CHAPTER 2

The Displaced Female Body: Reading Embodiment and Migration in the Select Women's Fiction

Migration, be it international, internal, rural, or urban, is primarily characterized by mobility. Such mobilities, as Emma Bond (2018) writes, "is broadly conceived as an embodied mode of movement" (3). Bond's statement identifies migration as a bodily exercise and one that requires corporeal engagement. Migration therefore affords a displacement of the embodiment of the migrant or the mobile subject and such a displacement is suffused with a myriad of political meanings. The urgency of redirecting scholarly attention towards the body of the migrant while reading narratives of migration also emerges out of the fact that the body of the migrant cannot be understood in a universal homogenous sense. Many contributing factors such as gender, sexuality, caste, class, race, and other aspects of socio-cultural background are responsible for making migration a largely diverse corporeal experience that differs from migrant to migrant. One of the main parameters that significantly decides the bodily experience of migrating to a different geographical location is gender. Migration or displacement can no longer be analyzed through a genderless approach especially while focusing on the body of the migrant and deriving meanings out of its treatment.

Monica Boyd (2021) discusses how historical accounts of migration typically present "men as the principal actors" and women or children "as part of the baggage transported by men" (20). Contrary to this imposition of passivity, the female body is rather most prominently marked with the brutalities of migration. Reading the female body in narratives of displacement unpacks how its corporeality is used as a tool to express political dissent in constructive modes of nation-building. The politics of archiving often systematically eliminates the gendered shortcomings of the female body in the vulnerable unstable spaces of transit while being displaced from the notion of 'home'. While the female body acts as an uncomfortable site of power exploitation during movements of displacement, it is also the more potent mobile subject for its reproductivity that either threatens or supports a certain form of nation-building. The female migrant's body is therefore a crucial socio-historical text and demands to be read, interpreted, and problematized through its many representations across different media. One of the most defining movements of migration that the subcontinent of India has witnessed was in the aftermath of the 1947 partition of India and Pakistan. Veena Das (1995) examines how communal violence during the 1947 Partition targeted the female body because of its association with family honor. The female body was abducted, and sexually exploited so that the honor of the community it belonged to could be soiled. Literary writers like Amrita Pritam or Sadat Hassan Manto among many others have captured the position of the female body in these border tensions and communal violence, portraying how there were mass abductions of both Hindu and Muslim women from both sides of the border as people were forced to relocate. However, while there is an overwhelming gamut of literary representations of women's trials and tribulations during the 1947 partition and the exodus that followed in the North-Indian region of Punjab, it has also to some extent overshadowed literary narratives of migration from other parts of India and especially women's location in them. In the introduction to her compilation of translated Bengali fiction based on the Bengal partition, Bashabi Fraser (2008) foregrounds that the "Partition experience on India's eastern front was very different than on its western border" and yet there was a prevalent silence on these exclusivities in academic discussions (1). Moreover, treatment of the female body in other literary portraits by women writers from the eastern-Indian regions of Assam and West Bengal dealing with comparatively small-scale displacements, have received little attention let alone a gendered investigation.

This chapter, therefore, predominantly addresses these research gaps and investigates how events of displacement impact female bodies, studying the crucial nexus between female corporeality and migration. It contextualizes the nuances of bodily oppression through migratory events depicted in the translated women's fiction from Assam and West Bengal while giving only peripheral references to some instances of displacement captured in translated women's fiction from Odisha. This is mainly because there is hardly any Odia woman writer who has managed to write on the internal labor migrations prevalent in Odisha and is available in English translation. The pertinence of these fictional texts originally written by women writers in regional languages such as Assamese, Bengali, and Odia lies in their local flavors. A close analysis of these texts renders one with a set of female characters that are hued with local customs and culture, providing a much more authentic representation of what a socio-cultural shift can mean for them in a corporeal sense. By studying the changing social embodiment of these women characters due to migration afforded by wars and communal riots that took place in their regions, this chapter attempts to highlight the role women's bodies played in nation-building at the eastern front of India. Additionally, this chapter also brings into the discussion, fiction from the aforementioned regions that depicts some form of geographical and cultural shift for its women characters and are not consequences of any political war. This allows the present discussion to focus not just on the mass movements of displacement that came as a climactic consequence in history but also on individual narratives that might mirror or represent personal chronicles of people who have migrated from the selected region. One special instance is that of Anita Agnihotri's *The Sickle* (2021) translated from the Bengali novel*, Kaste* (2019) by Arunava Sinha which has the draught-stricken regions of Maharashtra in its setting. The text although not set in any of the eastern Indian regions discussed above, is originally written in Bengali and belongs to one of the linguistic traditions the present research focuses on while also being thematically relevant. Therefore, the novel is included in this comparative study. By focusing on the struggles of the bodies of the female migrant characters in the select body of regional fiction, the broader objective is to rescue the gendered trauma caused by such socio-political and socio-cultural transitions in the selected locale from academic erasure.

2.1. Wars, Partition, Riots, and the Dislocated Female Body

Chris Beasley and Carol Bacchi (2000) make a very apt point by claiming that, "subjectivity, including political subjectivity, is fleshly, is made out of flesh" (344). They further elaborate on this idea while establishing the intersection between feminist body theory and citizenship by emphasizing how the body is not just a passive receptacle or a product of the "operations of power" but is actively "implicated in social relations" (ibid., 344). In contradiction to the Western celebration of disembodied rationality over materialistic embodiment, Beasley and Bacchi (2000) accentuate how the body takes center stage in determining the political power relations of the society. They interestingly point out that in typical theorization, the 'political' is also more often than not, always associated with the 'public' while the female body in Indian contexts tends to get confined to private spheres. However, the narratives of displacement often render a chance to interrogate the treatment of the female body within the implications of a collective political act, a rather public event. It is urgent to understand how these public treatments of the private decode the conditioned corporeal performativity of the female body. Thus, narratives of migration aid in understanding what agendas motivate wars and political conflicts to rewrite the prescribed performance of female corporeality and how that further marginalizes female embodiment. Since women are so proliferatively represented to serve peripheral roles in the turbulent times of wars or communal riots, it is imperative to specify the tangible interactions of their lived bodily experiences during such periods. This allows one to underline how their neglected undocumented experiences in war archives determine the political motives behind a well-disguised state-sanctioned gendered crime. The present discussion therefore aims to engage through such critical interventions with the female embodiment in war, communal conflicts, or partition-based displacements that took place in eastern India and as represented in the select body of women's fiction from the region.

2.1.1. The Sino-Indian War and the Bodily Struggles of the Displaced Pregnant Assamese-Chinese Women

The Sino-Indian War of 1962 is one of the major wars that was fought in the difficult landscapes of the Northeastern region of India, in the Indo-China borders of Arunachal Pradesh. The Chinese troops invaded the hilly towns of Arunachal Pradesh such as Tawang, and Bomdilla, and were all set to enter the town of Tezpur in Assam. This military humiliation is archived in India with the poignant tales of brave martyrdom, with Lata Mangeshkar's rendition of *"Ae mere watan ke logon"*[1] evoking nationalistic sentiments, with critiques of the center's lack of involvement in the war-affected regions of Northeast India, and with Chinese betrayal negating the widely circulated pre-war notion of brotherhood between the two countries with catchphrases like "*Hindi-Chini bhai-bhai*,"[2] (Nayak et al., 2023). However, it is seldom discussed how the 1962 Sino-Indian war also led to the signing of The Defense of India Act (1962) by the President of India which "facilitated mass incarceration of Indians having Chinese ethnicity, not even sparing children and pregnant women" (Nayak et al., 2023, 2). The Chinese Indians were taken into custody and were forcefully displaced overnight, not being allowed to carry any essentials with them like money, clothes, jewelry, food, etc. Moreover, the Enemy Property Act signed in 1968 caused acts of vandalism and theft of all such properties they left behind

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[1] A popular patriotic song sung by legendary Indian singer Lata Mangeshkar remembering the martyred soldiers in the 1962 Sino-Indian war.

[2] A popular catchphrase in Hind which translates to Indians and Chinese are brothers.

(Li, 2011, 82). Therefore, those who could manage to return to their respective lives found themselves to be homeless and with no money. Most of the accounts on this episode revolve around the Chinese community in Kolkata and are available in the form of memoirs or oral history. While this limited body of literature focuses largely on the stateless identity imposed overnight upon the community, it fails to capture the gendered trauma and challenges in this "systematic disenfranchisement" of the Chinese-Indians (Banerjee, 2007, 447). Moreover, the agonizing post-war predicament of the pregnant Assamese-Chinese women hardly received any historical scrutiny let alone a gendered investigation into their corporeal struggles during this ordeal. The documentation of this state-sanctioned forced migration is scant also due to the fear among the existing Chinese-Indian minority regarding their volatile and vulnerable citizenship in the country. Kwai Un Li (2011) notes this reluctance among her respondents while she interviewed them and reports that this tight-lipped uncomfortable stance comes from their concern for their relatives who continue to live in India.

Urgently addressing these gaps, Rita Chowdhury's historical fiction *Chinatown Days* (2018) translated into English from her Assamese novel *Makam* (2010) revisits the atrocities endured by the Assamese-Chinese community. More importantly, Chowdhury's narrative uniquely renders a peep into the bodily trials and tribulations of the pregnant Assamese-Chinese women who had to deal with the additional burden of their reproductive bodies during this forced migration. The novel "conducts a rare historiography tracing the origin of the Assamese-Chinese community in colonial India," when Chinese men were smuggled into India to work in the tea gardens of Assam (Nayak et al., 2023, 2). These Chinese coolies eventually integrated into Indian society by marrying the local Indian female coolies through the "depot marriages" prevalent in those times in the tea gardens of Assam (Sen, 2002). The novel depicts how the community was living in harmony in a small town of the Upper Assam area called Makum in pre-war times, celebrating *Bihu*[3] as well as Chinese New Year, how they were forcefully displaced and transported to the Deoli detention camp, and how ultimately, they were deported to China. What sets apart Chowdhary's account of this tragic event is the fact that it specifically provides an intimate picture of the treatment meted out to the pregnant

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[3] Traditional Assamese festival and a dance form performed in the festival, both going by the same name.

