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INTIMATE RELATIONS

KRUPA SHANDILYA

SOCIAL REFORM AND THE LATE NINETEENTH-CENTURY SOUTH ASIAN NOVEL



Intimate Relations



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Intimate Relations

*Social Reform and the Late Nineteenth-Century
South Asian Novel*

Krupa Shandilya



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*To Corinna Lee,
for her friendship and support*

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Intimate Relations

At Home in the World

*Feminist Agency in the Late Nineteenth-Century
Social Reform Novel*

On one of my forays into Cornell's Kroch Library I found Rabindranath Tagore's *Nashtanir* (The Broken Nest, 1901), a short novella about a young woman, Charulata, confined in a stifling marriage to an older man.¹ Charulata falls in love with Amol, her husband's young brother, whose intellectual conversation and playful jests provide her with much-needed companionship. When Amol gets married, Charulata is heartbroken. Yet, at the end of the novel, she does not leave her husband in search of true love but remains married to him.

As I was gripped in this heartbreaking tale of passion and unfulfilled desire, it dawned on me that here was a woman whose desires did not seem to fit into any nationalist or imperialist theorization of the nation. Conservative nationalists would never condone Charulata's frustrated sexual passion, yet her desire to break free of her marriage could not be framed as a proto-feminist attempt at "modernity" either, for at the end of the novel she reconciles herself to home and hearth. How do we read Charulata's subjectivity in the context of her own time, when social reform movements attempted to articulate a new definition of Indian womanhood?

This book is invested in understanding women's subjectivities that were both shaped by social reform movements and—in their desires and longings—exceeded their ideological demarcations. I focus primarily on social reform movements that negotiate the intimate relations between men and women in Hindu and Muslim society, namely

the Widow Remarriage Act in Bengal (1856) and the education of women promoted by the Aligarh movement (1858–1900). These reform movements were launched in response to colonial criticisms of the low status of Indian women, which the British used as a justification for empire. The reformers countered the British view that Indian women were bound in sexual slavery to Indian men by suggesting that women's place in the home made them repositories of a unique spiritual culture, uncontaminated by colonialism. Since the conjugal relation most closely resembled the colonial relation, social reformers argued that while the colonial male's submission to his master was based on fear, the wife's submission to her husband was based on love and was thus far superior to the colonial relation. In this the social reform project was also a nationalist project, as the social reformers were determined to prove the superiority of Indian culture by reforming the material and social conditions of women's lives while requiring them to retain their unique Indian spirituality.

Both the widow remarriage movement in Bengal and the education of women movement in northern India were ostensibly invested in recovering women as "respectable" subjects for the Hindu and Muslim nation, where respectability connotes asexual spirituality. Yet the domestic novels that emerge from these movements are ideologically fraught texts that grapple with articulating a coherent reformist agenda that can reconcile women's sexuality with their spirituality. Thus no widows are remarried in the Bengali widow remarriage novel, while education enables the respectable wife of the Urdu novel to circumvent the codes of veiling even as it enables the immodest courtesan to observe them.

The title of this book gestures to the relation between Indian reformist men and the women they set out to reform: wives, widows, and courtesans whose troubling sexuality needed to be explained and accounted for by the reformist project. It also refers to the relation between reformist men and British Victorian discourses of ideal womanhood—the woman as the proverbial "angel of the house." I argue that the reformist elite did not respond to British critiques simply by inverting colonial binaries but rather that through the social reform novel they struggled to articulate a coherent vision of the reformed Indian woman. The dissident subjectivities represented in the Bengali and Urdu social reform novel exceed the ostensible agenda of reforming women to make them signifiers of the spiritual, asexual, and therefore apolitical South Asian nation. As both a literary form and a vehicle for

reform, the novels work to articulate these dissident subjectivities, in which the sexual-spiritual is part of the political, and in the process gesture to the emergence of a new South Asian modernity.

Intimate Relations participates in the inauguration of a new comparative literature by focusing on the vernacular novel in two dominant languages of the Global South, Bengali and Urdu, with vast and textured literary histories. In taking the vernacular novel as my subject, I aim to expand the scope of comparative literature as we know it. In *The Age of the World Target*, Rey Chow suggests that the field of comparative literature is embedded in Euro-Americanism, such that French and German literatures are subject to meticulous study, while languages, histories, and cultures of the Global South remain “by default, undifferentiated—and thus never genuinely on a par with Europe—within an ostensibly comparative framework.”² Similarly, in *Death of a Discipline*, Gayatri Spivak calls for a “new comparative literature” that will embrace languages outside of the Euro-American tradition and pay close attention to the textures and histories of words that get obliterated in translations.³ Spivak argues that work on literatures in South Asian languages has emerged primarily from area studies departments, while English departments have focused primarily on Anglophone literature of the colonial and postcolonial periods.

In *Born Translated*, Rebecca Walkowitz argues against these formulations of comparative literature and suggests instead a framework of “comparison literature” in which one can study world literature by reading texts in and as translation. She suggests a methodology of “close reading at a distance” that demotes close reading in favor of analysis of the circulation and production of texts.⁴ This book pushes against Walkowitz’s “close reading at a distance” and stresses that close reading in the languages of the Global South is crucial to understanding the “otherness” of the third world novel. By this I mean that it is impossible to understand the Bengali widow remarriage novel, for instance, without unpacking the novelists’ use of the Bengali word *satita*, which translates as “wifely devotion” and has a sedimented history, drawing on the act of *sati* (self-immolation on the funeral pyre) and also on the Sanskrit word *sat*, which connotes spiritual purity. Such a close reading is essential for understanding the colonial Bengali novel not merely as a translation of the European novel but as a complex literary text. My approach to comparative literature focuses on the literariness of the vernacular novel of the Global South, considering questions of literary form, narrative voice, and the use of poetry, among others. It reflects

on these questions in the specific context of these literary traditions but also in the larger context of empire: the ideological underpinnings of the British Raj and the narrative form of the British novel.

I read these novels not as social texts but as literary texts that “bear clues—often indirect, perverse, and prejudiced—to a history of ideological coercions and exclusions.”⁵ In other words, I read the social reform novel as the site for an ideological contestation on women’s reform and explore trajectories of desire and subjecthood that are present neither in legal or historical documents nor in Anglophone literature of the same period. The novel thus serves as an alternative site for understanding the construction of women as the subjects or objects of reform, for exploring articulations of feminist agency, and for understanding an evolving South Asian modernity.

Scholarship on the Indian novel in the vernacular has usually focused exclusively on one linguistic tradition. The exclusion of other contemporaneous literary traditions has resulted in a telescopic view, one that sees Bengali literature as the concern of the Hindu upper-caste, middle-class, and Urdu literature as the domain of the Muslim elite and thus reproduces the communalism that postcolonial scholarship critiques. My focus on the Bengali and Urdu novels of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century seeks to remedy this divide by drawing attention to the unexpected similarities in constructions of the reformed woman and in the form of the novel across these literary traditions. These similarities suggest that the problem of accounting for women’s sexuality in a reformist agenda transcended religious and linguistic divides and that, rather than being self-contained, these literary traditions were deeply connected to one another. Further it suggests that the question of women’s reform was a national rather than a local question. Thus my reading of female agency produces an alternative feminist modernity in the context of the South Asian nation.

I undertake first-time English translations of several texts analyzed in this book, such as the Bengali novelist Saratchandra Chatterjee’s letters and his essay on women, Urdu novelists M. H. Ruswa’s *Junun-e-Intezaar* (The Madness of Waiting), and Nazir Ahmad’s *Fasana-e-Mubtala* (The Story of Mubtala).⁶ In addition a significant body of secondary literature on these (Bengali and Urdu) novels exists in other South Asian vernacular languages (e.g., Hindi) and has therefore not been used by critics who work within one linguistic tradition. For instance, the Hindi novelist Ila Chandra Joshi was deeply influenced by Saratchandra and wrote a biography of him, but this biography has

not been mined by literary critics because of a linguistic divide that sees Hindi literature as separate and distinct from Bengali literature.⁷ My translations and engagement with these hitherto unavailable texts make available a new body of scholarship that I hope will inaugurate vital discussions in fields as varied as South Asian history, area studies, and transnational feminism.

In the remainder of this chapter I will map the theoretical arguments, historical engagements, and methodological tools that this book deploys. I begin by drawing together the disparate histories of these contemporaneous social reform movements in order to reflect on the similarities of Hindu and Islamic constructions of woman as the embodiment of the gendered nation. I then explicate a postcolonial feminist methodology of close reading that I will use to read the male-authored social reform novel as a site for dissident female subjectivities. Finally, I define the conception of feminist agency that animates this project and consider its implications for the dichotomy of the home and the world, which structures scholarly discussions of women's roles in late nineteenth-century South Asia.

LITERARY CULTURE AND SOCIAL REFORM IN THE BENGAL RENAISSANCE AND DELHI RENAISSANCE

In 1857 Indian sepoys mutinied against their British masters, but British forces finally subdued the Indian soldiers, and the British Crown took over from the East India Company. Thus began the official reign of Queen Victoria as Crown Empress of India and the onset of the British Raj. Historians attribute many reasons for this seemingly sudden uprising: cartridges coated with cow and pig skin that offended the sensibilities of both Hindu and Muslim soldiers, the mysterious circulation of *chapatis* (flatbreads) inciting rebellion, and the cruelty of British officers, among many others.⁸ At the time, however, the British saw one clear reason for the revolt: British interference in native morality. In the years preceding what is known as the Revolt of 1857, British criticisms of Indian society had led to legal and social reforms to ameliorate the condition of women, such as the passing of the Abolition of Sati Act in 1829 and the Widow Remarriage Act in 1856. With the official instatement of India as Britain's colony, the Crown had a vested interest in painting Indians as uncivilized barbarians and touted

the degraded conditions of Indian women as proof. But at the same time the Crown also instated an official policy of noninterference in native morality, which meant that there was little legislation passed on women's issues and that even when legislation was passed, the British were not too keen on implementing it.

Thus the task of reforming women fell to the Indian elite who belonged to the two hubs of imperial power: Bengal and Delhi. In Bengal the male elite took on the task of reforming the status of women while claiming the moral superiority of Indian women based on their spirituality. Instead of the well-worn road of legislation, they adopted the novel as a means for producing wide-ranging change in society. This is because of the ready availability of cheap editions of novels, published in serialized form in literary journals. Further, the vast and varied readership of these journals ensured a devoted public keenly invested in these debates.⁹

A similar wave of reform coursed through Delhi after 1857. As the nominal head of India, the Mughal king in Delhi was accorded respect and honor by the East India Company before 1857. After 1857 the Crown justified its claim to empire by citing the moral turpitude of the Mughal Empire, which was visible in its harsh treatment of women and its decadent literary culture.¹⁰ To this end the British passed the Resolution on Native Female Education in 1868 but did not enforce it because they were wary of interfering with Muslim society.¹¹ The task of reforming Muslim society was then left to the male Indian elite, who spearheaded two distinct reform movements, the Aligarh (1858–98) and the Deoband (1860–90), both aimed at making Muslim society more moral and Islamic. These movements had a two-pronged agenda: reforming Urdu poetry by making it more moral and reforming Muslim women by making them better Islamic subjects. Like the Bengali elite, the *ashraf* (upper-class, feudal, Muslim) elite used the novel as a vehicle for social reform, even as they continued to have a vexed relationship with Urdu poetry, which they could neither abandon nor adequately justify in their new program of reform.

Thus both movements wanted to reform women by remaking them into pious subjects. Gail Minault explains that unlike the Bengal renaissance, “the Delhi renaissance was a movement of preservation [of Islamic codes and Urdu literary culture] as well as revitalization, and this difference in motivation is the greatest point of contrast between the two movements.”¹² Thus the ideal Muslim wife followed Quranic injunctions for piety to the extreme, preserving Islamic codes

of modesty by donning the veil. Although not as clear-cut as in the Delhi renaissance, the Bengali elite's notion of the reformed Hindu woman was also motivated by preserving the idea of an ideal Hindu culture. The reformed woman was modeled after the *Manusmriti*, a second-century Hindu code of law that defined the ideal wife as one who embodied wifely devotion to her husband.

