



Partition or its Phantasm?: Sixty-five Years after the Cracking of Bengal

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Abstract

The article studies two films, *Lizard (Tiktiki* in Bengali, 2012) directed by Raja Dasgupta, which is a small-screen drama aired as a telefilm in Tara TV Bangla, and Anik Dutta-directed *The Ghost's Future (Bhooter Bhabishyat* in Bengali, 2012), which became a big hit on the silver screen. Analyses of these two artworks reveal how and why the phantasm of partition, even more than partition itself, remains a key point of reference in defining the everyday spirit of post-Partition West Bengal.

In both these films made sixty-five years after the Bengal Partition, fiction picks on history by means of over-used notions. The article examines why, after several decades of Partition, art is exploited to appeal to the sentimentalist standpoint of 'The Refugee Experience,' even as so much scholarship is emerging that examines Partition in all its complexity. Who and what does 'The Refugee Experience' represent today? Who is the spokesperson for 'authentic Bengali-ness' in the recent socio-cultural context of Kolkata? The article addresses these questions.

Keywords: *Bhadralok*, *Bhooter Bhabishyat*, Calcutta, Partition of Bengal, Film, Refugee, *Tiktiki*.

Introduction: The Paradoxical *Bhadralok*¹ Immigrant Subject

The Bengali Hindus had been culturally and politically dominating India since the colonial period. Following a difference in opinion regarding the formation of the Bengal Union², it was not unlikely for many East Bengali *bhadralok*, who worked in Calcutta and simultaneously enjoyed the harvests of East Bengal parish lands, to support the Partition of Bengal. Joya Chatterji states: "...the founding fathers of West Bengal designed partition in

¹ *Bhadralok* is a variable social marker, which shifted its onus historico-politically from aristocracy of wealth and rack-rentier agrarian structure to "cultural chauvinism that derived from a pride in Western education and inheritance of the 'Renaissance' tradition in Bengal" (Ghosh, 2004, p. 4335). According to Barun De, India's colonialism operated not only at the level of British bureaucrats, planters and professionals, but also included the white-collar brown sahibs, merchants and dominant peasantry – a class that had explicit fidelity to the cause of imperialism (De, 1993). In Sumit Sarkar's view, even though the broad term *bhadralok* encompassed a wide range of preoccupations and statuses, ranging from "a Maharaja of Mymensingh to East India railway clerk," it was unified through "a degree of shared values about self-perception" (quoted in Ghosh, 2004, p. 247). For instance, admiration and aspiration for a given set of habits, such as penchant for Bengali literary classics, vouched for the legitimacy of one's *bhadralok*-ness.

² Bengal Union fortified the idea of a collective Bengali *jati* (race), focussing on linguistic and cultural unity of Bengalis over and above their religion-based differences. The main proponents of an independent united Bengal were Sarat Bose and Kiron Shankar Ray among the Hindu organizers, and Abul Hashim, Secretary of the Bengal Provincial Muslim League, as well as Huq and Huseyn Shaheed Suhrawardy, the Premiers of Bengal, from among the Muslim leaders.

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the hope of restoring their privileges and reasserting their dominance in the new homeland...” with the desire to “reverse its long history of decline, survive the disruptions of partition and win back its rightful place in the all-India arena” (Chatterji, 2007, p. 4). Regarding the Partition in 1947, Pablo Bose observes:

Many Indian Bengalis continue to blame separatist sentiments amongst the Muslim leadership for the Partition of Bengal, yet as Joya Chatterji and others have argued, Hindu communalists were vociferous in their demands for an autonomous, Hindu-dominated region of Bengal. (Bose, 2013, p. 63)