Assamese-Chinese migrants during this transit through its female protagonist. Chowdhury (2018) also reports in her author's note about the challenges of getting personal histories out of her Assamese-Chinese respondents. Chowdhury's success in this task was perhaps possible because "the fear of administrative vigilance (among her respondents) was attenuated upon discovering that their stories would be reproduced as fiction" (Nayak et al., 2023, 2). In her study on partition literature, Ayesha Jalal (2013), therefore, writes, "Creative writers have captured the human dimensions of partition far more effectively than have historians" (23). More than the numerical records that historians follow, fiction based on such fractured events helps in preserving lost narratives. Literature from Northeast India, especially Assamese literature attests to this. Manjeet Baruah (2016) studies how Assamese literature carefully maps the social history of the particular period out of which they have emerged. However, interestingly the war-torn period of the 1960s did not see any representation of the plight of the Assamese-Chinese who were forcefully displaced in the literature of that time.

Chinatown Days (2018) therefore is a crucial literary intervention in the socio-historical mapping of the region. It follows the life of Mei Lin, an Assamese-Chinese woman "who is taken away from her Assamese husband Pulok Baruah during the early stages of her pregnancy" (Nayak et al. 2023, 3). Mei Lin's forced separation from her husband is merely based on her race and comes as a consequence of the Defense of India Act being implemented in the aftermath of the 1962 Sino-Indian War. This present discussion problematizes the nature of nutrition, sanitation, and healthcare available to such pregnant women and breastfeeding mothers during the Assamese-Chinese forced migration of 1962 through its analysis of the specific contexts from Chowdhury's plot. Furthermore, it also interrogates how the absence of such proper facilities and the imposition of a deficient lifestyle on the pregnant bodies of these Assamese-Chinese migrants reveal a "constructive nation-building into play" (Nayak et al., 2023). The tumultuous love story between Mei Lin and Pulok unfolds against the backdrop of growing animosity towards the Assamese-Chinese community in Makum, increasingly worsened by the 1962 war. The novel demonstrates how Mei Lin's marriage into an Assamese household and her dominatingly Assamese upbringing are not deemed sufficient for her integration into the Assamese society in the post-war reality. The tactical banishment of the vulnerable and "non-threatening" population of pregnant women and breast-feeding mothers reveals how the state through the guise of protection, conveniently discards the racially unwanted from the nation’s racial pool (Marsh, 2015). *Chinatown Days* (2018) shows how the “familial tensions fostered by the war” were further worsened by the state’s interference in banishing the racially undesirable reproductive bodies of the Assamese-Chinese women (Nayak et al., 2023, 4). It further reveals what implications this tactical intervention of the political into the personal entails for the displaced woman’s body. Apart from depicting the horrific train to Deoli the pregnant Assamese-Chinese women were forced into and the equally pathetic conditions they had to endure in the Deoli internment camp, Chowdhury’s (2018) plot “also paints scenes of ruthless Chinese labor camps where the Chinese-Indians were transferred to work” post deportation from India (Nayak et al.,2023, 4). The relentless slavery the pregnant Assamese-Chinese women were subjected to in these Chinese labor camps as portrayed in the text also proves how the refugee woman is always at the disadvantage of getting her corporeal struggles neglected by the government in power irrespective of the race it belongs to. Moreover, the labor exploitation they suffer in these camps finds resemblance in the manner their maternal ancestors were exploited in the tea gardens of Assam during colonial times.

Chowdhury’s plotline also rescues such “intergenerational nuances of the displaced female body” from archival erasure through its chronological historiography (Nayak et al., 2023, 4). As research indicates that pregnancy causes “increased vulnerability” in normal circumstances, it can prove to be rather fatal in the case of refugees and forced migrants due to their stressful life changes (Almeida et al. 2013). Additionally, the scarcity of pre-natal healthcare available in refugee or internment camps and other spaces of transit aggravates the situation further. In the novel, it is shown how the Assamese-Chinese were dislocated from their homes and forcefully transported to the “Chowkhani’s cowshed” (Chowdhury, 2018). In one of the instances, during their transit through the cowshed, Yunlin is distressed because her baby is constantly crying due to the cold. Mei Lin attempts to comfort the baby with her shawl but it is apparent that there is no sign of a doctor present in the cowshed. This lack of proper medical facilities is also very prominent in the novel’s portrait of another space of transit and that is the train to Deoli. Chowdhury narrates how the pregnant Assamese-Chinese women were stuffed into a train where it was prohibited to open the windows in order “to protect the passengers from the angry stone-pelting public at the railway stations” (Nayak et al., 2023, 4). The novel also reveals the dearth of drinking water that these forced migrants had to face. Consequently, with the unavailability of water, be it for drinking or washing, and with the closed train windows, the passengers had to survive the suffocating air inside the train, suffused with the stench of human excreta and urine. In one of the scenes, a pregnant Assamese-Chinese woman named Wai Kwan goes into labor pain and begs for some water during her delivery while ultimately getting water from the train engine (Chowdhury, 2018). In her representation of the famished and thirsty pregnant and breastfeeding Assamese-Chinese women, Chowdhury (2018) writes, "Yunlin was unable to breastfeed her baby. Her milk had dried up. The baby was crying in hunger. The pregnant Wai Kwan lay listless" (271). The narrative describes how the Indian army officers overlooked the passengers' hunger and fed them half-cooked Khichdi[4] at long intervals. Chowdhary (2018) contrasts this moving picture with the revelation that, on the same train, a family belonging to an army officer enjoyed a "sumptuous lunch" in the "special compartment" (275). This discrepancy suggests that the Indian authorities did not provide the pregnant Assamese-Chinese women on board with the essential nutrition, even though they had the resources.

In his interview with Joy Ma, Dr. Lohit Konwar claims that India showed "some humanity" by planting a team of six doctors on the train to Deoli (Ma Et al., 2020, 153). Dr. Konwar calls Chowdhary's narrative fictitious since she does not mention India's medical assistance on the train to Deoli. He further mentions that during the entire journey, they dealt with only one emergency case that of a pregnant woman delivering her child. While Chowdhury in her narrative returns to this emergency case through her portrait of Wai Kwan's delivery, she makes no mention of the attending physicians. However, Ma (2020, 173) subsequently reveals that doctors had no interaction with the internees apart from the medical emergencies they had to attend to. She adds that the doctors were kept in coaches "firmly apart from the other passengers" and had their food at nearby restaurants whenever the train stopped, unlike the Chinese-Indian passengers who were given half-cooked Khichdi to eat (Ma Et al., 2020, 173). This implies that the doctors enjoyed considerably better hygienic circumstances much like the family of the army officials in the train and faced no scarcity of basic amenities such as drinking water. Due to such glaring disparities in their accounts of the train journey to Deoli, it is unlikely that Dr. Konwar could fully grasp the brutalities endured by the Chinese-Indian internees. Moreover, Dr. Konwar in his account never discusses what sort of consequences the pregnant internees present on the train might have to deal with due to long hours of starvation and eating half-cooked khichdi. He also does not mention what medicines and vaccinations were available to the displaced pregnant women and the breast-feeding mothers on the train to Deoli or the kind of help the woman who delivered her child received from the medical team in terms of sanitation considering the dire unavailability of water Chowdhury depicts in her novel. Therefore, the notion that the Chinese-Indians were treated with humanity by the Indian government only because a medical team was sent on the train is not conclusive evidence of the claim. More importantly, such claims seem to be blooming out of the much-privilege experiences of the doctors on board and especially de-historicize the sufferings of the pregnant Assamese-Chinese migrants. Chowdhury's portrayal of the starving and thirsty pregnant Assamese-Chinese women on the train specifically problematizes this glorification of medical assistance. Chowdhury hints at the deficient lifestyle prevalent in the Deoli camp through her description of Mei Lin's body as she writes,

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[4] A traditional dish from the Indian cuisine in which rice and lentils are cooked in concoction.

> In those two weeks she had lost considerable weight. She looked pale and undernourished, with signs of sleeplessness. Her clothes hung loosely on her body. Still in the same clothes she had on while in the train… (Chowdhury 2018, 287)

Contrary to the popular image of the 'pregnancy glow', Chowdhary "portrays her pregnant protagonist to be pale and undernourished" (Nayak et al. 2023, 6). The unconventional transitions of Mei Lin's pregnant body epitomize the most palpable implications of the camp authorities' negligence towards the pregnant Assamese-Chinese migrants' nutritional requirements. Such lack of nourishment is only briefly recorded in a few of the non-fictional accounts of life at Deoli. For instance, in her memoir, *The Deoliwallahs,* Ma (2020) recounts meeting a woman on the fiftieth anniversary of AIDCI[5] who told her that she too gave birth while she was interned in the Deoli camp and "had nothing to eat in that first month except *dahi*[6]" (Ma et al, 2020, 27). Similarly, Li (2011, 34) reports that one of her female Chinese-Indian respondents talked about having no drinking water on the first day of her arrival in the Deoli camp. Along with these physical traumas suffered by the pregnant internees at the Deoli camp, the novel also captures how the camp life inflicts mental agony on them. Specifically, in the scene where Mei Lin consistently writes letters to her husband Pulok and gets no response, Chowdhury (2018) creates a sense of catharsis. The combination of being a war refugee and being pregnant with a child whose father she is unable to establish contact with thrusts Mei Lin into a lot of mental agony. Her shriveling body could be a reaction to her psychological anguish. Forced migrants and refugees are frequently at high risk of these psychosocial factors impacting mental health during pregnancy and leading to severe difficulties (Almeida et al. 2013). A 2015 article revisiting the horrors experienced by the Chinese-Indians that India Today has published on its official website states, "Pregnant women gave birth to children in the camps. Some died due to the non-availability of skilled and trained doctors." [7] It is noteworthy that no quantitative data follows to back this information. This reveals that there is a lack of statistical estimation of the number of Chinese-Indian pregnant women who died during childbirth at the Deoli camp.