As we see, Victorian ideas of the moral, Christian woman were adapted and transmuted to Islam and Hinduism. Like her Victorian counterpart, this woman was asexual and embodied spirituality, modesty, and devotion to her husband.¹³ To construct this ideal woman, the reformers needed to read these virtues as already extant in Hindu and Islamic traditions and to ignore those aspects of Hinduism and Islam present in their society that contradicted this idea. For instance, while the Bengali reformers upheld wifely devotion, sexualized, feminized paradigms of devotion were neatly excised from this vision of the ideal Hindu woman. Similarly *ashraf* reformers denied the erotic play associated with veiling, delineating the veil as simply a signifier of Islamic piety and modesty. Thus "tradition" was as much a construction for the reformers as "modernity" was for the British.

In constructing this ideal "angel of the house," however, reformers were perplexed by women who remained at the margins of society, namely widows and courtesans. Although the Hindu widow was middle class and upper caste and the Muslim courtesan was educated and accomplished, both remained outside the normative construction of ideal Hindu and Muslim womanhood because their sexual desires exceeded this construct. Similarly the Muslim wife in the home was seen as an un-Islamic figure whose irreligious practices needed to be corrected so that she could save the Muslim man from the onslaught of colonialism.¹⁴ These figures could not be easily explained in the nationalist ideal of the home as the space of pristine spirituality, yet this very subject was most in need of reform. Needless to say, this literary and reformist project was fraught with ideological contradictions. The reformers attempted to mold these subjects into the idealized "angel of the house," but their social marginality and troubling sexuality prevented their neat enclosure within these narrative frames.

The ideological dominance of the reformers' perspectives makes their novels of special interest for a study of the "women's question" in the late nineteenth century. Thus *Intimate Relations* deliberately undertakes the task of reading subaltern figures through texts that are produced by male reformers instead of by women. This is not to

discount the vast array of novels, tracts, pamphlets, and poetry written by women on the subject of social reform, such as Tarabai Shinde's essay "Stri Purush Tulana" (A Comparison of Men and Women, 1882) in Marathi and Krupabai Sattianadan's English reformist novel, *Saguna*, among others,¹⁵ which feminist scholars have studied to understand women's entanglement with questions of social reform. For instance, Rajeswari Sunder Rajan considers Anuradha Ramanan's Tamil short story "Anaippu" (The Embrace, 1980) to explore debates on the practice of widow immolation in the 1980s and 1990s.¹⁶

While the project of recovering women's voices is laudable, I am invested in analyzing the narration of the subaltern woman through the elite male discourse of reform because it dominated the social and political landscape of nineteenth-century India and informed conceptualizations of the "women's question." As Sunder Rajan notes, "Our understanding of the problems of 'real' women cannot lie outside the 'imagined' constructs in and through which 'women' emerge as subjects. Negotiating with these mediations and simulacra we seek to arrive at an understanding of the issues at stake."¹⁷ Thus in order to grapple with questions of social reform as they were debated in the late nineteenth century it is important to read "imagined" constructs of womanhood through the discourse of elite male reformers.

Further, as Spivak argues, the subaltern subject, by definition, can never have access to representation because she is always subject to "the cathexis of the elite, that [her subjectivity] is never fully recoverable, that it is always askew from its received signifiers, indeed that it is effaced even as it is disclosed, that it is reducibly discursive." Similarly, in this project I acknowledge that subaltern consciousness is subject to the "cathexis" of the elite male reformers who write the subaltern as a fictional character. In other words, because subaltern consciousness is co-opted by elite discourse, it must be read through "strategic essentialisms," by which the categories *elite* and *subaltern* become fixed essences that can be defined and understood as such.¹⁸

Even though narrative is by its very nature branded by the mark of what Ranajit Guha terms the "dominant consciousness," articulations of gendered subaltern agency can be recovered by closely examining the ways in which the dominant consciousness—that is, the elite male writers discussed in this book—narrates the subaltern subject.¹⁹ This project is invested in the productive tensions that emerge from this interaction, while at the same time remaining acutely aware of the ideological formations that underlie these textual productions of

female subaltern consciousness. In this task there is neither desire for nor assumption of an “unadulterated” female subaltern consciousness that exists outside of the text but rather a careful unraveling of the traces of female subaltern consciousness from the site of its production.

To this end I deploy a postcolonial feminist praxis of reading that pays close attention not only to the plot and characters of a text but also to the text’s embeddedness in a history of colonialism. In *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason*, Spivak argues that feminist literary criticisms often reproduce “the axioms of imperialism,” such that third world literature is recovered through an “information-retrieval approach” and read through a “deliberately ‘non-theoretical’ methodology with self-conscious rectitude,” for the texts and traditions of the Global South are seen as intact literary heritages awaiting recovery. In this context Spivak argues for a “worlding” of third world literature—that is, a careful reading of this literature within the site of its historical and cultural production as primarily a literary text.²⁰

Thus I contend that the form and literary conventions of the vernacular social reform novel are necessarily different from *the* novel, a formulation derived from the English novel. As Chow writes, this idea of “*the* novel works with the assumption of a kind of differentiation that is ultimately additive or cumulative in method, requiring others to name themselves *as other* while they retain the generic term as the grid of general intelligence, the morphology that has the power to account for additional, including divergent or deviant, information.”²¹ The English novel is seen as the paradigmatic form of the novel, necessarily making novels in other literary traditions merely deviant derivations.

In this context I suggest that the social reform novels constitute a unique genre, what I term the “modernesque.” Drawing on the legacy of literary innovation associated with modernism, this term describes texts that do not refract European modernism but instead attempt to articulate ideas about the modern world through stylistic and generic innovation. The modernesque novel attempts to reconcile old literary conventions with new to explicate an evolving modernity. This framework enables us to read the endeavors of the social reformers- novelists as extending to the literary form of the novel itself. For in response to British criticisms of Bengali and Urdu literary culture as immature and decadent, the novelist-reformers were heavily invested in revitalizing their literary traditions, remaking them to bear the weight of modern ideas. Several of the novelist-reformers discussed in this book acted as translators, both literally and culturally, between the English and

Indian populations. Some of them were directly employed by the British civil service, and they assumed the task of translating Hindu or Muslim culture for their imperial masters.²² As men of letters they also translated English best-sellers into Bengali and Urdu. The social reform novels these men produced thus attempt to reconcile indigenous literary forms and notions of the function of literature with British ideas of the same, while simultaneously making them vehicles for social reform.

Methodologically, then, I argue for the agency of the literary, that is, reading the novel not simply as a representation of the social but as a complex literary text in which close attention to its rhetorical dimensions are crucial to untangling its representation of the political. In “The Staging of Time in *Heremakhonon*,” Spivak argues for a practice of close reading that foregrounds the novel as a staging of history: “For the appreciation of the novel as a relief map of time, with one structure of characterological memory and another, a paratextual structure implied in historical signifieds, we bring to the text a way of reading imaginatively involved with the retrieval of the cartography.”²³ For Spivak the “rhetoricity,” or rhetorical historicity, of Maryse Conde’s *Heremakhonon* lies in the paratextual demarcations of time because they reveal not merely the history of a character but the traces of the subaltern history of a continent. That is, the novel’s marking of time both in the chronology of its narrator-character and its gesturing to the many histories embedded in the narrative reveal the untold stories of the nation.

Similarly I deploy a methodology of reading that takes into account the rhetorical dimensions of these novels, such as narrative structures, introductory prefaces that outline the novel’s ideology, and the use of poetic interludes. I situate these narrative and generic innovations within the history of vernacular literary traditions as well as in the context of the English novel—the penny dreadful, the domestic, and the didactic novel—which played a key role in the formation of the modernesque novel.

This reading strategy also unveils the ideological dimensions of the novels and enables us to read the sexually expressive female characters of the social reform novel not as elements of male fantasy but as tropes; that is, they emerge as dissident subjects that distill the anxiety surrounding questions of reform that plagued the male reformers. This feminist methodology opens modes for reading traces of subaltern consciousness and for thinking through its narration in the late nineteenth-century novel. This project is thus invested in the ways that

women's subjectivities are articulated and implicated in the battle of literariness that is central to the production of the late nineteenth-century social reform novel and enables us to truly understand questions of female agency, narration, and the "worlding" of the vernacular novel.

RETHINKING FEMINIST AGENCY IN THE HOME

Partha Chatterjee's theorization of the nation in *The Nation and Its Fragments* (1993) has become paradigmatic for ways of thinking about gender and nation across disciplinary boundaries such as history, literary criticism, and anthropology.²⁴ Chatterjee contends that colonial nationalism is founded on gender difference and that the Bengali middle class divided the world into a material outer world, which was open to Western influences and dominated by men, and a spiritual inner world (the home), composed primarily of women, which was the true expression of the self and a repository of "national culture": "The home was the principal site for expressing the spiritual quality of the national culture. . . . No matter what the changes in the external conditions of life for women, they must not lose their essential spiritual (that is, feminine) virtues."²⁵ This enabled the Bengali nationalist elite, emasculated by colonialism in the outer sphere, to exercise unquestioned authority within the inner sphere.

Feminist scholarship has challenged Chatterjee's formulation of women as asexual tokens of nationalist discourse and suggested that women were capable of sexual and political autonomy. For instance, the anthropologist Kamala Visweswaran argues that Chatterjee's theory is based on a colonial-centric view of women as domestic rather than political subjects.²⁶ Through a close study of women's participation in the nationalist movement in the Madras presidency she suggests that women were active subjects in the nationalist movement and were thus the subjects rather than the objects of nationalist discourse. Similarly, in her essay "Pygmalion Nation," feminist scholar Himani Bannerji claims that Chatterjee's theorization of women's role in the home and the world denies women agency by associating them with tradition rather than modernity, which is necessarily associated with men. She upholds modernity as a constructive formation within which women could exercise agency.²⁷

Although feminist scholarship has radically challenged this nationalist notion of woman as the asexual embodiment of "tradition," it has

done so by citing women who are sexually autonomous and free from the confining chains of tradition. Alternatively it has focused on women who participate in the political sphere, where the political is defined in terms of male homosociality and access to institutional structures of power. These instances locate women's agency in the modern, thus reiterating the colonial tradition/modernity dichotomy, in which tradition is necessarily repressive while secular modernity is liberating and allows women to become sexual beings and political actors.

In this book I argue for an alternative conception of feminist agency that disrupts the tradition/modernity dichotomy by claiming that the subject's agency is premised on her inhabitation of religiously inflected patriarchal norms, specifically of devotion and modesty, which have hitherto been dismissed as "tradition." Her enactment of these norms is both psychic and corporeal, such that the corporeality of her body radically reformulates the norm itself, and thus calls into question its assumptions and structure. In their engagement with power these acts are political, but they are not seen as such because of the narrow definition of the political that underlies contemporary theorizations of this period.

This formulation of agency builds on Saba Mahmood's analysis of women's agency in the Mosque movement in Cairo. Mahmood suggests that the subject's agency arises from the discursive traditions and norms that she inhabits: "Stated otherwise, one may argue that the set of capacities inhering in a subject—that is, the abilities that define her modes of agency—are not the residue of an undominated self that existed prior to the operations of power but are themselves the products of those operations."²⁸

Mahmood suggests that since the subject is made through power, her agency arises from her inhabitation of norms and not only her resistance to them. Drawing on Foucault, she argues that the subject is constituted not by subjectivity but by "subjectivation," which is a coming into being of the self through relations of power, the moral codes, norms, and precepts of her society.²⁹

I argue that the socially marginalized subject's inhabitation of the norm not only enables her agency but also reconfigures the injunctions of the norm itself; this is what I term the "politics of inhabitation." Norms are therefore not static or fixed but constantly shifting through the marginalized subject's inhabitation of them, such that sexuality is expressed through the material practices of religion and erotic power is wielded through religious norms of modesty. In other words, just as

the subject is made by power, her inhabitation of the norm also effects a change on power.