Chatterji further notes that many East Bengali Hindus, until a long time, were a part of the aforementioned communalist groups, and actively wanted the Partition to materialize. Subsequently, they had voted in the Bengal Assembly for a well-protected Hindu Bengali province. As the Radcliffe line had not become visible until at a later stage, the East Bengali *bhadralok* were not sure if the Partition would directly affect their own geographical location, and anticipated that their specific regions might be included in the Hindu cartography of the partitioned Bengal. Such an administrative decision would allow them to preserve ownership of their ancestral properties. On the other hand, the post-Partition period saw the Muslim populace holding out the new status of minorities to the Hindus that wanted to stay back in what had become the Islamic polity of East Pakistan. Upon realizing that their ‘homes’ would become a part of the Muslim-majority nation-state, a substantial section of the *bhadralok* who were equipped with English education and proper socio-cultural channels, sold off their properties and migrated to obtain a decent living in West Bengal. Apart from the fear of physical harm, anxiety about lack of economic opportunities and loss of social standing acted as incentives in the East Bengali *bhadralok*’s decision to migrate to West Bengal. Unlike what elitist Partition narratives suggest, such a decision would not wreak irretrievable material damage to them. On the contrary, migration could relieve them of the increasing Muslim dominance and help them to rejuvenate their lost political control in the Hindu-majority land of West Bengal. Based on these considerations, the East Bengali Hindu male elite that feature in the history of post-Partition West Bengal politics, does not fit into the popular refugee image signifying poverty and deprivation.³ He cannot be equated with the rural masses, whose gaze Kishan Chander describes in “Annadata”⁴ as the gaze of a collective peasantry cast at the city. While Chander shows the peasants as returning to their villages with dreams of new harvest at the end of the temporary famine conditions, the refugee groups, as they are portrayed in Nemaï Ghosh’s film *The Uprooted* (*Chhinnamul*, 1950) are “politically an extremely important demographic entity...[who] take part in a reconstruction of the city”. (Biswas, 2007, p. 45, 52).

Nostalgia in Bengal Partition Artworks and History of Post-Partition Calcutta

Bengali authors have extensively produced narratives about journey from *desh* to Calcutta, especially about the post-Partition permanent immigration to a point of no return and how the migration acted towards altering the everyday lives for both the West and the East Bengalis. What Shelley Feldman’s study calls as one of the major aftermaths of the Partition of Bengal

³ Anindita Dasgupta studies that many *bhadralok* economic migrants had simultaneous homes in Sylhet and the Brahmaputra districts and Cachar since 19 C. For them, Partition meant loss of ‘*desh bari*,’ which, however, did not affect their intact job and property in Assam. Previously, Assam used to be a semi-feudal, semi-tribal self-ruled province. By the time an Assamese middle-class began to emerge, the Bengalis had occupied major government positions, leading to mal-distribution of power and resources. Stereotypes of ‘lazy Assamese’ as opposed to ‘disciplined Bengalis’ justified the latter’s ‘suitable’ hegemonization. As a form of resistance, Assamese nationalism forwarded anti-Bengali opposition towards Sylheti Bengali immigrants by founding the Assam Sangrakshini Sabha (Dasgupta, 2004).

⁴ “Annadata” (“The Giver of Grain”) is a short story based on the 1943 Bengal Famine.

– the postcolonial challenge of “(re)making communities” out of the node of contact between the established West Bengalis and the recently migrating East Bengalis into the territories of West Bengal – is a topic recurrently discussed in the works of immigrant Bengali artists. They refer to the tensions that arose due to the dissimilar essences of ‘Bengali-ness,’ which became evident at the levels of religion, ethnicity and place, complicating the “state-making and nation-making projects” (Feldman, 2014, p. 112, 114). Even as the post-Partition storylines cannot be physically located in East Bengal, ‘the Golden village’ occupies a psychic space in the discussion of the ideal, and in simultaneous depiction of Calcutta’s degraded society. Tagore in the capacity of a landlord and Nirad C. Chaudhuri as a salaried clerk have made many colonist impressions of the rural Bengal. Being rooted in Calcutta, they would visit the East Bengal countryside on duty or for outings. Both the authors described the natural scenery through studied sensibilities of European art and poetry. What is more, from Jibanananda Das to Sunil Gangopadhyay, Manik Bandopadhyay to Ritwik Ghatak, authors have juxtaposed East Bengal’s fertility with West Bengal’s lesser agricultural abundance, its people’s simplicity with the Calcuttan’s depravity, its love for Bengali language, culture and traditions with Calcutta’s Westernized values. As a result of this, two permanent poles of ‘good’ and ‘bad,’ ‘genuine’ and ‘fake’ Bengalis have been erected, which continue in the present times.⁵