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[5] Association of India Deoli Camp Internees, an organisation based in Toronto, Canada.

[6] Hindi word for curd.

Similarly, another article published in 2015 by the Scroll mentions that despite this inaccessibility to good healthcare at the camp, Joy Ma's mother was not allowed to have an abortion when she was pregnant with her during her internment. [8] This imposition of motherhood is especially problematic in circumstances where the pregnant Assamese-Chinese migrants are struggling with the liminality of a stateless identity. The pregnant Assamese-Chinese women who were separated from their Assamese husbands like Mei Lin were forced to bear fatherless children who had no future security in terms of education and healthcare. With such uncertainties and deficiencies prevalent in the spaces of transit, abortion seemed like a valid solution. However, it was only in 1964 that the liberalization of abortion laws commenced in response to high rates of maternal deaths in India, and the Medical Termination of Pregnancy Act was passed in 1971 which legalized abortion all over India except for Jammu and Kashmir (Hirve, 2005). Given that the Deoli internment happened at the end of 1962, it appears that the process of de-criminalizing abortions in India was still a revolution in its early stages. The state policies therefore held the pregnant

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[7] See "53 years of Indo-China war: Indian-Chinese prisoners recount horror behind barbed wires" India Today, 2015. https://www.indiatoday.in/india/story/53-years-of-indo-china- war-indian-chinese-prisoners-recount-horror-behind-barbed-wires-269077-2015-10-20

[8] See "Barbed wire at Deoli: Indian Chinese who were interned after the 1962 war want an apology" Scroll.in, 2015. https://scroll.in/article/760580/barbed-wire-at-deoli-indian-chinese-who-were-interned-after-the-1962-war-want-an-apology

Chinese-Indian women at a further disadvantage during the internments. It collaborated on making the female body an easy target of the Sino-Indian political turmoil. Another peculiarity of Chowdhury's (2018) portrait is the absence of female authorities in the committee of camp organizers. In the novel, it is seen only men were allowed to attend the meeting with the camp commander to discuss the problems they were facing as a community. While the men discuss the lack of soap and the bad quality of food served, there was no mention of sanitation and nutrition particularly meant for menstruating, pregnant, and breastfeeding Assamesse-Chinese women. However, there is no concrete evidence in other non-fictional records of this lack of female representative among camp authorities although the novel shows how women were never given a stage to voice their grievances and neither had the power on the other side to show any sympathy regarding gender-based bodily challenges. This extensive patriarchal representation casually neglects the trauma that the reproductive female body endures in the camp and prioritizes problematizing the unavailability of amenities that they collectively need. Chowdhury (2018) uniquely follows the pregnant Assamese-Chinese migrant's body after their deportation to China and explores the similarities the two governments shared in their negligence for it. The treatment offered to the deported Chinese-Indian migrants on the transit to China and in China, both carry certain resemblances with the treatment they received in India. For instance, the novel describes the ship to China as overstuffed with passengers suffering from sea sickness and with no doctor accompanying them on the journey.

Chowdhury portrays the same China-bound ship having Assamese-Chinese migrants like Mei Lin, struck with fever in an advancing stage of pregnancy and once again with no access to a doctor. The apathy towards Mei Lin's weak body almost acts as a pre-figurative metaphor symbolizing the community's unwanted presence in both countries. This is further accentuated in the way the Chinese Indians received verbal abuses when they reached Canton port as local netizens shouted "Hak gwai. Hak gwai. Black ghost. Black ghost" (Chowdhary 2018, 329). This racist response was especially meant for the Assamese-Chinese migrants since many of them had shared Indian ancestry and looked more Indian than Chinese with darker skin tones. Far from acquiring legal citizenship in China, their mixed heritage plunged the Assamese-Chinese into the liminality of perennial refugee status. This is more so apparent in the scenes of Chinese labor camps where pregnant Assamese-Chinese women were shown no leniency. For instance, Chowdhury paints a scene where “a heavily pregnant Mei Fung is punished by the camp supervisors for eating a fistful of peanuts that were meant for sowing” (Nayak et al. 2023, 8). Mei Fung is punished with hunger as she loses her food coupons for three days. Her bodily cravings were met with a bodily punishment. Chowdhury effectively draws a poignant picture of this helpless situation inflicted upon the pregnant bodies of Assamese-Chinese migrants through Mei Fung’s husband Liang’s appeals as he says,

> But think of her physical condition, sir. Even in this state, she has been working. She has not said she won’t work. At such times, women feel like eating different things. That is why- (Chowdhury 2018, 357)

Liang’s harmless appeals reflecting his sympathy for the pregnant body of his wife are conceived as a rebellion and he is publicly thrashed by the Chinese authorities. Due to their shared Indian heritage, the Assamese-Chinese are shown to be under stern surveillance as they were treated as possible Indian spies. The Assamese-Chinese migrants juggled between this dichotomy of being probable Chinese spies in India and Indian spies in China The most brutal implications of this binary are realized through the pregnant female body. Liang is rather identified as a threat to national security due to his concerns for the pregnant body of his wife. Interestingly, Chowdhury’s narrative also renders a space for a comparative analysis of the modes of corporeal exploitation suffered by the maternal ancestors of these pregnant Assamese-Chinese women.

Chowdhury reveals in her chronological plotline how their maternal ancestors were trafficked and forcefully migrated from different parts of India when there were efforts to feminize the tea gardens of colonial Assam. The physical and sexual humiliation of these female coolies while being forced into relentless labor was common in those days (Sen, 2002). Chowdhury depicts this in one such instance when the Chowkidar receives orders from the tea-garden manage to punish three female coolies by lifting their clothes and “flogging their bare buttocks” (Chowdhury, 2018, 91) publicly. Such depictions inform upon how historically women in the community of Assamese-Chinese have suffered through forced displacement and bodily oppression in their new habitats. In the novel, Mei Lin’s daughter Lailin’s disgust for Indians emerges out of these “trans-generational hauntings” even though she has not suffered these traumas herself (Baishya, 2019, 24). The novel therefore essentially “presents the contrast between the amnesia of such events in collective public memory and their phantom presence in many generations of the families of victims" (Nayak, et al. 2023, 8). The plot demonstrates how the callousness towards the female body is exhibited by not just one but both sides across the Sino-Indian border.

2.1.2. Ethnic Riots, Migration, and the Female Body

Assam's long history of being a preferred location for migrants has led to its emergence as a multi-ethnic space. However, the cohabitation of these multiple ethnicities has been a chaotic affair. The Assam Movement (1979-1985) found its inception as a political urge to preserve the Assamese culture from the perils of the Bangladeshi infiltrations and soon resorted to violent terrorism resulting in events like that of the Nelie Massacre (1983)[9] or Khoirabori Massacre (1983). Nandana Dutta (2012) maps the memory of violence from her "personal experiences of living hybridity" in the state of Assam and studies what the Assam agitation felt like for a non-Assamese Bengali migrant in the state (5). Dutta's analysis of such a memory archive of ethnic violence led by the Assam Movement (1979-1985) presents a crucial understanding of not just the movement but also of Assam as a location teeming with cultural hybridity due to the continuous flow of migrants.

Sanjib Baruah (2020) similarly comments on how Assam's multi-ethnic landscape, resulting from the wide-scale migrations, shapes its political sentiment through the "indigene/migrant divide" (49). Such contested battles for ethnic supremacy are ironically motivated by a stark resistance to cultural dominance but end up promoting cultural standardization. Arupa Patangia Kalita's (2011) novel, The *Story of Felanee* translated from Assamese by Deepika Phukan is set against the backdrop of Assam agitation that led to a chained reaction of many forms of organized ethnic violence. Kalita's protagonist is a woman named Felanee, who lost her parents in one such riot and who comes from a lineage of mixed ethnicities, having Bodo, Assamese, and Bengali culture in her bloodline. To explain her protagonist's complex genealogy, Kalita opens up her novel first with stories of hybrid unions between her grandparents and parents. The narrative opens up with the love story between Felanee's Assamese grandmother Ratnamala and her Bodo grandfather

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[9] See "Nellie massacre and 'citizenship': When 1,800 Muslims were killed in Assam in just 6 hours" https://theprint.in/india/governance/nellie-massacre-and-citizenship-when-1800-muslims-were-killed-in-assam-in-just-6-hours/193694/

Kinaram. Against all the conventional restrictive norms that an Assamese child widow is expected to follow, Ratnamala elopes with her Bodo lover Kinaram. However, she soon dies giving birth to Felanee's mother Jutimala, and later one day Kinaram's bullet-riddled body is found in the pond he generally fishes in. Her Assamese-Bodo mother Jutimala is brought up secretively by Kinaram's relatives and later marries Felanee's father, a Bengali merchant Khitish Ghosh. Felanee is thrown away amidst the tensions of an ethnic riot that kills her parents. She is saved by her Bengali father's distant relative and as she grows up, she is married to a man from the Koch community of Assam, Lambodar. Kalita's strategic design of her protagonist's volatile ethnic history renders an excellent platform to problematize how multiculturalism ethically interferes with ethnic cleansing. The construction of Felanee's identity can be read in parlance with the multiculturalism prevailing in Assam and therefore Felanee's characterization can be interpreted as a metaphor for Assam herself. Felanee, a true exemplar of Dutta's (2012) notion of "living hybridity", symbolizes how the land of Assam which encompasses many cultures and ethnicities, is threatened to adopt a single dominant culture as its primary identifier. This makes Felanee's body a site of control and dominance much like the agitators who try to impose a particular cultural identity on the land.