I suggest that the subject's social marginalization produces her as always already enslaved by power; however, power in this instance is not a monolithic formation but is multifaceted. In the social reform novel the woman is produced as weak, vulnerable, and in need of reform by the patriarchal discourses of her society. In this instance power refers to the larger ideological formations of her society, which refuse to recognize her as a subject but continue producing her as an object who must inhabit normative structures of piety in order to be redeemed. However, because these women occupy center stage in social reform novels, they are also narratively produced as subjects with interiority and desires. In other words, women are the objects of reform, and so they must inhabit normative structures, but because they are also the subjects of the novel, their inhabitation of norms is mediated through their psychic and corporeal being, and in this their bodily enactment of patriarchal norms (re)produces the norms as excess. Judith Butler, reading Simone de Beauvoir, eschews the Cartesian mind-body duality and contends instead that the body becomes the means of enacting gender norms internalized by the subject. Thus the body is both the locus of power and also the site for the performative enactment of power.

Hitherto, feminist theorizations of women's inhabitation of power through the material practices of the body have largely focused on women in the first world, since third world women are seen as always already oppressed by power. This becomes evident in the debates on sadomasochism that came to the fore in the "sex wars" of the 1980s and 1990s. Libertarian feminists argued that sadomasochism is a sexual practice like any other and should not be condemned as aberrant or incompatible with feminism because it is based on consent. On the other hand, the antipornography feminists argued that practices of sadomasochism could never be consensual for they are, after all, a reiteration of the patriarchal subjugation of women.³⁰ The unspoken subject of these debates was the first world woman whose agency was premised on liberal notions of consent. In contrast the third world woman's agency was co-opted by culture and tradition. As the antipornography feminist Diana Russell writes: "Women have been reared to be submissive, to anticipate and even want domination by men. But wanting or consenting to domination and humiliation does not make it nonoppressive. . . . Many young Brahmin women in the nineteenth century "voluntarily" jumped into the funeral pyres of their

dead husbands. What feminist would argue that these women were not oppressed. . . . Such consent does not mean that power has not been abused.”³¹ Russell’s casual use of the example of *sati* to declaim sadomasochism suggests that the experiences of third world women are lumped into the catch-all, universal “woman” who serves as the extreme example to demonstrate the impossibility of consent. At the same time, the third world woman is a victim at all times and places, her subjectivity co-opted by a regressive culture. Postcolonial feminist scholarship has adamantly contested this co-optation of third world women’s experiences.³²

In keeping with these postcolonial feminist critiques, I argue that the question of the third world woman’s agency troubles three assumptions made in the current feminist discussions of a materially grounded theorization of agency. First, these theories discount the possibility of the self’s coming into being through patriarchal modes of violence; second, they ignore the distinction between secular and religious modes of agency, as the example of *sati* above suggests; and third, although ostensibly concerned with the body, they obscure what happens to the body when it mediates power. In other words, they do not read the body’s mediation of power as the material site of a feminist practice.³³ As Butler writes, “Power happens to this body, but this body is also the occasion in which something unpredictable (and, hence, undialectical) happens to power, it is one site of its direction, production and transvaluation.”³⁴ In Butler’s theory the question of what happens to power when it is implicated by the material structure of the body remains unanswered.

I suggest that while the body is inflected by norms of piety formulated through the ideological strata of male power and desire, it is also embedded in other material inhabitations of subjecthood that originate from the body. In other words, since the subject’s psychic inhabitation of a norm is made material through the site of the body, the female subject’s bodily inhabitations of the norm are simultaneously shaped by and in excess of these patriarchal ideological formations. In this the subject’s inhabitation of normative structures has the potential to destabilize them from within.

The politics of inhabitation is a theory of subjectivity grounded in the materiality of the body. I am acutely aware of the dangers of such a theorization, since, as Sunder Rajan explains, “the female subject has been so facily created already through the hierarchically inferior attributes of binary oppositions such as mind/body, reason/sentience,

culture/nature.”³⁵ In this context I suggest a radical reenvisioning of these dichotomies, such that we read norms as shaping the body’s desires and in turn also being altered by these desires and becoming something other than what they are. If the widow’s inhabitation of piety is inflected by her sexual desires, then the very construct of piety as understood by male reformers undergoes an epistemological shift in order to accommodate the sexual. Similarly if being a veiled woman enables one to destabilize the spatial and moral constraints of veiling, then the veil is no longer the instrument of shielding women from the outside world and thereby guaranteeing their morality.

In the next two chapters I argue that in the social reform novels of Bankimchandra Chatterjee, Rabindranath Tagore, and Saratchandra Chatterjee the Bengali widow protagonist is produced as a subject through the norms of *Vaishanava* devotion (Hindu worship of Krishna, an incarnation of Lord Vishnu) and the discourse of *satī/satīta*, wifely devotion. This socially sanctioned performance of spirituality interacts with the corporeality of her body—its sexual desires—to produce a sexually inflected performance of piety. Her agency thus arises from her inhabitation of the norms of devotion as spiritual subjugation and from the materiality of her sexual desire for subjugation, which are, in turn, mediated by the discourse of Vaishanava *bhakti* (devotion). In this the paradigm of devotion is irrevocably altered: the asexual spirituality sanctioned for the *bhadralok* widow is transformed into sexual-spiritual devotion.

A similar dynamic is at play for the educated Muslim woman, whether the veiled wife or the unveiled courtesan. In chapter 4 I discuss Nazir Ahmad’s and Hali’s Urdu novels, where the injunction that veiled women should display modesty is radically challenged by the educated veiled woman for her inhabitation of the norms of modesty is inextricably bound with her desire for social affluence and political power, such that the norms of modesty become the means by which she gains this power. Thus her performative enactment of modesty no longer signifies it as such.

Conversely in chapter 5 I describe how the unveiled courtesan of M. H. Ruswa’s novels uses the ambiguity generated by the multiple significations of the veil to perform modesty through the register of sexual desire. In other words, her inhabitation of norms of veiling is mediated through her profession as poet and courtesan, such that she rearticulates Islamic norms of modesty through the very constructs that signify licentiousness. In both instances the norm of the modest educated

woman is challenged by the subject's inhabitation of its injunctions. Thus I theorize agency in terms of the subject's inhabitation of religiously inflected patriarchal discourses of subjugation, whether devotion or modesty, and the consequent reformulation of these norms through the subject's corporeal performance of them. In this way I open feminist modes of inquiry to include the sacred as a system of knowledge that can productively inform our understanding of agency.

This formulation of sexual-spiritual agency radically deconstructs nationalist accounts of the home as a space of asexual spirituality and the world as the space of the political. I argue that the social reform novels become political precisely because they are concerned with the home. The home is the site of the political, but it is not seen as such because it is populated by subaltern women whose modes of agency do not map onto hegemonic understandings of the political, which are grounded in male homosociality and secular liberalism. More concretely, as a representation of all that has been repressed by the reformist elite in their attempt to articulate an idealized woman, the presence of these women characters in the home gives rise to the unhomely. Freud defines the unhomely as that "which is familiar and old-established in the mind and which has become alienated from it only through the process of repression."³⁶ In the psychoanalytic context the unhomely is the subject's repression of his relation to the (m)other, which he has given up for individuation. Extrapolating from this, Homi Bhabha concludes that in the colonial context the subject experiences the unhomely as the repression of the self in history. Colonial categories of differentiation such as race dislodge her from her history and cause her to experience the "insider's outsideness."³⁷

In the social reform novel the patriarchal norms of Bengali and *ashraf* society decree asexual spirituality, thus repressing the erotic elements of Hinduism and Islam and denying the erotic desires of their protagonists. However, as I discussed earlier, the subaltern protagonists' inhabitation of the patriarchal norms of their society exceeds their formulation. That is, they inhabit the erotic elements of the norms repressed in their society and thus experience both a displacement from the self, the "insider's outsideness," and an unmooring from the world. These characters' experience of the unhomely undoes the binary of the home and the world, for the home, here represented by the subaltern woman's erotic and spiritual desires, is now part of the world. Conversely the world, defined by male homosociality, is torn asunder by the presence of the home.

The unhomely in these novels arises from the novelist's inability to reconcile the already present, devotional, erotic female subject with the fantasy of female (secular) liberation. In aesthetic terms the unhomely effects a narrative failure. This becomes evident in the conclusions of these novels, which are unable to contain their dissident protagonists within a reformist agenda. In other words, reformist men's narrative constructions of women's subjectivities were shot through with their own anxieties about reform and literary form.

In my concluding chapter I argue that these erotic-religious subjectivities reconfigure the relation between the religious and the political, the private and the public, and thus gesture to a South Asian modernity in which the erotic-religious is always already a part of the political. Ultimately the social reform novel is a literary form that grapples with narrativizing this modernity in its content and through stylistic and generic innovations. I thus map the emergence of a South Asian modernity in conjunction with a new formulation of the modern South Asian novel.

The South Asian novel, read through the postcolonial feminist praxis of this book, suggests a new formulation of comparative literature. The vernacular novel reveals the traces of subaltern consciousness that are enmeshed in an ideological battle between the reformist nationalist elite and their colonial masters. Reading these novels exposes the fractures in conceptions of the nation, and thus the local vernacular novel has bearing on how we understand the national. In this *Intimate Relations* introduces a new mode of understanding world literature. Here the literature of the Global South becomes a part of world literature because of its nuanced specificity, not, as Walkowitz claims, despite it. In other words, the specifics of the South Asian vernacular social reform novel defamiliarize the conventions of the European novel and compel a rethinking of world literature.

Desire, Death, and the Discourse of *Sati*

Bankimchandra Chatterjee's Krishnakanter Uil
and *Rabindranath Tagore's* Chokher Bali

In 1829 the British government passed a law banning the practice of *sati*, the self-immolation of widows at the funeral pyre of their husbands. This move was greatly debated by the indigenous elite, who broadly fell into two camps: traditionalists and social reformers. The traditionalists sought to persuade the British government that it was denying chaste Hindu women the right to express devotion to their husband by self-immolation, citing Hindu scripture to support their argument.¹ These thinkers lauded the widow who committed *sati* and considered the practice a sign of the superiority of Indian culture. Social reformers who opposed the practice of *sati* and were instrumental in having it banned, most notably Rajaramohun Roy, insisted that *sati* was a cruel, immoral act that subjected the widow to a terrifying death and that its continuance reflected poorly on Indian society. The reformists saw the widow as a victim of caste Hindu society who needed to be saved by the enlightened Hindu male.² The British were finally convinced by the reformists that the widow was a victim, but they considered her a victim of the barbaric brown man, who needed to be saved by the benevolent and just white man. And thus, as Lata Mani argues, the widow's benighted life came to be used as the justification for empire.³

In the legal debates of the time these differing ideological perspectives resulted in the creation of the "good" *sati*, a *sati* undertaken voluntarily by a woman, which would be condoned by the law, and the "bad" *sati*, in which the widow who was forced by her husband's

family to mount the funeral pyre would be rescued by a colonial official and then punished by the law. Thus the widow—whether she was being thrown on the funeral pyre or being saved from it—was co-opted by the nationalist, reformist, and imperialist projects for their own respective agendas. Each side used the widow to put forth its own visions of Indian culture, whether traditional and Hindu (traditionalist nationalists), barbaric or uncivilized (imperialist), or newly coming into a specifically Hindu modernity (reformist nationalists).

