; they could often be found oriented towards anti-communal politics as well, specifically in the leadership of communist-led agrarian movements like Tebhaga. However, while referring to the Bhadraloks as a subset of the Hindu Bengali community in this paper, I mean the communal section, oscillating between nationalist and organised communal politics.

2. This was a Fazlul Huq-led coalition of Krishak Praja Party and Muslim League which adopted measures that set aside many provisions that earlier benefitted Hindu elites.

3. This is evident in a statement issued by the PWA reminding the organisers of their task: "We (the undersigned) realise that the main job of all patriotic intellectuals and writers in this grave and critical hour for our country is to fight communalism in all its manifestations and to do all we can to stop bitterness, ill-will, and enmity between Indian and Indian, between Hindu and Muslim from spreading. We have to work not only by appealing to the essential humanity and rousing the basic patriotism of our people, not only by exposing the sinister game of imperialism and its willing and unconscious agents but through depicting the glorious example of unity from day to day life and common struggle for our people' (Pradhan 2009, 187).

4. All the necessary sections of the primary materials are translated by me.

5. The column was periodically published during 1946–47. The original Bengali column is digitally accessible: www.amarboi.com/2018/08/desh-patrika-archive.html (*Desh* 1946 (April–July) and *Desh* 1947 (January–March, March–June, September–December).

6. Nabendu Ghosh's '*Trankarta*' and Narayan Gangopadhyay's '*Ijjat*' are two short stories written in Bengali, which are available in a collection of short stories edited by Bhadreswar Mandal (1965). I have translated the excerpts included here.

7. AdhikariBheda is a theological doctrine that validates caste hierarchy in Hindu society. Sumit Sarkar has cited the text in 'Identity and Difference' to show the enormous impact this text had in the pre-1920 phase over Bhadralok readership, to highlight the violations of its mandates, marking an overt shift of Bhadralok stances regarding lower caste Hindus in post-1920s.

8. Golwalkar. M.S. *Bunch of Thoughts*. archive.org/stream/in.ernet.dli.2015.201991/ 2015.201991.Bunch-Of_djvu.txt. Accessed 11 November 2021.

9. Tatsama are the Sanskrit loan words in Indo-Aryan languages like Bangla, Odiya, Assamese etc. This shows that the narrator is well-versed in the much more sophisticated version of the Indo-Aryan language and its chords rooted in the classical tradition.

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