Throughout the novel, Felanee is advised and even threatened to wear and not wear a certain ornament or clothing for her survival. Felanee's mixed ethnicity makes her corporeality a contested space as she wears a *Mekhela Chador*[10] along with the Bengali shell bangles. The plot reveals that during the ethnic riots of the 1980s when danger looms large over Felanee's village, she is advised by her well-meaning neighbor to fly an Assamese *gamosha*[11] to exhibit her loyalties toward her Assamese identity and to get rid of the Bengali shell bangles which were the only remnants of her mother's memories. Moreover, Felanee's pregnant body in its critical condition was denied swift treatment by the medical team in the camp she was shifted to after the riots because her wrists were adorned with the Bengali shell bangles, labeling her body's ethnic identity to be Bengali. In that particular scene, Kalita (2011) interrogates this harsh corporeal discrimination through a woman who intervenes and fights with the doctors for Felanee and questions their prejudices in these lines, "She held up Felanee's wrist with the white shell bangles, traditionally worn by married Bengali women, and asked, is this the reason for neglecting her?" (34). Similarly, in the latter half of the novel, when there is a Bodo agitation taking shape, the prescribed form of attire to cover Felanee's body is the traditional Bodo attire for women called *Dokhona*. Even in her new settlement post her horrific displacement, her Bodo neighbor Bulen almost threatens her that if she doesn't want to be consumed in the wrath of the Bodo agitation, she must embrace her Bodo lineage and adorn her body with its cultural markers. Felanee's body is imposed with such sartorial convictions much like how the superiority of one culture and the urgency of its retention were imposed on the multicultural landscape of Assam. Amit Rahul Baishya (2019) reads this text in his exploration of necropolitical zones where death and violence are normalized in the everyday realm. Baishya's (2019) study postulates that the characterization of Felanee offers an effective platform for understanding the vulnerabilities that "pluralistic forms of multi-ethnic coexistence are subjected to" and how this multi-ethnicity is vigorously attempted to be erased (186). Thus, one witnesses an urgency throughout the plot to inscribe Felanee's body with a particular cultural attire like *Mekhela* or *Dokhona* depending on the political agenda of the relevant agitation while erasing other cultural markers like the presumably 'foreign' Bengali shell bangles from her embodied reality. Such efforts at controlling Felanee's embodiment demonstrate how women's bodies are treated as "repositories of tradition" (Dutta, 2012, 149).

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[10] Traditional Assamese attire for women.

[11] Dominant cultural symbol of Assam.

Sangeeta Ray (2000) foregrounds in her study how the figure of the Hindu woman functions as a "crucial semiotic site" around which the discourses of nationalism are built (8). Ray (2000) further remarks that the "female native body is the non-liminal site of otherness that makes possible the realization of the imagined community" (8). While Ray speaks from a context of retaining nationalist socio-cultural ideals in a foreign land, mediated through the female body, it is also a methodology that stands true for any form of "subnationalism", to borrow Sanjib Baruah's terminology (1999). This subnationalism highly relies on women's bodies to bring forth its political motives to prominence. So here in the context of Assam, the community is realized through the women's bodies being dressed in a certain community attire much like the trope of the saree-clad Hindu women in an imperial economy that Ray (2000) adopts for her arguments. The forced displacement of Felanee comes as a result of her failure to vehemently showcase her cultural allegiance to the Assamese community.

Felanee is forced out of her home to save herself, her son Moni, and her unborn child from the attackers during the riot as her home is set on fire and her husband is killed brutally. It can be seen that much like the Assamese-Chinese pregnant women in *Chinatown Days* (2018), *The Story of Felanee* (2011) also exposes how Felanee's multi-ethnic pregnant body was not shown any special consideration because she belonged to a village populated by ethnic minorities and Bengalis. The agitators did not care for the Assamese traces in her lineage while performing violence that had serious implications for her pregnant body because the erasure of such communities was the primary agenda of the riot. Felanee sits hiding her heavily pregnant body with her son in a small congested "mosquito-infested garbage hole" that is stinking because of the banana trees dumped in it as she sees her home being set on fire (Kalita, 2011, 26). Kalita further depicts the severity of this trauma on Felanee's pregnant body in the following passage:

> And then the familiar stench of petrol and kerosene hit her. Her home was in flames. The screams of the two men being burnt alive inside rent the air and paralyzed her. She held Moni tightly and dug deeper into the banana leaves, clutching on to her broken sickle. She saw a woman running down the road trying to escape. There was a sharp sound and the woman fell to the ground. The crowd surrounded her and chopped her half-dead body into pieces. They threw her baby into the flaming house. The sound of conch shells and the drum beats reverberated. The baby in her belly turned and a piercing pain shot through her chest. Holding her belly with one hand and Moni with the other she tried to burrow further into the garbage. (Kalita 2011, 26)

In this passage, the writer masterfully presents a graphic scene of Felanee being cut off from the notion of 'home' as she practically witnesses her home being set on fire. Interestingly, while her home is on fire, she is forced into a tight garbage pit implying the shrinking of space allotted to her body. The scene of another mother being murdered and her baby burnt alive represents the possible consequences she might face if she decides to claim her space any further than the garbage pit. This limitation of space foisted on her has direct repercussions on her body as she immediately experiences, through all these visual traumas, the baby moving in her belly and the subsequent sharp pain. Kalita (2011) draws one's attention to this bodily reaction of Felanee as she experiences her corporeality being severed from the space of 'home' and drastically limited to a pit for discarded things.

This implicitly makes it apparent that to save herself from the rioters, Felanee has to settle down in a space that is meant for 'thrown-away' things, and interestingly, her name Felanee also literally means 'thrown away'. Such nomenclature is suggestive of her destiny in the face of a battle that rejects to accept any form of multiculturalism and therefore Felanee's multiethnic body is displaced from the setting of home and thrown away into the garbage pit. Her multi-ethnic fetus is shown no mercy in this act of cultural standardization. The restrictions on the amount of space her body can take or exist in and the resulting bodily pain make her forced displacement more tangible in its manifestation, more corporeally affecting. Kalita's portrait of the pregnant female migrant's body being given a tight space for discarded objects implies in turn that the migrant's body itself is a discarded object. As she moves from the familiar space of her village to the unfamiliar transit space of a refugee camp, Felanee experiences a stillbirth in the camp resulting from all the physical discomforts brought forth by the riot.

It is noteworthy that upon being asked if she wants to see the baby, Felanee enquires about the gender of the baby first and when the nurse informs her that it was a girl, she expresses her interest to see the baby once before she is thrown away by the sweeper. Felanee's choice to see her dead daughter's body once before she is discarded is a desperate attempt to rescue her daughter's corporeal elimination in her memory, to set her apart from the breed of 'thrown-away' female bodies in the long history of ethnic violence in the region. The plot further reveals how the sanitation in the camp was grossly neglected as the pit latrines disappeared and people started using open areas for defecation. Kalita (2011) draws repugnant images as she writes of the horrible stench of this filth and the fact that white worms covered it. This shows that the camp as a space of transit is no better than the garbage pit in which Felanee initially takes refuge. The metaphor of her body being the discarded object, meant to be discarded amidst filth and waste is taken forward in these scenes, unraveling the modes of rejection Felanee's multi-ethnic female body experiences. Kalita juxtaposes this image of the discarded female migrant's body with certain contrary depictions of life in the camp to which Felanee and other survivors like her were shifted. The narrative reveals that in the camp, the very same discarded female migrant's body is used as a sexual commodity. For instance, the novel describes how the last few cubicles in the camp were occupied by girls whom men from the outside, including army soldiers, visit for their "amusement" (Kalita, 2011, 46). Though Felanee's son young Moni works temporarily with the boys who escort the customers seeking their amusement in these discarded female bodies, he is forbidden by his peers to not peep into the cubicle at any point. There is a symbolism at play here. It shows just how Moni's peers do not engage in watching or understanding what sexual transaction takes place inside the cubicle, the army also turns a blind eye to the oppression of the ethnic minorities while having a sexual appetite for these discarded female migrant's bodies. Kalita (2011) highlights with such a nuanced portrait how military intervention was absent during the riot, with no course of action from the army, and yet the army soldiers visit the camp and its discarded occupants to satisfy their sexual urges. Their discarded stature makes their bodies a cheap sexual commodity and therefore more readily accessible. The portrait of the army in the novel also reveals the brutal forms of counter-insurgency adopted by the state military during the ethnic tensions in the region. This especially finds expression in the characterization of Bulen's wife Sumala.

Sumala's character arc follows two layers of oppression: first, she loses her sanity as she gets traumatized witnessing the brutal abduction and murder of her brother, and second, in her mentally unstable state she is forcefully displaced due to the agitation. In her mentally handicapped state, Sumala is repetitively seen undressing in public since she lacks a sense of bodily privacy. This unintentional act makes her body an easy target for playful mockery, torture, and sexual gaze in the novel. For instance, in the refugee camp, when Sumala is in a frenzy in the absence of her husband, she gets tied to a post and young boys throw pebbles at her, calling her a madwoman. Older men eyed her exposed body when they were shifting from the camp to the settlement while Bulen tried to constantly cover his wife's body. But more importantly, it is the culmination of Sumala's character that unravels the role of armed forces in the bodily oppression of women in these conflict zones. Sumala's husband Bulen joins a Bodo militant group that formed with the Bodo agitation and leaves his wife to fend for herself without considering the fact that she is completely dependent on him for her day-to-day activities. Bulen's act leaves Sumala with no security in the settlement and she howls in starvation, going from home to home because of her mental challenges. Sumala is ultimately found lying dead one day near the army camp and in the following lines, the novel depicts the horrors her body went through in her last moments.