With the passing of the law banning *sati*, a large number of widows were left to the mercies of Bengali *bhadralok* (upper-caste, middle-class) patriarchal family structures. While the conjugal bond tied widows to their marital home, they lost all rights within it the moment their husband died and were forced into a life of penury and hardship. Due to the practice of marrying young girls to older men, a large number of widows were young women in their reproductive prime who lived in their deceased husband's home, often within an extended family, where they looked upon marital relationships but could not enter into any themselves. An increasingly large number of child widows spent their lives in utter misery.

In addition Bengali *bhadralok* society exacted a price for the widow's life: her complete submission to Hindu norms of ascetic widowhood. As feminist historian Tanika Sarkar explains, the widow's life was circumscribed by Hindu ritual injunctions, which insisted on the self-abnegation of her body and its desires, whether through ritual fasting or the shaving of hair, with the goal of attaining spiritual salvation.⁴ While nationalists glorified ascetic widowhood, the reality was quite different. Many widows were abandoned by their natal and marital homes and were banished to places of pilgrimage, such as Kashi, where they were expected to become Vaishnavis, or devotees of Krishna.⁵ However, the priests of the temple, upon whose goodwill these destitute women depended, often misused their power and compelled them to become prostitutes. Therefore the term Vaishnavi came to be synonymous with a "loose woman," and consequently the term for "prostitute" in Bengali and Hindustani was *baishya* or *vaishya*, a modification of Vaishnavi.⁶

The widow's sexuality posed a problem for reformers, who were horrified by the cruelty of ascetic widowhood but could not condone prostitution, which they considered a sign of the moral decay of Hindu society. In this scenario the widow's sexuality could only be contained by remarriage. Thus Ishwara Chandra Vidyasagar, a fiery

public speaker, social reformer, and intellectual, agitated to pass a law legalizing widow remarriage. Like *sati*, the topic of widow remarriage was greatly debated in *bhadralok* society by public intellectuals, who rehearsed many of the same arguments that had been made during the legal debate on *sati*.⁷ After much deliberation the Widow Remarriage Act was passed in 1856, legalizing widow remarriage.

Although both the 1829 Abolition of Sati Act and the Widow Remarriage Act of 1856 were attempts to reform the material and social conditions of the widow's life, the widow remained a victim of patriarchal society. Feminist scholars such as Lata Mani, Tanika Sarkar, Gayatri Spivak, and Ania Loomba have argued that the widow was never the subject of these narratives but always their object. In these feminist accounts the discourse of imperial legal structures and Brahmanical scriptural readings subsume the widow's voice. Thus the widow remains a highly contested figure in feminist scholarship on South Asia.

This chapter intervenes in this feminist scholarship by turning to the social reform novel of the period which provides an alternative site for contesting the dominant legal, historical, and political scholarship on widow remarriage.⁸ Fiction served as an important medium for the dissemination of ideas and as an agent for social change because although the Widow Remarriage Act gave widows the legal right to remarry, *bhadralok* society effectively nullified its efficacy by ostracizing those men who ventured to marry widows, and thus the social reform novel became a way to change public opinion.⁹ I focus on the social reform novels of two Bengali intellectual giants who greatly influenced the public discourse on widow remarriage through their fiction and essays.

Bankimchandra Chatterjee (1838–94) was an orthodox Brahman who served as a deputy collector and rose to deputy magistrate in the imperial government. He was a highly influential intellectual of his time and wrote thirteen novels and several essays, many of which were concerned with the question of widow remarriage. For instance, in his essay “The Confessions of a Young Bengal” (1872), Bankimchandra denounces the practice of widowhood, writing, “No enlightened human being can bring himself to believe in the moral excellency of perpetual widowhood. . . . The necessary minor premises being assumed, sound logic compels us to cry with one voice, Hinduism must be destroyed.”¹⁰ The rationalist framework of his argument compels Bankimchandra to arrive at the conclusion that Hindu caste society is responsible for the widow's state of “perpetual widowhood,” yet at

the end of the essay he is unable to advocate compellingly for widow remarriage. This problem is also evident in Bankimchandra's widow remarriage novels, *Bisha Briksha* (The Poison Tree, 1873) and *Krishnakanta's Will* (Krishnakanta's Will, 1878).

In *The Poison Tree* the widow is framed as the helpless victim of Hindu caste society who unwittingly falls in love with a married man. Because of her naïveté she falls prey to the forces of evil that surround her and eventually commits suicide. *Krishnakanta's Will* complicates the plot of *The Poison Tree*. Rohini, the *bhadralok* widow protagonist of this novel, is tempted by the prospect of remarriage to replace the will of a wealthy landowner, Krishnakanta, with a false one. When this offer of remarriage is withdrawn, Rohini is tormented by her misdeed; she realizes that she is in love with Govindlal, the inheritor of Krishnakanta's fortune, and decides to put the true will back in its place. When she is caught red-handed, Govindlal intervenes on her behalf and unwittingly falls in love with her. He eventually forsakes his wife, Bhramar, leaves his ancestral home, and begins a life of "sin" with Rohini. In what follows he discovers that Rohini is sexually promiscuous, murders her, absconds, and returns to his ancestral home years later to find Bhramar on her deathbed. Brimming with repentance, he forsakes his life as a householder and becomes an ascetic. As we see, both *The Poison Tree* and *Krishnakanta's Will* end with the death of the widow rather than her remarriage, peculiar conclusions to novels written ostensibly in support of the practice.

This conflict persists in the work of Bankimchandra's contemporary Rabindranath Tagore (1861–1941). Born into a literary Brahman family, Rabindranath published his first collection of poetry at sixteen. Although he is best known now for his Nobel Prize-winning collection of poems, *Gitanjali*, he was better known in his time as an advocate for social reform, specifically the amelioration of the social and material conditions of women's lives in the context of a burgeoning Indian modernity. His novels problematize extant social mores that condemn women to a life of misery; *Ghaire Baire* (*The Home and the World*, 1916) argues against the practice of secluding women through *purdah* or the veil, and *Chokher Bali* (*A Grain of Sand in the Eye*, 1902) argues for removing the stigma associated with widow remarriage.

In *A Grain of Sand in the Eye* the beautiful young widow Binodini is the "grain of sand" who is lodged in the "eye" of *bhadralok* society. Spurned by Mahendra, the spoiled son of a rich family, Binodini is married to a poor relative who dies soon after the wedding. The widowed

Binodini vows to seek revenge on Mahendra and resolves to win his affection with her beauty and her devotion. Unfortunately Mahendra is unworthy of her devotion, and Binodini leaves him for Mahendra's friend, Behari, her true love. Ironically when Behari suggests marrying her, Binodini refuses and leaves for Kashi, where she can pass her days in religious devotion. Unlike Rohini, whom Bankimchandra characterizes as given to moral depravity and unseemly pleasures, Rabindranath's Binodini is the ideal candidate for remarriage, yet at the end of the novel she removes herself from *bhadralok* society.

Although Bankimchandra's and Rabindranath's novels are ostensibly written to promote widow remarriage, they conclude with the social ostracism and death of the widow protagonist and ultimately contribute to hegemonic ideas of the impossibility of widow remarriage. In this context I argue for the agency of the literary; that is, I read traces of the widow's subjectivity and her agency in and through the hegemonic narrative construction of the widow in Bankimchandra's *Krishnakanta's Will* and Rabindranath's *A Grain of Sand in the Eye*.

In what follows I contend that the widow is a desiring subject who has not been read as such because she comes into being through the moral codes of her society, namely the cult of Vaishnava *bhakti* (worship of Lord Krishna), which includes the poetry of the fifteenth-century saint Mirabai, and the discourse of *sati*, all of which privilege subjugation. These moral codes intersect with the desires of her body to produce a form of agency that is encoded within a discourse of desire as sexual and spiritual subjugation, what I term a "politics of inhabitation." I then assert that these sexual-spiritual desires are expressed through *satita*, or wifely devotion, which becomes a means of radical agency for the widow but is necessarily circumscribed by the mores of her society. Following this I argue that the widow's spiritual and sexual devotion disrupts the nationalist construction of women as embodiments of asexual spirituality and the dichotomy of the home and the world, which is premised on this division. Finally I suggest that the widow's sexual-spiritual desires substantially revise our understanding of Bengali modernity at the turn of the century, which is premised on the avowed asexual spirituality of the widow.

SATITA, SATI, AND THE DESIRING WIDOW

Mid-nineteenth-century Bengali society saw the revival, reform, and resurgence of different strands of Hinduism. Prominent among these were Gaudiya Vaishnavism, a form of Hinduism founded by Chaitanya Mahaprabhu, which focused on intense loving devotion as a means of attaining Lord Krishna, and Brahmanic Hinduism, which was rooted in scriptural authority and focused on ritual practice as a means of expressing devotion.¹¹

In the late nineteenth century Gaudiya Vaishnavism was revived in Bengal as the exclusive worship of Lord Krishna, over and above other Hindu gods.¹² However, the intellectual elite had a fraught relationship to Gaudiya Vaishnavism. One faction, led by Kedarnath Dutta, saw Vaishnavism as a monotheistic devotional practice that could counter imperialist attacks on Hinduism, while the other, propounded by Sisir Kumar Ghosh, conceived of Gaudiya Vaishnavism less as a religious practice and more as a tool of social reform that could potentially level the differences that fractured Bengali society.¹³

While Bankimchandra and Rabindranath were deeply influenced by the revival of Gaudiya Vaishnavism as a means of social reform, they remained committed to a more orthodox, Brahmanical view of Hinduism in which men were the rightful worshippers of god, while women could only hope to reach god through their *satita*, their wifely devotion to their godlike husband. These conflicting ideological positions are evident in these authors' social reform novels, which fail to resolve the question of widow remarriage.

Reading these novels as literary rather than social or historical texts, I argue for a careful unraveling of the widow's agency in and through the dominant ideological positions (religious, patriarchal, and social) that structure the narrative, a reading of narrative voice as a means to recovering traces of subaltern consciousness. First, the widow protagonist's sexual desires are framed in terms of the discourse of *sati*, which is inflected by Brahmanical Hinduism and Gaudiya Vaishnavism understandings of the same, and in this her sexual desires are necessarily spiritual. Second, the widow's sexual-spiritual wifely devotion (derived from Gaudiya Vaishnavism) becomes a means of radical agency for her, even as the orthodox Brahmanical mores of her society circumscribe and limit its power. Thus *satita* and its corollary, widow remarriage, become a strategy for occupying an impossible subject position.

From the outset of *Krishnakanta's Will*, Rohini longs to become a wife through remarriage. This is signaled by her innocuous desire

for fine clothes and good food, which she is denied as a widow. The third-person omniscient narrator tells us, “She had become a widow very young, but had some habits improper to a widow; she put on black-bordered cloths instead of the prescribed white or grey, she wore bracelets on her wrists, and chewed betel, which gave her a forbidden pleasure and gave her lips a forbidden tinge of redness.”¹⁴ The third-person narrator mediates between Rohini’s desires and the mores of *bhadralok* society. He condemns Rohini’s desire for *bhadralok* signs of femininity, such as chewing betel and wearing bracelets and bordered saris. We can read Rohini’s longing for these sensual delights as indicative of her desire for conjugality, which, like these delights, is a “forbidden pleasure” condemned by her society.

While the narrator is sympathetic to Rohini at the beginning of the novel, as Rohini’s covert desires for remarriage become more explicit, he disavows any knowledge of her interiority: “What was passing through Rohini’s mind I cannot tell, but it might have been something like this: ‘For what fault was I destined to become a widow while still a child? Am I a greater sinner than other people that I should be deprived of all joys of this world? For what fault am I, still young and beautiful, condemned to pass my life like a piece of dry wood?’”¹⁵ Just as the bark of the sandalwood tree is used ritually in Hindu sacrifices, Rohini, whose name means “sandalwood,” is an integral part of Hindu caste society. However, here the bark of the tree is dry, deprived of its fragrance, and hence discarded from its ritual use, just as a woman is discarded from Hindu society once she has ceased to be a wife. Sandalwood is also used in the funeral pyres of upper-caste Hindus, and in this context the body as the bark of the sandalwood tree signifies Rohini’s resistance to being literally burned on her husband’s funeral pyre or figuratively burned on the pyre of an overly constraining Hindu society.