At the outset, this was a logical defence mechanism taken up by the East Bengali refugee *bhadralok*, colloquially referred to as *bangal*, against the innumerable disparaging falsehoods that the native *bhadralok* or *ghotis* of West Bengal floated in the society about them. Such spurious debates on alleged ‘superiority’ and ‘inferiority’ in the everyday parlance would serve a harmless social interface, to the extent that the *bangal-ghoti* dyad represents the spirit of the Bengali culture till date. It is, however, problematic when the initially powerless immigrant Bengalis, especially from the *bhadralok* class, accumulate power by constantly appealing either to their ‘lesser’ and victimized status, or by emphasizing their inherently greater aptitude than the natives. In this discourse, there is hardly any mentioning about the socio-cultural networks that the immigrants have been exploring in post-Partition West Bengal. Under such circumstances, the idealized Otherness that the *bhadralok* immigrants claim becomes an active tool for gaining access to social assets.

Romola Sanyal and Nilanjana Chatterjee observe that faced with public and governmental rebuff, the *bhadralok* immigrants who settled in the squatter colonies had often resorted to politicizing their demands as refugee citizens. While Bengal had for a long time been a *bhadralok* province where upper-castes spoke for all, the Partition resulted in a complex situation, where the East Bengali’s problems had to be undertaken by the West Bengali elite. Hence, acquisition and self-rehabilitation on the part of *bhadralok* immigrants in the squatter colonies was a means of downplaying their refugee identity with caste-class superiority.

The immigrants’ determination not to go back to East Pakistan played a powerful role

⁵ Jibanananda Das’ works, such as “Rupasi Bangla” and “Banalata Sen,” among others, are rapt with descriptions of the picturesque East Bengal, and emanate pathos and nostalgia. In the subsequent years, “Rupashi Bangla” became the refrain of inspiration for the Liberation War of Bangladesh (1971). Set against the backdrop of the years preceding Partition, Manik Bandopadhyay’s *Padma Nadir Majhi* is inspired by an idealistic vision and desire to create an island in the Padma delta, where Hindus and Muslims coexist peacefully. This “beacon and dream of a better life on a remote island, *Moyna Dweep*” has a strong essence of the idyllic life and experiences of rural East Bengal (Ray, 2005, n.pag.). Observing Ritwik Ghatak’s works on Partition, Priyanka Shah notes the following: “East Pakistan has been portrayed in Ghatak’s films as an idyllic place breeding prelapsarian innocence and purity. On the other hand, Calcutta has been time and again portrayed as a dumping ground of debris. Calcutta to Ghatak, is a place which he loved to hate and hated to love” (Shah, 2014, p. 126). This attitude is perceptible in Ghatak’s films, such as *Subarnarekha* and *Jukti, Tokko Aar Goppo*.

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in forging their identity as claimants of legal protection and sympathy in West Bengal. In post-Partition West Bengal, the Hindu immigrants seized the centre-stage through their self-portrayal as veritable patriots. Critics even go to the extent of calling them as the “protagonists in the city” (Biswas, 2007, p. 52). In a bid to be included within the Indian nation-state, the immigrants recurrently referred to the drastic ‘fall’ of their social and economic status. They expected a higher position with respect to the natives, by asserting their contribution in the Indian independence, which they thought was unfairly repaid. Etching a self-image based on victimhood, they acted as vanguards of a carefully preserved and reinvented past. Repetition and naturalization of these tropes in literature and artworks have paved the material aims of the immigrants in the host land. This romanticizing tendency is more prominent among the upper-caste middle- and lower-middle-class Hindu immigrants, who had to depend on governmental aids for re-establishing themselves. Their narratives about the pre-Partition life tend to balance out their post-Partition status decline.