> Her naked body was disfigured and there were distinct signs of brutality on her person. In place of her breasts there were two raw bleeding wounds. Her emaciated

> genital passage was a huge open wound… It was as though someone had struck a helpless female goat repeatedly with a large knife till she died. (Kalita 2011, 212)

These lines suggest the brutal rape or possibly a gang rape suffered by Sumala and the location where her body was discovered strategically indicates the army's involvement in the act. Kalita uses the metaphor of a helpless goat to describe Sumala's incapability to protect herself. She didn't possess the intellectual faculty to make sense of the cruelty of the event, and the danger it involved for her, and thus was incapable of staging an impactful resistance. The discovery of Sumala's mutilated body near the military camp unveils how the armed forces used rape as a tool of counter-insurgency in the region of Northeast India during such conflicting times. The failure of the Assam movement gave rise to militant organizations like the United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA) which demanded the autonomy of the state of Assam from the Indian nation-state and interpreted Assam's independence to be lost when it was incorporated into the British India through the Treaty of Yandabo (1826) (Baruah, 1999, 6). Responding to ULFA's violent measures of restoring this perceived notion of Assam's independence, the Indian government implemented draconian laws like that of the Armed Forces Special Power Act (AFSPA), to control such forms of subnationalism.

AFSPA paved the way for drastic military interference, enabling armed forces "to make preventive arrests, search premises without warrants, and even shoot and kill civilians" (Baruah 2020, 4). With the rise of ULFA, other subnationalist events like the Bodo Nationalist Movement took shape, further necessitating Indian sovereign powers to exercise by defining the region as a "disturbed area". Sanjib Baruah (2020) discusses the notorious death squads that comprised masked men who carried out secret killings of the relatives of ULFA members when they failed to make them surrender and how this organized state-sanctioned killing of innocent civilians is barely archived in mainstream media as a "tool of counterinsurgent terror in Assam" (128). More importantly, the legal immunity offered by laws like AFSPA facilitated the armed forces to abuse their power and especially exploit the vulnerable bodies of the female relatives of ULFA members or Bodo militants. Papori Bora (2017) presents in her discussion the findings of Manab Adhikar Sangram Samiti (MASS) which is a human rights organization of Assam that has been documenting violations of human rights in the state since 1991. Bora (2017) cites a report by MASS, titled, "Rape: The Hatred Weapon of Indian Armed Forces" which talks about the systematic nature of “organized humiliation of women” by the armed forces “in retaliatory acts” against the suspected rebels in the 1990s (252). Bora (2017) further elaborates that “these women were mostly wives and sisters of men suspected to be rebels” (252). This performance of retaliatory sexual violence on the female body humiliates the honor of the rebels’ families and thus is a way of mentally harassing them to surrender. Interestingly, Bora (2017) also points out that using rape as a tool of counter-insurgency identifies “women as boundary markers of the nation” and that aids in understanding the politics behind raping an internally displaced person like Sumala (253). The separatist nature of the Bodo nationalism or the ULFA’s quest for independent Assam makes the women of their members' households contested territories to be penetrated and forcefully conquered. The armed forces exercise their institutional power and exploit the impunity they are shielded with by sexually violating these women’s bodies and in turn sending the message that their chastity is no longer secured and that their sexuality is no longer exclusive. Their bodies become a shared space, a conquered space.

While Sumala’s husband Bulen fought for a separate Bodoland, his wife’s body was targeted to be conquered, violated, and mutilated. Bulen as an internal migrant who demands a separate autonomous space finds the woman of his household raped and murdered by the armed forces. Here the migrant female body not only acts as a site to perform political dissent but also a site that is to be imposed with the presence of the dominant power structures, a site for the sovereign powers to forcefully penetrate. Commenting on this aspect of extreme sovereign disciplining, Baishya (2012) interprets rape as a way of violating the “boundaries of the self and forcing the other’s corporeality on one’s body” (139). Such an interpretation of rape supplements the analogy of women as the boundary markers, as territories to be conquered in the gendering of the nation. Baishya (2012) further remarks that “such forms of bodily privation” reduce women to “abandoned corporeal selves that can be made use of and disposed dependent on the sovereign’s will” (139-40). The abandoned corporeality of such bodies is the most prominent element in the *Story of Felanee* (2011) which overlaps with the notion of ‘thrown-away’ female bodies. Moreover, social scientists have even noted that AFSPA also provided the army “an excuse to rape and brutalize women who appear in any way agentive.” Or even “to dishonor entire communities” (Banerjee, 2014, 58). Ironically, such acts of dishonoring communities based on their ethnic differences and demands of autonomy were performed by the Indian Army, an organization that is supposed to “protect the honor of the citizens at the time of external aggression" (Gogoi et al., 2016, 169). Countering the feminine agency through sexual violence amidst cultural and ethnic politics shows how the sovereign powers use the female body as an easy tool to regain control over the disturbed territory. This can be seen in the case of Bulen's niece who gets raped by the police when she participates in a procession of Bodo movement and her body is marked with gruesome injuries. Bulen's niece suffers corporeal punishment for exercising any agency and for actively taking a political position. While Sumala does not possess any agency in the novel because of her mental disability and thus does not actively propagate any political agenda or ideologies, Bulen's niece does and yet meets with a similar fate. Kalita has explored such heinous acts of sovereign exploitation of the female body in some of her other short fiction as well. For instance, in her short story, 'The Call Girls At The Shelter Home,' (Kalita, 2020), she writes of the Japanese soldiers who invaded China and how they raped even the old women. The short story shows how a group of prostitutes who took refuge in a shelter home rescued the other women staying there by sacrificing their own bodies, quenching the lust of the soldiers on everyone else's behalf. Similarly in her short story 'Ayengla Of The Blue Hills' (Kalita, 2020), where the protagonist Ayengla gets raped by Army jawans because she was threatened by a group of militants to give them food. The army instead of investigating the fact that the innocent villagers get threatened by armed militants to help them with food, oppresses the women further with sexual violence.

These short fictions are not taken for detailed analysis in this chapter because there is no event of forced displacement in the plot and no focus on the displaced female body. The army men therefore as agents of sovereign power use and abuse the displaced female bodies in the novel as per their will amidst all the ethnic tension as they fight their battles through their corporeality. Kalita's portraits reveal bodily vulnerabilities and forced displacement faced by the women of Assam in its multiple ethnic riots. Her narratives demonstrate how the displaced female body is symbolic of the contested territory and thus is met with forms of dominance and violence by sovereign powers and the men of the community alike. While from inside the community the men demand a certain performance of adorning the body with a particular attire, the army men or the police as agents of sovereignty abuse the female body as a way of retaliation against any form of sub-nationalist militancy. In either case, the displaced body suffers through a double layer of corporeal oppression; first in the form of forced migration and second through the state-sanctioned sexual violence performed by the sovereign authorities.

2.1.3. Female Body as a Site of Communal Violence in the Select Translated Bengal Partition Narratives by Women Writers of West Bengal

One of the most significant waves of forced migration experienced at the Eastern front of India was during the Bengal partitions. Bengal was divided first into West Bengal and East Pakistan with the 1947 partition of India and later with the creation of Bangladesh from East Pakistan during the 1971 Liberation War. In the year before India's independence, in the months of October and November 1946, the Noakhali riots took place in the Chittagong region of undivided Bengal which is now in Bangladesh. The Noakhali riots uprooted many Hindu Bengali families and rendered them homeless, resulting in a mass refugee movement from East to West Bengal. The partition of India at the Bengal border was set in motion with the Noakhali riots (1946) and Khulna riots (1950) as over two million Bengali Hindus fled to West Bengal to survive the turbulence created by these massacres (Chatterji, 2007). This division was based on the differences and disturbances between the religious communities of Hindus and Muslims, highly driven by patriarchy. However, the worst sufferers of such patriarchal religious communal violence turn out to be women who endured the tangible consequences of this partition on their bodies. The Noakhali riots were characterized by large-scale gender-based violence in the form of rapes, forced abduction, forced marriages, conversion, etc.

This form of violence on Hindu Bengali women's bodies made them vulnerable and urged them to flee to India with aspirations of survival in West Bengal's Hindu-dominant society. However, the integration of these refugee women back into Hindu society, especially for those who faced any corporeal oppression in the riots was a rough ordeal. Discussing the politics of the Bengal partition, Joya Chatterji (2007) states that in the process of creating a "homogeneous nation," some people become minorities upon finding themselves "on the 'wrong' side of new borders or in the 'wrong' state, with the 'wrong' ethnicity, language or religion" (105). Conceiving the stark reality in Chatterji's statement, one might expect the minorities will acquire better living standards and security on the other side, the supposedly right side of the border. However, the available literature on this episode of mass migration tells a different narrative specifically for women who braved rapes and abduction as members of a minority community. This practice of rejecting women's violated bodies and attaching the notion of communal purity to their embodiment is highly problematic. It situates the displaced female body in a context of liminality and social alienation. Jyotirmoyee Devi's (1995), novel *The River Churning*, translated from Bengali by Enakshi Chatterjee is a classic feminist partition narrative that revolves around this pressing issue. Devi's protagonist is a woman named Sutara Dutta who is one of the survivors of the Noakhali riots. As a young teenager, Sutara witnesses her family getting slaughtered in the rising flames of the riots. Her father goes missing and her mother to escape getting raped, jumps into the pond. Sutara sees her sister getting raped and possibly abducted, and suffers through an assault herself. She is saved by a kind Muslim family of her friend Sakina. Interestingly, Sutara's trauma of the riot only makes for a small segment of the novel, almost like a prelude to the fate that awaits her in West Bengal where her extended family members are based and which is supposed to be a haven for her.