The image of the funeral pyre links Rohini’s desires to the scriptural discourse of *sati* and to its resignification in the poetry of Mirabai, a fifteenth-century itinerant saint. According to the Hindu *Dharma-shastras* scriptures, suicide is reprehensible except in the cases of ritual death and *sati*. Ritual death is when the self acquires *tatvajnana*, or knowledge of truth. *Sati* is sanctioned because suicide occurs at a site of pilgrimage; in an act of devotion the male student commits *sati* on his teacher’s funeral pyre, and in the case of the female *sati*, the proper place of pilgrimage is the husband’s funeral pyre. Spivak suggests that this act can be read as “a simulacrum of both truth-knowledge [*tatvajnana*] and piety of place.”¹⁶ The widow gains truth-knowledge of

the insubstantiality of her self as a subject and kills this self by figurative immolation at the site of pilgrimage. The practice of *sati* in the late nineteenth century obliterates the meaning of *sati* as a metonymic death of identity and privileges it as the last instance of a woman's piety to her husband.

In this context the devotional poetry of Mirabai, popularized in Bengal by Chaitanya Mahaprabhu, the leader of Gaudiya Vaishnavism, offers a radical resignification of *sati*. Mirabai repudiated her lawful husband, refused conjugal relations with him, and considered the god Krishna her husband instead. After the death of her husband she abandoned her palace and wandered the streets singing of her love for Krishna. The Gaudiya Vaishnavas saw Mirabai's ecstatic worship of Krishna in her poetry, suffused with sexual and spiritual longing, as paradigmatic of the true devotee's worship of god.¹⁷

As a widow Mirabai explicitly invokes the trope of the funeral pyre to signify the devotee's sexual and spiritual longing to merge with the divine:

*Agar chandan ki chita banaau, apne haath jaiia jaa
Jal bal bhai bhasm ki dheri, apne ang lagaa jaa
Mira kabe prabhu girdhar naagar,
jot me jot mila jaa*

If/when I become/make a pyre of sandalwood: light it
with your hand
And when it burns to a heap of ashes apply it to your body
Mira says: Lord Girdhar mingle my light with yours.¹⁸

The "pyre of sandalwood" refers to the funeral pyre of the *sati*. This poem could be read as a celebration of *sati*: the devotee's self-immolation enables her to become one with her lover. In her analysis of Mirabai's poetry, the feminist scholar Kumkum Sangari suggests that this devotional theme "wavers suspiciously between a suicidal love and the immolation of a deserted woman, between the fire of *virah* [separation] and a funeral fire, between a desired abstract union of two flames, and physical extinction as the path to such union."¹⁹

I read the imagery of *sati* in this poem not as the "abstract union of two flames" mandated by the scriptures but as a sensual union of the flesh. Here the ashes of the pyre merge into the lover's body and the devotee literally becomes one with the lover, absorbed in his skin. This

intensely sensual imagery sexualizes the trope of *sati*. Reading Rohini's lament in the context of Mirabai's poetry we see that the body as a "piece of dry wood" is a veiled reference to Rohini's sexual desires, which needs only a lover's touch to flare into an all-consuming passion.²⁰ In other words, Rohini's sexual desires are visible in the discourse of *sati* as an act of sexual-spiritual devotion, and this constitutes a politics of inhabitation.

Similarly in *A Grain of Sand in the Eye* Binodini's desires are explicitly encoded in the imagery of the funeral pyre: "He [Mahendra] had succeeded in lighting a fire within her and she couldn't figure out if it was love, hate or a mixture of both. She would smile bleakly to herself and say, 'Is there another woman with a fate like mine? I cannot even understand if I wish to slay or to be slain.' But either way, whether to be burned by or set fire to, Mahendra was indispensable to her."²¹ Here too the fire is a metaphor for Binodini's flaming sexual desires, her passion, and also *sati*. Although she is not literally burned on the pyre of her husband, as with Rohini, the overly constraining mores of *bhadralok* society punish her by not allowing her to express her sexual desires, which then threaten to consume her, figuratively speaking. Alternatively we can read Binodini's desire to be "slain" and to be "burned" as a desire for sexual subjugation.

Rohini's and Binodini's desires are spiritual, in that they consistently evoke the trope of the funeral pyre, and sexual, in that they are embedded in an economy of sadomasochism. These desires remain unacknowledged in feminist theories of sadomasochism, which, as discussed in chapter 1, are premised on the secular, first world subject and the occlusion of the third world subject as a subject-of-pleasure. The feminist thinker Ann Ferguson, theorizing sadomasochism as an empowering sexual practice, bases her argument on a secular ideal: "Even when fantasies involve images of dominance and submission, they may empower some women to enjoy sex more fully, a phenomenon that, by enhancing connections to one's body, develops self-affirmation."²² Here sadomasochism as empowerment is theorized in terms of bodily self-affirmation: the sexual subjugation of the self is desirable because it enables a positive relation to one's body. In contrast the widow protagonist desires sexual subjugation as part of a spiritual practice, that is, sadomasochism as devotion. This theorization of spiritual sadomasochism opens feminist modes of inquiry to include the sacred.

It also challenges contemporary scholarly accounts of the nineteenth-century Bengali widow. Dipesh Chakrabarty argues that the widow

of the domestic novel is characterized by *pabitrata* (purity) and *prem* (asexual love) rather than sexuality because the patriarchal extended family “obviated the emergence of a category such as ‘sexuality’ that could have mediated between the physical and psychological aspects of sexual attraction.”²³ In other words, the patriarchal family’s psychological and physical hold on the widow removed the difficult question of the widow’s sexuality. However, as this feminist reading of the widow’s desires suggests, the patriarchal family does not obviate the emergence of the widow’s sexuality but rather mediates its expression through norms of widowhood—in this case the discourse of *sati*. For in the absence of the act of *sati*, the tropes of *sati* are used to delineate both the widow’s sexual desires and her spiritual aspirations.

In the course of the novels the widow’s sexual-spiritual desires take the form of *satita*, or wifely devotion to a married man, and this too is rendered through the tropes of *sati*. The widow’s expression of *satita* becomes a means of radical agency for her as she transgresses the mores of her society by obtaining an unavailable man. At the same time, however, her embodiment of wifely devotion jars against the Brahmanical mores of her society, which necessarily circumscribe her agency.

In *Krishnakanta’s Will*, when Rohini is banished from the village she refuses to leave because of her wifely devotion to Govindlal, which she expresses through the tropes of *sati*: “This village is my heaven, it is the temple of Govindlal. It is my cremation ground, here I shall burn to death.”²⁴ The widow’s expression of *satita* through the tropes of *sati* complicates the Brahmanic definition of *satita*. From the orthodox Brahmanic perspective, the good wife is one whose “purity” and “chastity” (her *sat*) enables her to express devotion or *satita* (the noun form of the adjective) to her husband.²⁵ The wife’s ultimate act of *satita* is her self-immolation on her husband’s funeral pyre, that is, *sati*. From the orthodox Brahmanic perspective, the widow’s very existence suggests that she has failed in her *satita* to her husband.

The meaning of *satita* is quite different in Gaudiya Vaishnavism. In Mirabai’s poetry *satita* to a being other than one’s deceased husband can be read as an agentive practice:

*Sati na hosya Girdhar gaasya mahaara man mohe
ghannami
Jeth babuko naato na raanaji, hu sevak the swaami
Girdhar kant Girdhar dhani mahaare, maat pita boi bhai
Thai thaare main mahaare Ranaji, yun kabe Mirabai*

Why should I burn myself on a pyre with the body of
 the *rana* and be *sati*?²⁶
 Is not Girdhar my eternal consort?
 I recognize no relationship of body, or by marriage to human
 beings
 I know only Girdhar. He is my father, mother, husband, kin,
 none besides.
 I have nothing to do with the ruler of the state
 So says Mirabai.²⁷

This complicates the Brahmanic discourse of *sati* as a good wife for here the devotee refuses her connection to men. “I recognize no relationship of body,” she says, including her sexual relationship with her husband, the *rana* (king), forsaking these for Lord Girdhar (Krishna), her true husband. The devotee acquires *tatvajnana* (knowledge of the self) so that she might annihilate her earthly self and become one with her Lord.

It is this notion of *satita* that animates Rohini’s desire to commit *sati* for Govindlal rather than her deceased husband. While the wife who commits *sati* is immediately granted heaven, Rohini as a widow aspires to reach heaven and merge with her lord (Govindlal) through this figurative death. And in the novel her devotion bears fruit, as Govindlal abandons his wife to live with her. Yet because the widow protagonist’s embodiment of *satita* unfolds within an orthodox Brahmanic society that condemns widow remarriage, her *satita* inevitably results in her ruin. Thus Rohini’s devotion to Govindlal does not end in promised transcendence but in adultery and murder.

In *A Grain of Sand in the Eye* the widow protagonist is able to gain both an unavailable married man and a single available man through her wifely devotion. The novel cannot entirely condone its widow protagonist’s *satita*; this becomes evident at the end, when Binodini rejects Behari’s marriage proposal but still adorns his bed with jasmine flowers, in anticipation of a wedding night that is never to be. She tells him, “You had once slept in this room—I have dedicated it to your memory; those flowers were used to worship your thoughts and they lie there now, withered and lifeless.”²⁸ This curious moment in the text suggests a nuanced complexity to Binodini’s paradigm of devotion. In the context of wifely devotion we can read the adorned bed as a symbol for the wedding night, when the marriage is to be consummated. However, because Binodini is a widow, her wifely devotion, replete with

unrealized sexual desires, cannot come to fruition, and thus the flowers she offers to worship Behari wither before his arrival.

A secular feminist reading of the novel would insist that Binodini's rejection of Behari simply perpetuates the norms of *bhadralok* society, which do not allow the widow to remarry. I argue that when Binodini rejects Behari's proposal she exchanges *satita* as wifely devotion for *satita* as spiritual devotion and uses the tropes of the former to resignify the latter. In this reading the withering of the flowers could suggest the renunciation of wifely devotion; that is, Binodini's flowers worship the memory of what Behari has meant to her in the past, and therefore the freshness of the flowers fades, just as Behari's significance in Binodini's life fades. Like Mirabai, Binodini rejects an earthly, inevitably flawed husband in favor of a divine husband, who is flawless; that is, she rejects wifely devotion for devotion to the divine. The image of the marriage bed to describe Binodini's devotion is in keeping with the imagery deployed in Mirabai's poetry to suggest her union with Krishna; it is at once spiritual and sexual.²⁹ Thus it is possible to interpret Binodini's rejection of Behari as an act of devotion to Lord Krishna.

This reading of the Bengali social reform novel suggests that the widow, although a victim in the dominant patriarchal ideological construction of widowhood, can still be read as an agentive subject—but her desires are visible only when read through the heterodox religious practices of her society, namely Gaudiya Vaishnavism, which privileges a form of agency premised on the sexual and spiritual subjugation of the devotee. What are the implications of the widow's resignification of normative devotional practices through her corporeal inhabitation of them? The widow's politics of inhabitation disrupts the patriarchal order of society by ousting the patriarch from the *bhadralok* home, destroying the *bhadralok* home and consequently rupturing the dichotomy of the home and the world.

THE HOME AND THE WORLD

In *Krishnakanta's Will* and *A Grain of Sand in the Eye* the widow's *satita* is a contradiction in terms; it cannot exist because the object of her devotion has passed away, yet it exists. The appearance of the widow's *satita* in the social reform novel is the return of a sexual-spiritual form of devotion that is repressed by *bhadralok* society, the unhomey.