Set against this backdrop, this article studies two films, *Lizard* (*Tiktiki* in Bengali) directed by Raja Dasgupta, which is a small-screen drama aired as a telefilm in Tara TV Bangla in 2012, and Anik Dutta-directed *The Ghost's Future* (*Bhooter Bhabishyat* in Bengali), which became a big hit on the silver screen in the same year. Analyses of these two artworks reveal how and why the phantasm of partition, even more than the partition itself, remains a key point of reference in defining the everyday spirit of West Bengal in a predisposed fashion.

***Tiktiki*: Reinforcing Truisms**

Lizard (*Tiktiki*) is an adaptation of *Sleuth*, a 1970 play written by Anthony Shaffer. In the original story, the play is set in the Wiltshire manor house of Andrew Wyke, a successful mystery writer, who is obsessed with inventions of fiction, and fascinated with game-playing. He baits his wife’s lover to the house and convinces him to stage a robbery of her jewellery. The Bengali version *Tiktiki* appears as cerebral, informed from various resources, and morally influences the audience about the Partition of Bengal. The filmic technique of *Tiktiki* is based on a principle of shock, and borders on Adorno’s definition of pseudo-revolutionary films. Referring to *Anything Goes* from the 1930s, Adorno defines the traits of pseudo-revolutionary films as propagating a formal movement beneath the external veneer of indeterminacy, supposedly “in the service of emancipatory intentions” (Adorno, 1991, p. 184). Similarly, *Tiktiki* adopts a culturally well-organized style to make an emotive claim for refugee agency in West Bengal, especially in Calcutta. The film brings back the stimulating debate about the West Bengali ‘they’ versus the East Bengali ‘us’ that the civic life of West Bengal still finds as relevant. In other words, the sentimental power of the topic commands attention.

The story’s design is simple, to the point of being simplistic. An aging native Bengali man from Calcutta, predictably shown as a rich aristocrat, locks horns with a rustic and poor but more intelligent refugee youth from Faridpur, over a sexual tussle involving the former’s wife. The Calcuttan man’s emasculated character is one of the implied reasons why his wife has deserted him for the refugee youth. In the West Bengali man’s concocting a cruel brain game to trap his rival, and the latter’s surviving his vile tactics, one can perceive a repetition of notions propagated by canonical immigrant artworks, such as Sunil Ganguly’s *Arjun* and *Purbo Paschim* (*East-West*), which are set in post-Partition West Bengal. Both novels create the stereotype of the ‘highly accomplished’ poor refugee, who is ill-treated by the wealthy native *bhadralok*. *Tiktiki* harks back this tight dichotomous discourse, in which the native people of West Bengal are unvaryingly identified as affluent, privileged and unkind, leaving no room for the diverse existence of the grassroots and the middle-class West Bengali masses.

Moreover, the film questionably conflates the poor *bhadra* immigrants’ image with that of the Dalit refugees, whereas historical records suggest that the former have always

maintained a distance with the latter.⁶ While the East Bengali *bhadralok* has frequently claimed a unified 'Refugee-ness' by alluding to mythic battles that the refugees waged together against ruthless native landlords and the state, such a claim obscures differences of caste and class. In practice, the caste-class factor was crucial in determining the kind of rehabilitation to which a particular refugee family was entitled in post-Partition India. Differential treatments at the official level reveal the intrinsically heterogeneous nature of 'refugee' as an identity marker. The *bhadralok* squatters' indifference towards the Dalit refugees is observed in the former's withdrawal from the movement called for the rehabilitation of Bettiah deserters,⁷ which had ultimately become a failure. In Dipesh Chakrabarty's words: "the petty bourgeoisie squatters who had very little relationship with the lowly *Namasudra* peasant before migration felt no real concern for the fate of these agriculturalists" (quoted in Chakrabarti, 1990, p. 178-179).

The main characters in *Tiktiki* are two vague and over-generalized symbols of two stock types of Bengali-ness – the '*bangal*' (immigrant) and the '*ghoti*' (native), both of whom transcend their caste-class specificities and stand for a pervasive and monolithic trend, rather than a particular case. In the limitations of both these symbolic characters, the other, more layered meanings of Bengali existence suffer a lack of representation. The opulent West Bengali's prototype is shown as embodying the entire old-Calcuttan baggage of 'Urban Native-ness.' Such a representation is as suspicious and quaint as the modest East Bengali's prototype, which is shown as replicating typical 'Folklorist Refugee-ness.'