However, Sutara faces hostility and gets practically ostracized from her family because her body is perceived to have been polluted by being in a Muslim household for six months. Although Sakina's father, Tamiz Saheb conveyed promptly the news of her recovery to her brother in Kolkata, the letters he got in response did not express any particular anxiety about her return to West Bengal. When Sutara is finally taken to her brother's in-laws' family home in Kolkata by Tamiz Saheb, her body is treated with a lot of hostility in their Hindu household. Devi writes the following passage to depict how Sutara gets ostracized in the household and physically alienated from participating in any daily chores:

> Yes, of course, we Hindus have some code of daily rituals. It does not allow such girls to be accepted back into the family. They have to be kept apart. She has eaten with Muslims, lived with them- how can she be accepted in the community? The pots and pans in the kitchen must not be touched by her. We have to respect the deity, the Brahmins and the codes of social conduct. (Devi 1995, 42)

Here in these lines, the Brahminical notion of purity is at play and Sutara's body takes the brunt of it. Devi broaches a very crucial question in the passage which captures the entire essence of the problematics of the raped or assaulted recovered refugee women during the partition. The idea of Sutara's embodied self, being unacceptable to the community she belongs to, emerges from the fact that she has 'lived' in a Muslim household. It is ironic how her being alive is a notion subservient to her being alive with the help of the other community which is considered a disgraceful proposition. This rejection of the female body from one's community reveals how the female body and its chastity are defined by its relation with men. Therefore, when the female body is assaulted by the men of the 'enemy' community, or when it is nourished under the patriarch of the 'other' religion, it is perceived as polluted. This sort of branding of the women's bodies does not come as a consequence of religious conversion but "represents their otherness and their 'other' identity as shamed, conquered, and violated" (Dube, 2015, 65; Daiya, 2002, 226). Debali Mookerjea-Leonard (2004) in her critical analysis of Devi's novel, posits that women's bodies are a "site for the performance of identity" and its communal purity is a "political pre-requisite of belonging in the new nation" (34). Such constructions of violated chastity and religious contamination transgress the nationalist imagination of ideal femininity. This deliberates a vital scope for patriarchal violence on the women's bodies specifically in the events of forced displacement that result from communal violence. Since men perform their political dissent on women's bodies, it essentially categorizes the raped or abducted refugee women's bodies as a blot on the nation's/community's honor. Drawing on this aspect of assigning the metaphorical body of the nation to be feminine, Paulomi Chakraborty (2014) problematizes the "symbolization of the nation as women/Goddess," propagated with classic motifs like "Mother India" (47). Chakraborty (2014) argues that it is this symbolization that "locates nation in the flesh-and-blood female bodies" (47).

In the bodies of the refugee women, raped and assaulted by the enemy community, what nation is then metaphorically located? Are they simply bodies of no nation? This line of query intervenes in understanding the refugee women's embodiment amidst wars between communities. It is adequately unveiled by the recovery missions adopted by the Indian government in the post-partition period that sought to rescue the abducted women. Menon and Bhasin (1993) have mapped the gendered nuances of "The Abducted Persons (Recovery and Restoration) Bill" and how it forced women to be taken into custody and restored them to their Indian families while their reintegration into it was mostly undesired. It determined the state's unaccountability of the desires of the women in question, whether they would like to come back or not. Menon and Bhasin (1993) report how numerous women "committed suicide after they were released by their captors" (3). While mature women with a better understanding of the ways of the Hindu society would choose to not return to their families or rather die after being in a Muslim household, Sutara's innocence drives her to seek her familial ties in West Bengal. Through Sutara, one therefore witnesses the process of rejection of her embodiment and how she is quarantined from the social duties of her family. Sutara then faces a double layer of bodily oppression as she is first physically assaulted and uprooted from her home in the non-Hindu society and then she is corporeally rejected, and treated like a contaminating element in her Hindu household. The decision of sending Sutara to a boarding school, away from all the family gatherings and functions forces her into a liminal space where the narratives of her bodily torments are silenced. This rigorous erasure of Sutara's displaced body from the space of her family/community alienates her and can be interpreted as a social elimination. Had Sutara been aware of this attitude towards girls or women whose bodies were conquered by the 'other' community, would she have been urged to come back or preferred to die? In Kolkata, medical centers were set up where a large number of raped refugee women from East Pakistan were treated and abortions were performed on them because of their special circumstances, otherwise, abortion was not legalized as mentioned earlier till the 1970s. However, despite all the medical resurrection performed on these female bodies, apparently "problem arose when attempts were made to send them back to their families" (Chakravartty, 2005, 43).

This dual nature of claiming the female body as a marker of a particular community and then disqualifying it from the same community because it was sexually or otherwise violated by the men of the rival community makes the displaced female bodies of the Bengal partition contested sites of identity. Some of the other literary representations of the modes of violence these contested female bodies were subjected to further reveal their double marginalization. Sabiti Roy's (2019) novel *Nowhere People* translated from her Bengali novel *Badwip* (1972) by Adirita Mukherjee is set in a refugee colony in Kolkata where people are gathering back their lives and fighting to bring back the basic facilities they deserve. While Roy's novel is majorly a political narrative, depicting the nitty-gritty of communism that flourished in the refugee colony and moves through the debates of the party meetings, it also subtly portrays how women's bodies were used and exploited during the turbulent times of the partition. For instance, in one of the scenes, a young woman narrates her experience of feeling vulnerable in her older home in East Pakistan and why she ultimately migrated to West Bengal. The following passage from the novel epitomizes her concerns:

> Not that we had riots or anything like that in our area, but it was getting harder and harder to keep our dignity intact. Even going out for a bathe in the pond was risky for us women- the Muslims would stop us on the way and say nasty things. Stupid chants, like “Pak Pak Pakistan; wife of Hindus, real Mussalmans.” (Roy 2019, 18).

These lines make it apparent that even in areas that did not experience destructive riots like that of Noakhali, women were subjected to sexual vulnerability which forced them to migrate. The derogatory chanting mentioned in the passage promotes religious colonization as manifested in women’s bodies. The chant aspires to sexually colonize the married women, such as female bodies that are already conquered, and thus prominently identified with the community. This act helps make the notion of masculinity of one community triumph over the other while the female bodies become a sorry medium to achieve this. Roy (2019) weaves her commentary through multiple characters and at many points makes contemplative remarks that deny villainizing only a single community and unravel many grey zones in the practice of sexually abusing a female body. Suggesting such blurring of lines between community identities in targeting the female, she writes, “The truth is that scores of Hindu women have been raped by Hindu rogues just as numerous Muslim women have been tortured by Muslim men” (Roy, 2019, 45). By this statement, Roy attempts to highlight the rape culture prevalent in both communities in all other times apart from the partition to show that the female bodies are a soft target for sexual violence in multiple contexts and is not just a mode of violence adopted by a specific community.

Such intra-community bodily violence against women shows that female sexuality is volatile in its meaning and gets objectified with the community’s honor only in case the miscreants are from a rival community. Since rapes have been a weapon for scandalizing the female body in both communities, the ostracization of the rape victim becomes a common practice. While the rape victims upon being raped by the men of the same community are offered the truce of marrying their rapists, those who have been raped by the other community are simply made outcastes in society. Their previous social stature and identity no longer matter after their bodies are subjected to violence performed by the men of the other community. This can be exemplified in Sutara’s case, as when she returns to her extended family home in Kolkata, she is treated explicitly as if she belongs to a lower caste. Sutara overhears a conversation between the women of the household who were putting forward stern regulations of untouchability for her day-to-day lived bodily experience. Devi (1995) writes with clear implications of how Sutara's rescued body is going to be treated in her upper-caste household in the following lines:

> She has spent so many days in a Muslim household, six long months. What is left of her caste, you tell me! It was good of you to bring her over, that is alright. But keep her away from household work as you would a low caste hadi or Bagdi. (Devi 1995, 36)

As evident in these lines, Sutara's body is immediately imposed with a subalternity and is severed from her past caste identity because she was rescued by a Muslim family. Her assault is also the work of the men of the Muslim community from East Pakistan but ironically there is a constant anxiety about having to accommodate her raped and displaced body in the familial space rather than any kind of relief for its safe recovery. Thus, the patriarchal constraints that associate the female body with the family's honor also disrobe her body from its caste privileges once it is violated by the men of the rival community. This is also the reason why a lot of recovered refugee women who were abducted or forcefully converted to another religion by marriage preferred to commit suicide. Death is the ultimate corporeal elimination that erases the dishonored female body from the context of nationalism and therefore was always preferred over recovery where one has to suffer through social discrimination.

Interestingly, Devi (1995) never reveals in the novel the nature of Sutara's assault and whether she was raped or not. Sutara's failed memory of the violence she faced in the Noakhali riots represents Devi's commentary on the patriarchal codes of honor for the female body which do not interrogate whether there is an 'actual' sexual violation or not. It is rather focused on the fact that she was manhandled by some men and rescued by others, both belonging to the 'enemy' community. Other scholars have interpreted this aspect of Devi's plot as a critique of the Hindu Brahminical society that strictly discriminates against and discards "soiled" (raped or not) women (Chakraborty, 2018). Even if Sutara had claimed that she retains the memory of her bodily violence and that she was not raped but only assaulted, the rejection of her corporeality in the Hindu society would have been the same. Therefore, Devi treats the details of the assault suffered by Sutara as inconsequential because in any case her being touched by the Muslim men in whatever capacity makes her body impure and unacceptable to the Hindu society. There is a social invisibility imposed on the female bodies that are soiled in this manner during communal riots and that exposes the symbolization of women's sexuality as a commodity that is deeply interlinked with the potentialities of manhood (Menon et al., 1998) Therefore, a nation's/ community's manhood is threatened when its women are raped and that in turn is readily avenged. Moreover, rape as a political act also distorts the female bodily function of reproducing the nation or the community and can also be read as an attempt of disrupting the woman's body as a medium for growing the nation's population (Mookherjee, 2008). But this understanding of rape as an act of disrupting the reproductive value of the female body by colonizing the womb in the context of nationalism is only valid when the rapist belongs to a rival community or enemy country. However, when within the same nation and the same community, marginalized displaced female bodies are met with such heinous corporeal treatment, it is simply an act of harassment and dissent. This stands especially true for the bodily violence suffered by lower-caste refugee women after they arrived in India from East Pakistan (now Bangladesh).