The presence of the unhomely results in the dissolution of the patriarchal order—a break in patrilineal norms of inheritance, the destruction of the *bhadralok* home, and the collapse of *bhadralok* society.

In *Krishnakanta's Will* the widow's desire for remarriage destabilizes patrilineal norms of inheritance and disrupts the status of the patriarch in the *bhadralok* home. Early on in the novel Krishnakanta disowns his son Haralal for his misdeeds. Haralal promises Rohini marriage if she replaces Krishnakanta's will with a fake will in which Haralal inherits Krishnakanta's estate. When Haralal later refuses to marry her, Rohini decides to undo her misdeed by returning the original will. Krishnakanta catches Rohini in the act of replacing the will and throws her out of the house, but Govindlal defends her and in the process falls in love with her. Having first disinherited his son, Krishnakanta now disowns Govindlal on account of his illegitimate desire for Rohini and bequeaths his property to Govindlal's wife, Bhramar, instead. Ousted as patriarch, Govindlal has no choice but to leave his ancestral home. The narrator remarks, "Meanwhile, Govindlal walked slowly to the outer part of the house. We must be truthful, and say that there were tears in his eyes. He remembered how happy Bhramar had made him with her simple, sincere, childlike love, how it had inspired her every word and flowed incessantly like a stream. He knew that he would never get back what he was now giving up. But he also said to himself that he could not undo what he had done." Govindlal's tears arise in the "outer part of the house," the liminal space where repentance is still possible. However, he cannot retract his decision to leave his ancestral home because his affair with Rohini has irrevocably marked him: "he could not undo what he had done." Bhramar's "simple, sincere, childlike love," the ideal, asexual love of the wife, prompts her to sign over the property to Govindlal and restore the rightful patriarchal order.³⁰ It is too late, however, for Rohini's sexual desires have permeated the *bhadralok* home, which is no longer the space of asexual spirituality; hence after Govindlal is forced out it falls into disrepair and Bhramar becomes insane.

While the ancestral home is founded on the authority of the patriarch, the home that Govindlal builds for Rohini is a den of vice (adultery) and death (murder) because it is founded on the illegitimate desires of the widow. This second home is an externalization of the widow's interiority. It is not chaste and asexual but decadent and sensual. In her analysis of late nineteenth-century discourse on the home, Inderpal Grewal argues that the nationalist home was an inversion of the

English notion of the harem: “For the Indians, what colonial discourse termed the harem, a space of opacity, became the *home*, a reconstituted Victorian space that was transparent in its clear manifestation of moral virtues as symbolized by Indian middle-class women.”³¹ The “opaque” Hindu woman of colonial discourse became the “spiritual” Hindu woman of nationalist discourse, and the harem was thereby turned into the home. Similarly I suggest that through another set of internal inversions in *Krishnakanta’s Will*, the second home turns into the “harem” of *bhadralok* society.

The omniscient narrator guides the reader through the second home, pausing to consider its relative merits and demerits: “As we enter a large room on the first floor, we notice that some of the pictures there are beautiful, but some others are so offensive as to be indescribable. We see a bearded Moslem music teacher who is tuning a *tambura* by plucking its strings and screwing its pegs, while a young woman is tapping a *tabla*, her golden bracelets tinkling with the movement of her hand.”³² Just as beautiful pictures coexist with the “offensive” and “indescribable” pictures, the woman of the house is beautiful but sinful because she has replaced devotion with sensuality and housekeeping with studying music, which in late nineteenth-century India was associated primarily with the Muslim courtesan, who was employed by the Mughal Court as a professional entertainer.³³ In the context of the discourse of upper-caste Brahmanical Hinduism that permeates Bankimchandra’s novel, the Muslim music teacher is a symbol of the idle decadence of a decaying Mughal culture, the house a prototype of a nineteenth-century brothel, and the widow a prostitute.³⁴ As a home of Muslim values, this second home is “unhoused” from Hindu society. A similar fate awaits the widow turned prostitute who accepts another man’s offer to become his mistress and is murdered by her protector, Govindlal. Unlike *The Poison Tree*, in which the unfortunate widow commits suicide, the protagonist of *Krishnakanta’s Will* meets a bloodier end because her desires are explicitly sexual and therefore cannot be contained by the text. The second home enters the corruption and moral degradation of the world, and thus the widow’s desires destroy the dichotomy of home and world.

A similar dynamic informs the plot of *A Grain of Sand in the Eye*. In the course of the novel Binodini succeeds in drawing Mahendra closer to her, and, like Govindlal, Mahendra forsakes the *bhadralok* home for the widow. When the couple set up a second home it too represents the widow’s interiority. While Rohini’s second home reflects its mistress’s

infatuation with luxury, Binodini's second home reflects her estrangement from patriarchal norms of wifely devotion: "Binodini, who loved to do the housework to perfection, felt stifled in the walled confines of this house where she had nothing to do—all her energies turned inwards and lacerated her instead. . . . Binodini felt relentless hatred and disgust for Mahendra, the senseless fool who had closed out all her escape routes and contracted her life thus."³⁵ Binodini experiences *satita* as a prison; that is, she is trapped by her own desire to express wifely devotion. She had imagined that being the mistress of a home would yield the pleasures of *satita*, but she realizes that her wifely devotion has acquired monstrous hues because it has incited Mahendra's naked lust rather than his promised protection as patriarch. The second home becomes the catalyst for Binodini's spiritual awakening as she self-consciously redirects her *satita* to Behari and ultimately to god.

Although the narrative of *A Grain of Sand in the Eye* offers the possibility of a third home in which the widow might fulfill her sexual-spiritual desires through remarriage and become the legitimate mistress of a household, this possibility is never realized. Rabindranath regretted the end of his novel after it was published, for widow remarriage in *A Grain of Sand in the Eye* could have set a precedent for social reform within *bhadralok* society. However, he was prevented from reaching this radical conclusion by his own view of literature as speaking "of the world around it, because it survives more by the force of its surroundings than by its own strength."³⁶ In other words, the social reform novel must mediate between its protagonist's desires and the extant mores of *bhadralok* society. Thus, as discussed earlier, Binodini uses the tropes of Gaudiya Vaishnava devotion to resignify wifely devotion as devotion to god. Tellingly her new conception of *satita* is located outside the home. At the end of the novel she leaves the *bhadralok* home for an ashram (religious retreat), a spiritual sanctum outside *bhadralok* society and beyond its purview.

In both novels the widow's *satita* destroys the nationalist construction of the asexual, spiritual *bhadralok* home and the immoral, corrupt world. This is because it brings the moral corruption of the world, namely female sexual desire, into the spiritual home and taints it. The widow and the second home are sites of the unhomely, of all that has been repressed by the *bhadralok* society, and therefore must be destroyed. The text's violent elimination of the widow mirrors the violent modes (*sati*, social ostracism) with which *bhadralok* society deals with the widow. This suggests that the domestic novel can no more

accommodate the figure of the *satita*-desiring widow than *bhadralok* society can accommodate the widow.

Further, in both novels the widow's *satita* disrupts the patriarchal order. In *Krishnakanta's Will*, Govindlal becomes a criminal and finally an ascetic who is ejected from *bhadralok* society because he has transgressed its norms. Similarly in *A Grain of Sand in the Eye*, although a chastened Mahendra returns to his ancestral home and his wife, his status within the home has been irrevocably damaged. The patriarch's dislodgement from society results in the dissolution of the social order, as we see in the bloody ending of *Krishnakanta's Will* and the inverted power relations of *A Grain of Sand in the Eye*. The conclusions of both novels clearly reveal that *bhadralok* society's inability to accommodate the sexual-spiritual desires of the widow leads to its own destruction.

RETHINKING BENGALI MODERNITY

The literary scholar Shivarama Padikkal argues that the early Indian novel took on the task of reviving a glorious past to counter colonial attacks on Indian culture or, alternatively, of reforming Indian society in response to colonial critiques. In both cases novelists attempted to "criticize colonial representations based on a Western rationalist world-view" that did not map onto the social conditions of their society.³⁷ In the social reform novels the widow protagonists are sympathetic characters, yet the novels fail to achieve their agenda of widow remarriage. Instead they conclude with the widow's death or social ostracism. The tragic conclusions suggest that widow remarriage could not simply be gained through the rational argumentation underlying the Widow Remarriage Act; it had to be negotiated with the extant mores of *bhadralok* society.

The novels' negotiation between two disparate ideological positions on widow remarriage produces a new understanding of Bengali modernity at the turn of the century. Dipesh Chakrabarty explains that historical conceptions of Bengali modernity at the end of the nineteenth century are modeled on the fundamental themes of European modernity, "for instance, the idea that the modern subject is propertied . . . that the subject was an autonomous agent . . . or that suffering could be documented from the position of the citizen."³⁸ In Chakrabarty's theory Bengali modernity is premised on the separation of church and

state, which in the late nineteenth century maps onto the dichotomy of the spiritual home and the political world. The social reform novel muddies the boundaries between the home and the world, for the spirituality of the home enters the world, while sexuality, seen as the province of the corrupt foreign world, becomes part of the home. Thus the widow remarriage novel indicates a uniquely Bengali modernity, one in which the sexual is not separate from the spiritual.

The novels experiment with articulating this modernity through innovations in narrative form and therefore constitute a new genre: the modernesque novel. I suggest that the articulation of a new Bengali modern subjectivity requires an experimentation with multilayered narrative voices, which allow for a proliferation of readings. In *Krishnakanta's Will* the tensions inherent in the widow's expression of *satita* are articulated in the plot of the novel, which sympathizes with the widow but ultimately punishes her. These tensions are also evident in the narrative voice, which fluctuates between a third-person moralizing narrator and a first-person narrative that renders Rohini's interiority with compassion and sympathy.

Similarly in *A Grain of Sand in the Eye*, Rabindranath deploys several narrative devices to explicate the complex subjectivity of his protagonist. At one point Binodini dictates a letter to Mahendra's wife, Asha. Asha is uneducated and trusts her more educated friend, and so she meekly transcribes Binodini's letter as her own: "You haven't answered my letter. . . . Whether you grant her wish or not, whether you turn your eyes to her or not, whether you come to know of her or not, this devotee has no option but to offer you her heart. Hence I write these lines today—O my stone-hearted god, stay steadfast on your course."³⁹ The artifice of the letter allows for multiple readings of the first-person narrative voice: as wifely devotion, as forbidden love, as a lover's reproach. It also suggests that at this point in the novel Binodini's *satita* is a performance, a self-conscious manipulation of patriarchal norms calculated to provoke a passionate declaration of love. Thus the modernesque novel becomes the site for new understandings of the widow as the subject of reform as well as for innovations in narrative form.

I have suggested that the widow protagonist of the Bengali domestic novel comes into being as a subject through the discourses of *sati* and *satita* rather than against them. Feminist scholarship on the late nineteenth-century widow has missed this articulation of the widow's subjectivity because it reads her as a victim of traditionalist nationalist,

reformist nationalist, and imperialist ideology. My reading expands our understanding of the late nineteenth-century Bengali widow, seeing her as an agentive subject whose sexual-spiritual desires disrupt the discourse of ascetic widowhood and the binary of the home and the world. Further, I reconfigure our understanding of the late nineteenth-century South Asian novel by indicating the symbiotic relationship between an evolving Bengali modernity and the Bengali modernesque novel.