In an overbearing attempt to come across as an 'authentic representation,' the character of the East Bengali man consciously interjects *bangal* dialect in his otherwise proficient Calcuttan speech. In this context, it is important to bear in mind that a certain standardized language stated as 'East Bengali' or *bangal* dialect has time and again featured in the cultural media of post-Partition West Bengal as a sign of individuation of the Refugee Other, in opposition to the so-called 'Calcuttan Bengali' tongue. Assertion of a separate vernacular is supposedly a way for the immigrant to challenge his/her marginal position in West Bengal. On the other hand, the legitimacy of the *bangal*-Bengali language binary and conflict can be complicated. Whereas in West Bengal, the scriptural Bengali version is considered as the uniform medium and used in formal public places, opposing it only with a sweeping 'East Bengali dialect' makes the linguistic scenario of Bengal rather too straightforward. Just as there are multiple versions of the Bengali language spoken in different parts of West Bengal, there is no single 'East Bengali dialect' outside of the regionally variable inflections in East Bengal. What is more, a politically motivated and flattened representation of a meta-language as depicted in the 'East Bengali dialect' is hardly adequate in securing any cultural roots. This is because most second- and third-generation immigrant Bengalis in West Bengal are unfamiliar with their ancestral region's vernacular, partly out of their urge to assimilate with the Calcuttan culture, and partly because the Calcuttan culture demands systemic unlearning of non-Calcuttan Bengali-ness. Thus, beyond celebrating a misplaced notion of collective refugee identity and promoting the unreal idea of a common language for all immigrants, the cultural media does not contribute

⁶ For example, K.N. Sen and L. Sen's case study reveals that although complete lack of social control in the post-Partition camp life had caused strangers from different castes and classes to huddle together, the poor high-castes maintained their hierarchies over the Dalits, especially with respect to shared public spaces and utilities, resulting in occasional caste frictions (Sen and Sen, 1953, pp. 56-57).

⁷ The camp-dwellers of Bettiah in Bihar had launched a peaceful movement in May 1958, for the fulfilment of their demands of improved living and better economic conditions in camp-settlements, as well as for their rehabilitation. It had influenced the Dalit Bengali refugees, who refused to go outside West Bengal. Like the Bettiah rebels, the Bengalis demonstrated massive civil disobedience in a Gandhian way, which resulted in more than 30,000 camp refugees being arrested (Basu Raychaudhury, 2014, p. 11).

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much towards preventing the obliteration of different East Bengali dialects in West Bengal.

Tiktiki defies Calcutta's cosmopolitan culture, where people from different linguistic, communal, caste, class and regional backgrounds coexist. Instead, it obsessively looks for puritan roots. As the story aims at putting forward an untenable perpetrator-victim rhetoric, it prompts the audience to question why the television artists in West Bengal today are offering a biased and predetermined content in a sophisticated format, through propagation of truisms about post-Partition Calcutta.⁸ The narrative's inadequate imagination and archaic causality heightens in the denouement, with the West Bengali man firing at the refugee youth, the refugee youth 'winning' the game by dying, and the police subsequently arresting his murderer. Even after so many decades of Partition, art is exploited to appeal to the sentimentalist standpoint of 'The Refugee Experience,' when so much scholarship is emerging that examines Partition in all its complexity.⁹