Kalyani Thakur Charal's (2022), contemporary Bengali novella, *Andhar Bill* translated from Bengali by Asit Biswas mentions acts of retribution in the form of gross negligence towards Dalit refugees in Dandakaranya. Charal (2022) presents a refugee colony in West Bengal populated by lower-caste Bangladeshi refugees such as the Namasudras who were mostly underprivileged peasants. The novella although can be considered plotless, stands apart from all other narratives on the episode of Bengal partition because it is written from the Dalit perspective by a Dalit writer. The narrative has certain crucial moments that briefly mention the oppression suffered by specifically the lower caste refugees post their arrival in India and their plights in Dandakaranya and Marichjhapi[12] which is rarely discussed in other literature available on Bengal Partition. The mass exodus of Dalit refugees from East Pakistan occurred much later than the displacement of the Hindu upper-class migrants who could fend for themselves and resettle in various parts of West Bengal. Their caste and class privileges allowed them to not depend on the government for their rehabilitation and resettlement in West Bengal. However, the lower-class Dalit refugees had to solely depend on the government for food, shelter, and labor (Sengupta, 2011). Since there was no more space to rehabilitate these refugees in West Bengal, the government assigned the sparsely populated Dandakaranya forest lands spread across Madhya Pradesh, and parts of Chhattisgarh and Odisha to them. However, the land was highly unsuitable for any kind of cultivation and in addition to that, there was an "acute shortage of drinking water", electricity, medical services, etc. which made Dandakaranya seem less like "a land of hope than a place of banishment" (Sengupta, 2011, 107). In the novella, the character of an old woman, Maoi remembers how some girls were kidnapped by military men and miah Muslims during the communal riots in Bangladesh and narrates the story of her displacement to young kids of the colony. She repeatedly emphasizes that these stories are not fiction but fact. Maoi's assertion of this aspect of her tale is then followed with the detail of her son who has returned from Dandakaranya and has gotten used to rotis with cracked edges. This indicates the lack of nutrition available to the refugees there. Although the novella does not discuss the plight of girls in spaces of transit like that of Dandakaranya, it brings the resettlement project and its many flaws to the notice of its readers. For instance, the novella mentions how Dandakaranya's rice-eating inhabitants had to consume rotis made of Milo flour and it became one of the many reasons for them to move out of the place. The novella constructs the imagination of Dandakaranya as a horrible place and leaves the reader curious about the horrors it entails.

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[12] See "The Forgotten Massacre of Dalit Refugees in West Bengal's Marichjhapi" https://thewire.in/history/west-bengal-violence-marichjhapi-dandakaranya

It is noteworthy that Charal (2022) makes her character discuss how women were abducted by the military and men of the Muslim community in her riot-stricken native land but does not mention any gender-specific challenges for such refugee women in Dandakaranya. The narrative only focuses on the lack of nutrition in that space of permanent settlement but does not delve deeper into what could have been its implications for specifically pregnant women or breastfeeding mothers. This absence of a feminist historiography of the journey from Dandakaranya to Marichjhapi for the Dalit refugees from East Pakistan is further problematized by Justin and Menon (2023) who map through the archival data to unveil a strategic elimination of the Marichjhapi massacre from public memory and women's location in it. The lack of basic amenities in Dandakaranya urged many refugees to demand a better place to live and ultimately move to the Marichjhapi island in the Sundarbans, West Bengal. While the government opposed this autonomous settlement as it claimed that the area was a protected forest reserve, the leftist party when it came to power changed its relief policies and created a blockade in the region "on 26th January 1979 to dislocate the refugees" (Justin et al., 2023, 96). This blockade meant blocking the release of clean drinking water and food. When the refugees attempted to collect food and water from nearby villages, their boats were destroyed, sometimes they were even shot, and scores of Dalit refugee women were raped by the local police in the massacre. Justin and Menon (2023) remap a feminist historiography of the Marichjhapi massacre which informs that no legal cases were filed against any physical assault or rape of Dalit refugee women while other researchers have revealed the exact number of Marichjhapi rape cases by police authorities (Sen, 2015). In this case, where Hindu men are raping the Hindu lower-caste refugee women, it is not religious colonialism at play, rather it is simply a performance of corporeal violence to drive out the undesirable 'alien' immigrant community and for that female body becomes a medium of threatening and violence. It is also noteworthy that no legal cases were reported of the assaults in the massacres specifically the gendered violence as it reveals how the pain of the female migrant's body is largely unarchived in such episodes of state-sanctioned crimes. While Charal's novella mentions the lack of better food or other facilities in Dandakaranya, it fails to dig deeper into the issues and challenges of Dalit migrant women in such spaces and how they were oppressed by the military on not just one but both sides of the border. Charal however describes in her narrative how the Dalit women in Andhar Bill lead their lives because of poverty. She writes,

> In fact, girls of that age group from this village do not wear blouses. Because of the scarcity of cloth to make petticoats, they have learnt to fold their saris in such a way that they can make do without petticoats. (Charal 2022, 129-30)

Charal here presents the bare world of the Dalit refugee women here. Their inability to cover their bodies adequately because of their financial conditions subjects them to the male gaze more prominently and objectifies them sexually, also making their bodies easily accessible. Her depiction can be read in parlance with the images of the Marichjhapi massacre Justin and Menon (2023) analyze in their study, particularly a photograph of a dark-skinned Dalit refugee woman with a ripped saree and only a blouse and a skirt by Soumya Sankar Bose (2020). They read it as the representation of the violation endured by the Dalit refugees in the massacre. Similarly, the scarcity of clothing faced by the girls in the narrative of *Andhar Bill* also seems to expose them to sexual violation by powerful state authorities although Charal (2022) does not explore any such cases of military harassment in her plot. Such absence of literary representations of gendered crimes by Indian state authorities is problematic in the context of the Bengal partition and creates a space for interrogating this politics of exclusion. Any exclusion of the bodily trials of refugee women in the narratives of the Bengal partition erases the role female corporeality has played in history and how it has served as a platform for communal wars to tangibly take shape. Women's displaced bodies were not just tools to express communal hatred and dissent for the alien immigrant community but also acted as assets to ensure security during the exodus of Bengali Hindus from East Pakistan. Roy (2019) exemplifies this mode of transaction in her novel in the scene where Dhiman's cousin Sharbani reveals that her misogynist rich landowner husband Mr. Chowdhury decided to stay on in East Pakistan and he ensured that he was not in any risk "by marrying off his niece to a local Muslim landowner's son" (47).

Upon inquiry about the girl's age, Sharbani goes on to say, "About sixteen. And exquisitely beautiful. You know what that means" (Roy, 2019, 48). Sharbani's statement here indicates the sexual exploitation that her husband's niece had to suffer through for his safety amidst communal tension. Here the female body is used as a commodity in exchange for peace as it satisfies male sexual desires and it demonstrates how a woman is sacrificed in this transaction between men. Thus, the partition of India in the Bengal, much like in the Punjab front largely shows the way women were used and abused in a war between men not just on one but both sides of the border. These select translated women's fiction from the region highlight the corporeal traumas left by the war on women's bodies and also bring into question the intersectionality of these traumas on multiple facets like gender, caste, and class.

2.2. The Female Body in Narratives of Cultural and Labor Displacements:

While drawing on the multiplicity of factors affecting the treatment of the female migrant's body, it is also urgent to focus on certain narratives from the select body of regional women's fiction portraying events of displacement that aren't based on wars, communal tensions, or riots. Rather these particular events present situations where women are secluded from the notion of home for labor and tricked into cultural shifts while depicting how this endangers their corporeal security. This section discusses two such literary instances from the select women's fiction which helps understand what repercussions migration holds for women's bodies when it is not forced but is voluntary and circumstantial. In this section, the chapter discusses two such instances from Anita Agnihotri's (2021) novel *The Sickle* translated from the original Bengali *Kaste* (2019) by

Arunava Sinha and Pratibha Ray's (2001) novel *The Primal Land* translated from Odia by Bikram K. Das. Agnihotri (2021) in her novel presents a group of laborers who are instigated by the droughts in their village in Latur district of Marathwada to migrate to Satara for work. The harsh droughts make it an impossible task for the farming fields to be cultivated and such uncultivable lands majorly impact the sustainability of the farming laborers' income sources. Therefore, to earn a living for the drought season these laborers move to work in the sugarcane fields and the sugar mill factories of Satara. The plot shows how these laborers live in makeshift shanties during their tenure working in the sugar mills and get exploited by the sugar mill agents. More importantly, Agnihotri (2021) presents specific bodily challenges that the women laborers have to endure in these spaces of transit. As their dire circumstances force these female laborers to be displaced from their homes, it is noteworthy how their bodies are immediately morphed into vulnerable objects for sexual predators who come from a space of power.

For instance, the novel opens up with one of the sugar mill laborers, Terna, having to sleep in the peak scorching summers in a heavy traditional attire which makes it difficult for any sexual predator to undress and gives her enough time to make noise and save herself from molestation. The plot then shows Terna revisiting the trauma of making the mistake of sleeping in loose clothes once in the past in her shanty and how that led her to be a victim of rape by the sugar mill agent. Agnihotri adopts a tone in her narration that almost normalizes these incidents of sexual harassment in the shanty life of the women laborers. The novel reveals that because of the space of power, these sexual offenders come from, the displaced women laborers are prohibited to oppose these acts or report them to the police. Agnihotri writes the following lines to portray the sexual violence the women in the colony of make-shift shanties (*toli*) suffer at the hands of the sugar mills agent.

> Not knowing the protocol of the toli, Terna had screamed, for which she was rewarded with a hefty slap on her delicate face. It drew blood from her bruised lips, while the man hissed, effortlessly ripping her thin cotton blouse and raising her petticoat above her waist. (Agnihotri 2021, 9)

The 'protocol' mentioned in the above lines reveals how women are conditioned to submit to such corporeal oppression while displaced from the notion of home. Terna being an amateur to the rules of the colony of shanties screams in protest but is soon shut down with further physical violence and it is evident that because the man raping her is the agent who gives them salaries, there is a fat chance that by complaining to the police, these laborers would jeopardize their only source of income during the drought seasons. Moreover, in the plot, this practice is portrayed as one that women are responsible for adapting themselves to. Agnihotri problematizes how the responsibility of ensuring their corporeal security is solely imposed on the women in shanties since they are expected to wear heavy clothing in a bid to secure their bodies even though the hot climate makes it unbearable to sleep being dressed in that manner. This notion of women having to ensure their safety in the spaces of displacement is further expanded in the instance where Terna is threatened by her husband Datu who warns her that although many men in the *toli* will desire her if she becomes pregnant in such ventures, he will kick her out of his household. Terna's husband even though knows how the settlement for laborers works for the women, makes it her responsibility to ensure that she does not conceive when she can't avoid a rape.