Erotic Worship and the Discourse of Rights

Spiritual Feminism in Saratchandra Chatterjee's Fiction

*Ekta sadharan meye golp likho tumi
Bada dukhodar . . .
Ami atyant sadharan meye . . .
Paye padi tomar
Ekeye golp likho Sarat babu
Nityanto sadharon meye golp. ("Sadharan Meye")*

Please write a story about an ordinary girl
A very tragic story . . .
I'm a very ordinary girl . . .
I beg you
Please write a story Sarat babu
The story of this very ordinary girl.¹

In the poem "An Ordinary Woman" (1932) by Tagore, Malati, the speaker of the poem, begs Saratchandra Chatterjee (1876–1938), the renowned novelist and champion of women's rights, to write the tragic story of her life. In the rest of the poem Malati explains to Saratchandra that Naresh, her lover, promised to marry her after he returned from England, but upon returning he abandoned her. She tells Saratchandra that although her story is a tragic one, when he writes it as a novel he should make her achieve great success in her career and life and make Naresh suffer for mistreating her. For the

speaker of the poem, only Sarat babu's pen can sensitively render the misfortune of her life.

Saratchandra's fame as a novelist was won largely through his sensitive portrayal of downtrodden women, so much so that Rabindranath, a literary giant in his own right, writes a poem wherein the speaker begs Sarat babu (rather than Robi babu—or Rabindranath himself) to narrate the miseries of her life.

In this chapter I look at Saratchandra's widow remarriage novel in the period immediately after the Partition of Bengal (1905). The Partition of Bengal by Lord Curzon along communal lines provided fresh impetus to the Bengali nationalist movement, as Hindus and Muslims united to protest this division and invoked a cultural and linguistic identity that transcended religious divides. In this political scenario the women's question was sidelined in favor of the nationalist agenda as writers wrote paeans to a united Bengali nation and patriotic tracts inciting the people of Bengal to boycott foreign goods and embrace local products (*Swadeshi*) in an effort to economically undermine the British Empire.

While the social reform novel of the late nineteenth century had been used as a political tool to explicate the gains and pitfalls of widow remarriage, the Bengali novel after Partition veered toward nationalist politics. In the case of Rabindranath the women's question was enfolded in the nationalist question, as we see in *Ghaire Baire* (The Home and the World, 1916), an explicitly political novel that interrogates the nationalist construction of woman as nation.²

In this literary and political climate Saratchandra's social reform fiction, which resurrected the subject of widow remarriage and steered clear of nationalist politics, was met with much hostility from the *bhadralok* male intellectual elite, even though his women readers eagerly awaited the next installment of his novels. His popularity among his female readership was largely due to his radical views on the causes of women's subjugation in Bengali *bhadralok* society.

Unlike his literary precursors Bankimchandra and Rabindranath, Saratchandra had little formal education and pursued a largely undistinguished career as a clerk for an English company before the publication of his first novel, *Baradidi* (Elder Sister, 1907), brought him to public attention. His views were not the product of schooling but the result of his own experiences with women who had been shunned by *bhadralok* society—namely widows, courtesans, and lower-class women. Whether for this or some other reason, he was more scathing

in his critique of *bhadralok* society and more radical in his conceptualization of women's agency than any other Bengali writer of his time.³

Since the women's question was brought to the fore by the imperial contestation for power, Saratchandra's stance was greatly mediated by contemporaneous colonial debates. He was particularly influenced by John Stuart Mill, whose father's *History of British India* (1817) had set the tone for the debate on the women's question several generations earlier.⁴ He concurred with J. S. Mill that women's oppression stemmed from the patriarchal structures of society, which compelled them to a life of subservience.⁵ In the context of *bhadralok* society, the upper-caste middle- and upper-class widow was the most unfortunate of these women for she not only had to bear the burden of her widowhood, which cast her outside the pale of the *bhadralok* family, but her caste status also tethered her to the family, leaving her in a liminal space without escape. Several of Saratchandra's protagonists are therefore upper-caste widows who are desperately attempting to escape their fate.

Through a close reading of Saratchandra's oeuvre, his widow remarriage novels as well as his essays concerned with the status of women, I argue that Hinduism as a devotional practice—rather than a socially imposed doctrine—becomes a space of radical agency for the widow and opens up the possibilities for alternative moralities outside Hindu caste society. As discussed in chapter 2, the *bhadralok* elite of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century had a fraught relationship with Gaudiya Vaishnavism, viewing it alternately as Hindu revivalism or nationalism. In Saratchandra's fiction we see a third conception of Gaudiya Vaishnavism—as a rich literary tradition reflected in the formal innovations that pervade his fiction and as a means of social reform visible in the heterodox Hinduism that informs his protagonists' articulation of agency.

Like Rabindranath's and Bankimchandra's novels, the widow protagonists' formulation of agency through tropes of shamelessness drawn from Mirabai's poetry reconfigures the discourse of caste and class that permeates constructs of proper conjugality in Saratchandra's *Charitraheen* (Characterless, 1913). In *Shesh Prashna* (The Final Question, 1931) the widow's agency, her desire for love and sex, is articulated through *madhur rasa*, or erotic love, which exceeds and therefore contests the institutional structures of marriage. And in *Srikanta* (published serially from 1913 to 1933), specifically the section titled "Forbidden Fruit" (1927), the widow's erotic worship enables

her to construct an alternative ontology of emancipation that flouts her spatial and moral confinement. I think through the implications of these erotic and spiritual articulations of agency for the traditionalist nationalist, reformist nationalist, and imperialist projects as articulated in the early twentieth century.

CASTE, CLASS, AND NATION

Saratchandra's *Characterless* is the most self-conscious reworking of the genre of the Bengali widow remarriage novel. In this novel Saratchandra retains the narrative tropes of the beautiful widow, the asexual wife, and the second home that characterize the widow remarriage novel but radically reworks them to reflect his own intellectual position on the widow's relation to the social. Sabitri, like Binodini (the protagonist of *A Grain of Sand in the Eye*), is a young, beautiful, upper-caste widow who is thrown out of her conjugal home by her in-laws and driven to work as a maidservant in a youth hostel, where she falls in love with her master, Satish, an upper-caste, middle-class, *bhadralok* male.

The upper-caste widow was a peculiar problem for *bhadralok* society because, while she continued to be ruled by the doctrines of widowhood particular to upper-caste women, she could no longer wield the privileges of her caste status.⁶ Unlike a lower-caste widow, who was not bound by caste injunctions of widowhood and who could work and earn her keep,⁷ the upper-caste widow could not work and was at the mercy of her conjugal family, who usurped her inheritance, impoverished her, and subjected her to a life of penury. In this context Sabitri's deviance from the *bhadralok* norms governing her caste position led to outrage as Saratchandra's *bhadralok* audience could not stomach the thought of an upper-caste, lower-class widow earning her own keep, much less falling in love with an upper-class man.

In response to the furor created over this plot device, Saratchandra writes to Pramathanath, his friend and editor:

Yesterday Phoni [editor of the literary magazine *Jamuna*] sent me a telegram saying *Charitraheen* is creating "alarming sensations" [in English]. I ask what is there in it? One upper middle class girl for whatever reason is working as a maidservant in a house (character unquestionable—that's not it) and one upper class man falls in love with her—but he is not getting influenced

by anyone to do so. But on the other hand, Robi babu's [Rabindranath's] *Choker Bali* shows a widow from an upper class good family, in her own house, being destroyed by her own relatives and close associates and nobody said anything! (Do you remember Rohini in *Krishnakanta's Will?*)⁸

Situating his work among novels of the same genre, Saratchandra points out the similarities: the protagonists of all three novels are upper-caste widows and hence the "proper" subjects of reformist and traditionalist discourse. The significant difference is of course that both Binodini and Rohini remain within their class position ("upper-class good family") even when they flout the injunctions of *bhadralok* society in other ways.

Kundanandini of Bankimchandra's *The Poison Tree* is the only other widow protagonist of this genre who lives in penury. On the death of her husband she is bereft of the traditional family structure that supports women and is thrown out of her class. However, she is rescued by Nagendra, who rehabilitates her financially and socially by incorporating her into his extended family. Unlike Kundanandini, Sabitri does not depend financially on the patriarchal extended family.⁹ Since Saratchandra was an advocate of women's rights in the tradition of Mill and Spencer, it is possible that he could have transformed Sabitri's narrative into one of liberal feminist emancipation: the woman finds equality, monetary freedom, and spatial mobility through her work.

Yet I suggest this narrative is unavailable to Sabitri because, as a wage-earning woman, she deviates from the expectations of her caste and class and is displaced from *bhadralok* norms of respectability. Consequently she must rehabilitate herself by situating herself within a paradigm of devotion, which allows her to celebrate rather than reject the correlation between class and immorality.¹⁰

From the very outset of the novel, Sabitri devotes herself to Satish's welfare. She takes on all the duties of a wife, from preparing and serving Satish's meals to preventing him from keeping company with wayward men. We discover that her devotion to Satish and her concern for his welfare exceed her desire for his love, so much so that when Satish proclaims he is in love with her, she rejects him with great vehemence: "No, you are not,' Sabitri's lips quivered and her eyes flashed. 'A *man without character, that's what you are!* Aren't you ashamed to speak of love when you love a woman like me? Go away. . . . Don't insult me in my room.' Satish could not withstand this insult. He became really

heartless now. ‘I’m a man without character? Be it so, Sabitri, but I see that your parents christened *you* with the right name!’”¹¹

Satish’s reaction is based on the *bhadralok* correlation between class and immorality, and in fact reinforces it—he transforms Sabitri from a lower-class woman into a prostitute by implying that she is unworthy of her name, a name synonymous with devotion and chastity. Sabitri reiterates her position as a lower-class woman, a performative act intended to reaffirm Satish’s judgment of her as an immoral woman and prostitute. Sabitri’s attempt to blacken her own character and push Satish away is because *bhadralok* society would disapprove of their relationship. Kamala Visweswaran, following Spivak, writes that speech has become concomitant with agency and silence with subalternity.¹² In this instance, however, Sabitri’s words destabilize the correlation between speech and subalternity because her agency is aimed at producing herself as a subaltern subject.

In describing herself as a fallen woman Sabitri situates herself within a larger *bhadralok* discourse of widow devotees who were considered akin to prostitutes; as discussed in chapter 2, upper-caste widows who, following Mirabai’s example, left home and hearth to join ashrams where they pursued their devotion for Krishna were considered prostitutes because these ashrams often functioned as brothels. Just as Mirabai was eventually ejected from high-caste Rajput society, which could not accommodate the widow’s “shameless” love for Krishna, Sabitri similarly ostracizes herself from *bhadralok* society by calling attention to her “shamelessness.” Mirabai’s *bhajan* (devotional songs) celebrate her shamelessness: “Laaj saram kul ki marjaada, sir se door kari [She brushes away considerations of shame, of modesty and of the dignity of her family (in pursuit of Krishna)],”¹³ and in much the same way Sabitri celebrates her shamelessness so that she can dedicate herself to her beloved, even if this means that she must insult Satish by calling him “characterless.” In doing so she rescues him from a social death, much as her mythical counterpart rescues her husband from the god of death. Her love for him exceeds her desire to be with him, so much so that she hopes that he will marry a respectable woman someday.

This is borne out by the end of the novel, when Sabitri, like Binodini of *A Grain of Sand in the Eye*, refuses Satish’s offer of marriage and chooses to nurse his sick brother Upendra instead, an act of devotion that again is entirely selfless.¹⁴ This suggests that contrary to the assumption of the *bhadralok* reading public, Sabitri does not seek remarriage or reentry in *bhadralok* society through conjugality but rather aspires

to devotion. Although this ontology of devotion involves a subjugation and subordination of the subject, it enables Sabitri to recast herself as a moral subject. The novel makes evident that although Sabitri is lower class and open to temptations of all sorts, she is capable not only of resisting them but also of an intense devotion that no ordinary woman can match.