Unlike the way the cultural media propagates it, 'Refugee Experience,' especially in the recent times, has become more discursive. Compared to the millionaire immigrants, the pauper and labour class refugees in the Eastern and Southern flanks of Kolkata have completely different experiences to tell. Manas Ray points out that the middle-class-ness of the refugee colonies has given way to a fast-growing urbanization and upward mobility, with new high-rises replacing older housings and older residents finding newer localities to settle. The new homes could be outside the original 'refugee neighborhoods,' outside West Bengal or even outside the country altogether. The Salt Lake township in Calcutta is an example of how the East Bengali *bhadralok* immigrant's housing clusters, which were initially designed to accommodate elite refugees, are gradually losing their 'Bengali' texture, as an increasing number of houses change hands with the so-called 'non-Bengalis,' especially the Marwaris. This insists on questioning who and what 'The Refugee Experience' represents today. Diverging from the representation of a group of people that were displaced during the Partition, it has essentially become a nostalgic idea enmeshed in the Left politics of the past, which has historically dominated the narrative of Bengal for several decades after the Partition.¹⁰

***Bhooter Bhabishyat*: The Bhadrak's Dominant Discourse**

Bhooter Bhabishyat is more subtle in pandering the subjective and politically loaded native-refugee dichotomy. The politics of representation and the politics of sentiment are strongly inherent in the process of storytelling. The film flaunts Calcutta's rebellious Naxalite era at the cost of devaluing other ethos and practices associated with the city. As the narrator of the plot is a Naxalite martyr's ghost that was killed in an 'encounter' by the police, he is the

⁸ This type of artistic production draws on Theodor Adorno's explanation of culture industry, which involves "...sentimentality and an already rationally disposed and adapted romanticism..." (Adorno, 1991, p. 99). Married to the idea of power interests, "The consensus which it propagates strengthens blind, opaque authority" that invests towards "making [the masses] into masses" (105, 106).

⁹ Jatin Bala, Nakul Mallik and Shamim Ahmed in creative genres, and Udit Sen, Romola Sanyal, and Nilanjana Chatterjee in academic research, are only a few names related to Bengal Partition scholarship, who have created disjunctures through their study.

¹⁰ Talbot and Singh's research studies the long history of alliance between the Bengali refugees and the Communist Party of India (CPI). Post-1950s, CPI had started recruiting in 'illegal' colonies of Bally and Howrah municipalities. Following the West Bengal Congress fanning anti-refugee sentiments and disenfranchising the East Bengali leaders from its Hooghly faction, there was a major decay in the immigrant *bhadralok*'s longstanding support of Congress (Talbot and Singh, 2009, p. 117). Ironically, the Communist Party, which professed to be the representative of the 'sarbahara' or wholly despoiled masses in the immediate post-Partition decades, later on forwarded demands and agitations arising only from class-based issues, ignoring in the process the question of caste. Taking for granted its support from the Dalit refugees, the trajectory of the Leftist parties in West Bengal progressively took on an urban, educated, middle-class turn and majorly encompassed the *bhadralok* Hindu immigrants.

‘eye’ of the film that takes liberty to criticize other periods of Calcuttan existence. The difficulty lies in the fact that the ‘eye’ and its perspectives are too self-righteous to be able to objectively unpack the Other. The ghosts of *zamindar* Choudhary, the public singer Kadalibala and her *babu* client are presented as speaking melodramatically and in rhymes, and symbolize a parodied version of old Calcuttan clothing, aphorisms and even the nasal intonation of singing. The native *zamindar*’s ghost is depicted as snobbish and servile to the British *sahib*, and prejudiced towards people from other backgrounds. His character draws on the popular imaging of the West Bengalis as sycophants to the British colonizers and patrons of Westernization. Ashok Mitra’s study revisits such a labelling from a socio-historical point of view. According to Mitra, successive famines striking West Bengal in the 19th century had caused a massive West Bengali population to move to the sparsely populated lands of East Bengal, which affected West Bengal’s husbandry. Moreover, West Bengal’s landed estates were fragmented by the Permanent Settlement Act in 1793 and the Regulation Act in 1818. Consequently, because the average estates of West Bengal were smaller than East Bengal, West Bengalis, by the early 19th century, had to make use of British connections for jobs and were bound by loyalty to the government. Comparatively, East Bengal was less constrained. Being the centre of British capital, commerce and manpower, Calcutta was more overwhelmed by the colonial presence,¹¹ whereas East Bengal could enjoy the emergence of a more independent middle-class in socio-economic terms as well as in terms of education and profession. Juxtaposed with Mitra’s analysis, *Bhooter Bhabishyat* lacks a well-read approach and is hinged on unfounded stereotypes.