Her husband goes on to suggest that she should get her uterus removed to be on the safe side. This alternate solution of meddling with the body's reproductive ability is driven by the motive of patriarchal honor since if the womb carries the offender's seed, then it is as discussed in all other cases above an insult to the manhood of the husband. The husband here is helpless because of the financial aspect involved but is still exercising his territorial claim on the wife's womb so that the womb cannot be colonized by any other man. Agnihotri describes the removal of the uterus as a solution to multiple problems for women migrant laborers who have to adjust to the problematic living conditions of the *toli.* She writes,

> Sewing up the tubes was a makeshift arrangement, it didn't even work all the time, and there was the monthly problem of the flow. Here there were neither bathrooms nor toilets. Where were eight-months-pregnant women to go? But if you didn't have a uterus, you didn't have a problem either. (Agnihotri 2021, 10)

In these lines, it is evident that the living conditions in such spaces of transit are not inclusive of specific sanitary demands for menstruating and pregnant women. The reproductive bodies of the migrant laborers have these added demands and difficulties in such scenarios. Thus, to do away with the brunt of the reproductive corporeality is considered the easier choice. Terna goes through this body-altering solution so that she can continue her occupational migration to Satara every year in the drought seasons and not bear the tangible bodily consequences of the challenges of insanitation or sexual harassment it involves. In India, the practice of bonded labor is banned but it is regularly violated by such mills and construction sites. With the advance payments made to lock these laborers in by the contractors or agents, the women migrants are especially subjected to many insecurities including health, sanitation, and sexual violence (Sahu et al., 2022). A study carried out by the Indian Social Institute (ISI) Bangalore, points out that "one in every 14" garment workers migrants from places like Odisha, West Bengal, and Jharkhand, are raped or face forced sex[13]. These statistics mirror more or less different work setups while the problem of no health and sexual security for female migrant laborers remains. These women migrants are also sometimes trafficked for labor and due to their unregistered status; they are tricked into bonds with advance money and are exploited physically and sexually by their employers (Acharya et al., 2023). In these labor migrations, women turn out to be doubly marginalized being not only a financial subaltern, exploited in the capitalist structure but also a sexual subaltern for the employers to take advantage of while receiving no health benefits or proper sanitation for a hygienic living. While the men are signed into bonds of physical labor, women are signing bonds to give away physical and sexual well-being along with the physical labor that the work demands.

Similarly, another interesting case of migratory instance and its implication on the female body is seen in Pratibha Ray's *The Primal Land* (2001) which revolves around the life and culture of Bonda tribes from Odisha. In the novel, there is a character of Adibari Toki who is a Bonda woman and who becomes in the plot one of the firsts to adopt the dressing style of mainland Odisha much opposed to the tradition she is brought up with when she starts working in the development project started by the government officials. As Adibari becomes the first Bonduni to be clothed in a saree, she is also introduced to different cultural ways of life outside the honest and straightforward Bonda society. The various mannerisms of the Bondas and the female body's location in it are discussed in much detail in Chapter 3. This section only focuses on the special case of Adibari Toki who while working on the government's Bonda development project falls in love with a policeman who promises her a better life if she elopes with him. Adibari who is accustomed to the Bonda way of honesty falls victim to these claims and migrates to the Jeypore town in Odisha along with the policeman. However, her naïve trust in the entire plan shatters when she is taken away from her home and is exploited sexually by the policeman. Upon being found by a group of her friends, Adibari laments her choice and talks about the bodily torments she has to endure because of it. Narrating her corporeal agony Ray writes,

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[13] See 'Accompanying Distressed Migrant Workers in India' https://icmc.net/future-of-work/report/10-india/

> The young policeman had abandoned her on reaching Jeypore. A truck driver took pity on her and took her to his shack. At night he returned drunk, together with some eight or ten of his friends. Adibari was raped repeatedly. (Ray 2001, 198)

Ray further informs that to save herself, Adibari somehow manages to escape and seeks refuge with a *dhaba* (local restaurant) owner. The wife and children of the *dhaba* owner lived far from him in the village and therefore now Adibari did not only wash the dirty utensils for him but also shared his bed. Ray gives a rather poetic description of Adibari's tragic situation as she writes, "She had handed her own living corpse over to the old, wheezing, pock-marked man in exchange for a roof overhead" (Ray, 2001, 198). The fact that Ray uses the metaphor of a living corpse for Adibari's displaced body immediately brings to notice its lack of agency. The cultural shift that Adibari gets tricked into makes her body only a tool to be used by other men for their sexual satisfaction. Her socio-cultural shift puts her displaced body into a vulnerable position where she submits to the hegemonic structures prevalent in the non-tribal society and yields to sexual exploitation of her body.

Contrary to the sexual freedom that women enjoy in the Bonda society as they engage in pre-marital sex in the traditional dormitories for young women called *Selani Dingo*s where conceiving out of wed-lock is never frowned upon, Adibari becomes a sexual slave to the men of the planes. As societal norms change drastically in the course of her displacement, her body loses the sexual agency it enjoyed in the space of 'home' and falls prey to sexual abuse in the space of transit. The tribal migrants specifically struggle in the chaos of a socio-cultural and socio-economic shift in this way. Women like Adibari who are stranded and duped, fail to find honest paying work, and even when they do their employers take advantage of their unfamiliarity with the ways of a non-tribal society resulting in sexual harassment. A study conducted in 2013 reveals that all the tribal migrant women interviewed as a part of it reported being victims of sexual harassment and being molested by their employers who used obscene language and inappropriate touching (Bandela et al., 2013). Moreover, the article also posits that many tribal women migrants are kept by outsider men "with false promises of marriage" who abandon them "while changing place of jobs" (Bandela et al., 2013, 5). Adibari's case reflects such modes of betrayal and trickery that naïve tribal women face when they migrate to any non-tribal society. Their subaltern identities of being tribal along with being a migrant function into doubly marginalizing their body and making their embodiment a cheap commodity of physical and sexual labor.

2.3. Summary

Thus, the displaced female body of the migrant woman is subjected to multiple modes of oppression be it a mass forced displacement resulting from wars communal riots, or individual migration that came in response to labor opportunities and hopes of better lives. Whether the migration is state-sanctioned or circumstantial, whether it is for political dissent, poverty, or love, the displaced female body endures the pangs of patriarchal abuse in every case in some form or other. One of the primary observations gained from this study is that of the tampering with the reproductive aspect of the displaced female body. The pregnant Assamese-Chinese women were imposed with no medical security and questionable facilities in the Deoli detention camp, not being even allowed to terminate the pregnancy considering the unstable future and stateless identity as if their punishment was to bear the brunt of their pregnant bodies in their displacement. Similarly, Felanee's pregnant body was not shown any mercy for its hybridity, it was put into danger because of its location, a village populated with ethnic minorities.

While Felanee's child dies at birth, Mei Lin's daughter grows up to be an outcast, deported while in the womb from the country she truly belongs to. As the ethnic tension and political wars between cultures and communities vehemently oppose any mixing between themselves, the hybrid pregnant bodies of these women and their hybrid fetuses are rejected resulting in constructive nation-building. The intentional trauma these culturally hybrid pregnant bodies are subject to proves how in an attempt at cultural standardization, there is no space for such hybrid embodiment. However, in cases where the displaced female body is a non-hybrid member of a community, it is used as a tool for humiliating masculinity. This can be seen in the case of abductions and rapes that came as a consequence of the Bengal partition. Muslim men abducted Hindu women and Hindu men abducted Muslim women to accomplish a religious colonialism of the womb that belongs to the enemy community. The recovered raped and abducted Hindu women were not accepted back into their Hindu households because of their 'impure' bodies capable of giving birth to 'impure' fetuses. While the rapes were mostly motivated by communal hatred, it is also true that less privileged non-Muslim Dalit refugees from East Pakistan were also harassed in episodes like that of the Marichjhapi massacre by the West Bengal police and this can be understood as a mode of violence that the unwanted refugees were subjected to. The extra layer of subaltern identity in terms of caste and tribe, has proved to be brutal for the corporeality of women migrants as exemplified in the case of Adibari who is treated like a sexual slave by men of non-tribal society (more on this in the next chapter). The association of male honor with the female womb that carried the patriarch's lineage runs too deep and that can also be witnessed when Terna is urged to remove her uterus just because she is vulnerable in the displaced space of her shanty to fall prey to sexual abuse or rape. Interestingly, her husband only cared about the possible physical outcome of such bodily traumas but not the emotional impact it might have on Terna.

The displaced female body is always targeted for its reproductive abilities and the womb is conditioned, violated, and forced to bear a difficult pregnancy according to patriarchal desires. It is also noteworthy that the female body especially in case of ethnic tensions becomes a platform to flaunt cultural allegiance. While Felanee is advised not to wear a *mekhela sador* along with Bengali shell bangles, Mei Lin's consistent loyalty to the Assamese culture and language is rigorously ignored. Just as the West Bengal police use rape as a mode of violence against the refugees in the Marichjhapi case, the Armed Forces Special Power Act empowers the Army to use rape as a tool to curb insurgency. The horrible rape and further mutilation of Sumala's body in *The Story of Felanee* (2011) possibly came as a response to her husband Bulen's militant activities and Kalita only subtly indicates the Army's involvement in it by the location at which Sumala's body is found. The displaced female body disturbs the socio-cultural fabric and is imposed with these vulnerabilities and the gendered crimes the female migrant's body falls prey to are treated with deafening silence in debates around nation-building or community-building. It almost seems like the state powers condone such crimes and deem it to be the migrant woman's responsibility to ensure her corporeal security.