The film pictures the East Bengali refugee’s ghost as naive, who is constantly shamed by the *zamindar*. The *zamindar* also mocks an individual from the uplands, who is predictably named ‘Nanook.’ Like in *Tiktiki*, here too, the audience does not get to see the prototypes of the poor West Bengali or the wealthy East Bengali. The waged-class subaltern’s ghost is unsurprisingly a Bihari immigrant, who has come to Calcutta to cart a *rickshaw*, and keeps nervously apologizing because he is a poor man. The Bengali Muslim ghost is a cook from the Mughal era, whose Urdu-accented Bengali speech, majestic sensibilities and embellished robes are shown as anachronistic and comical from the point of view of the present-day Hindu Bengali. The colonist Ramsay *sahib*’s ghost is an enthusiast of wine, women and gambling; the new-generation band musician’s ghost a drug-addict; and the Kargil War-martyr’s ghost a droll figuration of army, whose clichéd anecdotes are best avoided by others. In this efficient spoof-formation of the Calcuttan people from different time-periods and socio-economic strata, the Naxalite intellectual ghost is the universal commentator. By that means, he is immune to the possibility of a counter-discourse that may produce a comic double of his position. The narrative of *Bhooter Bhabishyat* falls short of becoming a prodigious artwork, as it chooses silence when it comes to parodying the radical communist *bhadralok*.

Biplab Dasgupta, the idealist Naxalite’s ghost (his first name literally meaning “revolution”), is available to analyze the past moments. Out of all the ghosts, only he can express his perception about the city to the mortals. This makes him the most ‘relevant’ ghost with respect to the current time-space of the story. In the end, the director’s character in the film agrees to write a cinematic plot solely based on Biplab’s narration. The haunted house, where so many kinds of ghosts co-exist, becomes a site of film-shooting; yet, the first film shot over there is based on a unilinear and unchallenged perspective as offered by the ghost of the communist revolutionary, at the expense of marginalizing all the other ghosts. If one sees the house as a synecdoche of Calcutta (or Kolkata), and the film as an optic through which the ‘non-Calcuttans’ understand the city, then Biplab’s style of narration wrecks a

¹¹Besides the Communal Award (1932) and the Government of India Act (1935), the Calcutta Municipality Amendment Act (1939) and the Secondary Education Bill (1940) took away the Congressman *bhadralok*’s supremacy in the Calcutta Corporation and in the Secondary Education Board (originally controlled by Calcutta University) respectively (Gooptu, 2003, p. 2413).

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damage to the city's multi-layered history. It suggests that Kolkata in the modern imagination is only an exclusive container of the Naxalite period, whereas such a conclusion is guilty of distorting other discourses that have shaped the city both before and after the Naxalite movements.

In both these films made sixty-five years after the Partition of Bengal, fiction picks on history by means of over-used notions. They can be read as an active marketing by the cultural wing of the Leftist parties in West Bengal, especially in the wake of an overturning of the Communist government in 2011 by Trinamool Congress.¹² From the first film, one realizes that the Bengal Partition is made to survive in the Calcuttan memory only in terms of reprisal and indictment. There are no rooms for confession, forgiving or disinterested analyses. The second film raises questions, such as who is the spokesperson for 'authentic Bengality' in the recent socio-cultural context of Kolkata. Both films underline the fact that past, when revisited, always yields multiplicity of viewpoints, whereas only a streamlined version of these viewpoints are frozen into 'History,' and thereby into 'Culture.'

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¹² Mao-Tse-Tung explains how art can serve the goal of communist revolution: "Revolutionary literature and art are part of the whole revolutionary cause, they are cogs and wheels in it, and though in comparison with certain other and more important parts they may be less significant and less urgent and may occupy a secondary position, nevertheless, they are indispensable cogs and wheels in the whole machine, and an indispensable part of the entire revolutionary cause" (Khan et al. 1978, p. 114).

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Bio-note

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