While Sabitri successfully renegotiates her relationship to *bhadralok* society through her devotion, the same is not true for Kiron, the other widow protagonist of this novel. This is because, while circumstances have ejected Sabitri from her class, Kiron's love for a married man results in her expulsion from her caste, from which there is no redemption. In the *bhadralok* imaginary, caste is an immutable category, especially for women, whose status in society is closely linked to their performance of caste-appropriate behaviors.¹⁵ Once women have been ejected from their caste, they cannot be reentered within the structure of *bhadralok* society without destroying it.

On the death of her husband, Kiron offers herself to Upendra, her husband's childhood friend and companion: "I repeat Thakurpo [brother-in-law], that I know the outcome of this shameless impudent offer of mine at your feet. . . . It is only because they can't find God that they seek Him by offering everything they possess. That's why I feel that so far as I am concerned I would never have been so much in love with you if you had not been so unobtainable."¹⁶ By linking the widow's devotion to a married man with the devotee's devotion to god, she suggests that the former is just as difficult and impossible to realize as the latter. Alternatively she could also be suggesting that the widow's desire for a married man is just as legitimate as the devotee's desire for god. This is figured in the novel through the explicit parallel drawn between Kiron and Surbala, Upendra's wife.¹⁷ Both women are pious and devoted, yet Kiron's devotion is unrecognized by society. She frames her desire for Upendra as "shameless" and "impudent" because that is how it will be construed by *bhadralok* society, but it is clear that she glories in her "shamelessness" just as Sabitri and Mirabai do, especially since her love for Upendra could mean a similar ejection from *bhadralok* society and consequently from her caste.¹⁸

This eventuality does come to pass because Upendra and, by extension, *bhadralok* society fail to recognize her love as legitimate. Consequently Kiron decides to punish Upendra by eloping with Divakar, Upendra's nephew and protégé, to Arakan, Burma; as a result she loses her place in *bhadralok* society and also her caste by crossing the seas.

Once she loses caste, her narrative trajectory spins out of control and she is subjected to the evils of the world. She sets up another home with Divakar, but predictably enough this second home is a cruel caricature of the *bhadralok* home: it is a mere hovel infected with all the vices of the outside world—prostitution, poverty, greed.

Unlike the other widow remarriage novels, in which the second home is removed from *bhadralok* society but is still in Bengal, in this novel the second home is in Arakan and therefore far removed from Bengal. This spatial relocation has disparate repercussions for Kiron's and Divakar's narrative trajectories: while Divakar can be restored to caste through a "purification" ceremony, no such option awaits Kiron.¹⁹ The intersection of her loss of caste with her gender produces her as a subaltern subject who cannot be redeemed by *bhadralok* society. In fact the novel ends with Kiron's return to Bengal, where she discovers that Upendra is ill and dying and becomes crazed with grief.

This conclusion suggests that *bhadralok* society's failure to recognize the widow's devotion because it falls outside of the paradigms of conjugality leads to that society's own destruction. At the end of the novel the patriarchs have been dislodged from their place: Satish cannot marry Sabitri, Divakar is unmoored from *bhadralok* society, and Upendra is dead. The narrative hints that had Upendra allowed Kiron to express her devotion to him, she could have nursed him back to health. In this instance the widow fails to successfully negotiate the social because once she has been removed from her caste she is no longer seen as a subject of this society, an ostracism symbolized in the novel by her madness and dispossession.

Here we see an important distinction between caste and class as they intersect with gender. While Sabitri can disrupt and ultimately transcend the correlation between her lower class and her supposed immorality, Kiron's ejection from caste is far more decisive as she is unable to renegotiate her place in the social order. Although the novel concludes without redeeming Kiron, it is very critical of *bhadralok* society's refusal to recognize "unchaste" women as subjects in their own right with desires for devotion, love, and sex.²⁰ As the conclusion of the novel suggests, society's categorization of women as "fallen" because of their class status, caste position, or sexual desires was disastrous not only for the women but also for the functioning of *bhadralok* society.²¹

MARRIAGE AND MADHUR RASA

With the publication of *Characterless*, Saratchandra's fame as an advocate for women's rights was well established. Over the course of the next decade he wrote two essays focused exclusively on women's rights. The first, "Narir Itihas" (The History of Women), was lost in a house fire; it contained a history of women on the lines of Spencer's *Descriptive Sociology*.²² The second, "Narir Mulya" (The Value of Women), articulated a theory of women's rights in the context of Mill's and Spencer's arguments on the same.

Saratchandra also wrote novels on the same themes that were wildly popular among his middle-class audience. Notable among these are *Srikanta* and *The Final Question*. *Srikanta* is Saratchandra's magnum opus in four parts, published in installments over a period of twenty years, which reflect his evolving conception of women's rights. His other groundbreaking novel, *The Final Question*, published in the last decade of his life, approaches the question of women's rights more directly through its widow protagonist Kamal; it is explicitly a novel of ideas that engages with Mill's liberal discourse of rights in its critique of *bhadralok* patriarchal society.

I put Saratchandra's essay and novels in conversation with Mill's *Subjection of Women* to argue for a theory of women's rights that draws on liberal arguments for freedom and equality but articulates agency through a devotional practice that is intertwined with sexual desire—an erotic spiritual feminism, as it were. This challenges the notion of rights as particular to a specific liberal intellectual genealogy and broadens our understanding of other modes of agency. However, this is not an uncritical upholding of religious over secular modes of agency but rather a critique of institutionalized Hinduism and an exploration of alternative moralities made possible by Gaudiya Vaishnavism.

British liberal thinkers of the late nineteenth century were preoccupied with delineating a theory of women's rights in the context of marriage because marriage was the primary source of women's oppression in society. A woman's unequal partnership with a man led to her mistreatment and her mental, physical, and sexual slavery. In *The Subjection of Women* (1869), Mill writes, "However brutal a tyrant she may unfortunately be chained to—though she may know that he hates her, though it may be his daily pleasure to torture her, and though she may feel it impossible not to loathe him—he can claim from her and enforce the lowest degradation of a human being."²³ Mill cogently argues that

the wife is subjugated in marriage, forced to live with her husband and made into a sex slave.

Similarly many of the widow protagonists of Saratchandra's fiction declare that marriage is an institution that enslaves women. In his novel *Srikanta* this critique is made explicit by Abhaya, a character "widowed" by her husband's disappearance. Abhaya arrives in Rangoon with the purpose of recovering her missing husband, but when she discovers that he is a cruel, beastly man who does not respect her or the sanctity of their marriage, she leaves him and builds a home with her companion, Rohini Babu. Srikanta, the eponymous protagonist of the novel, is appalled by Abhaya's decision and vociferously criticizes her. Abhaya responds to Srikanta's criticism with the following argument:

Do Vedic mantras have the power to command a wife's loyalty, even after her husband has stripped her of all her rights and driven her away by brute force into the streets? . . . My husband took the marriage vows, as I did, but they have played no part in shaping his needs and desires. . . . Yet these same vows bind me to him with iron fetters simply because I'm a woman. . . . Were you trying to tell me that it is my duty to atone for my husband's sins by voluntarily embracing a death-in-life? . . . Why, Srikanta Babu? Why? Simply because I had the misfortune of being chained in wedlock to a selfish, brutal, loathsome creature?²⁴

We see here a direct parallel between Mill's argument and Abhaya's: Mill writes that the legal contract of marriage enchains a woman to a man for life, and Abhaya similarly focuses on the mental and sexual slavery she is made to suffer by her loathsome husband.

However, there is an important distinction here based on Mill's and Abhaya's identification of different hegemonic structures at work in the institution of marriage. For Mill the law underpins the marriage contract and demands the wife's subservience to her husband; for Abhaya the Hindu scriptures ("Vedic mantras"), particularly the *Dharmashastras*, which deify marriage as a religious rite, are responsible for perpetuating women's enslavement to their husbands.

In "The Value of Women," Saratchandra sarcastically denounces those "learned men" who use scriptural authority to subjugate women: "We will make goddesses of our widows—and using old verses of our *Shastras* that had been forgotten . . . we burden our new widows [with rules] and slowly we begin making goddesses of them. She . . . eats once

a day, works bone breakingly hard, wears thick, coarse saris because she is a goddess!”²⁵

This is significant not only because it identifies a key difference in Mill’s and Saratchandra’s social, historical, and national contexts but also because this difference informs their conceptualization of the ideal conjugal relationship. For Mill marriage is a legal, contractual agreement that must be based on the equality of husband and wife in terms of their intellect and their nature.²⁶ In Saratchandra’s fiction the union of two people is based on similarities of temperament and intellect, but his widow protagonists are critical of marriage as an institutional structure that binds women to unworthy men. For them the sex-love connection between two people is far more important, and this primarily spiritual contract should be based on *madhur rasa*, or erotic love.

The Sanskrit term *madhur rasa* literally means “honey juice,” and in Sanskrit poetry it connotes erotic love or the sexual relationship between a man and a woman. The foreshortened Bengali version, *madhurya*, loses its erotic potency because it merely connotes “amorous conversation.” It is significant, then, that Saratchandra uses the Sanskrit word *madhur rasa* rather than the Bengali *madhurya* to articulate his theory of the sex-love connection for it foregrounds the erotic as an essential component of this relationship. In “The Value of Women” he writes, “Once more, I will talk about *madhur rasa* because it is necessary to know how this feeling has in many, many ways developed mankind. . . . To keep this feeling pure and to keep it indestructible, man has unconsciously built the notion of *satita*. We cannot but admit that we have insulted this feeling in India for ages.”²⁷ Saratchandra suggests that Indian men have mutated *madhur rasa* into *satita* in order to maintain the purity of this idea. However, as the rest of his essay makes abundantly clear, they have misused *satita* by demanding the undying devotion of their wives while feeling no obligation to reciprocate this devotion.

Next he vociferously denounces the European notion that women are “peculiar representatives of sexuality,” a phrase he writes in English because a Bengali translation would not capture its particular derogatory connotations.²⁸ By this phrase I understand him to mean that for Europeans female sexuality is the basis of original sin. He thus criticizes both Hindu and European men because they have, in different ways, misunderstood and abused the concept of *madhur rasa*. *Madhur rasa* is neither compulsory devotion nor a sign of aberrant, abnormal sexuality. Rather it is a celebration of women’s sexuality and of their capacity for devotion.

The two components of this paradigm of love—the erotic and the devotional—are intimately intertwined in the choices made by the widow protagonists of Saratchandra's fiction. For instance, in *The Final Question* Kamal is despised because she lives with her lover, Shibnath. Well-intentioned men criticize her conduct, bolstering their arguments by citing the scriptures, which prescribe sexual abstinence for widows to aid their spiritual progress. She retorts, "Like all kinds of abstinence, sexual abstinence also contains truth; but it's a truth of a lesser order. Presented sanctimoniously as life's chief truth, it turns into a sort of incontinence which carries its own punishment. Spirituality grows weak through the arrogance of self-mortification."²⁹ At this historical moment nationalist discourse was dominated by Gandhi's politics, which suggested that the body's self-mortification was essential to spiritual progress and political liberation.³⁰ In rejecting self-mortification as arrogance, Kamal voices a critique against nationalist politics and also the Hindu and Christian traditions from which they derive. In its stead Kamal argues that the subject's sexual fulfillment is essential to her spiritual progress because the soul uses the body as its instrument of transcendence. Implicit in her argument is the celebration of the body as the site of both sexual and spiritual liberation. She also reconfigures the sacred subject to include the sexual subject. This theory of sexual liberation is radically different from and more progressive than liberal conceptualizations because, as we know, Mill's rather conservative liberal arguments for the equality of women in the conjugal relationship never included the erotic.

What are the implications of combining the spiritual with the sexual for a feminist theory of women's liberation? To answer this question I explicate the role played by the *spiritual* in this theory. At the end of *The Final Question* Kamal's arguments have conquered the male characters' patriarchal assumptions about a woman's role in society. Ashu babu, the old patriarch of the novel, admits to Kamal that he has never understood a wife's love for her husband, but thanks to her, he now understands its depth. He says, "I'm overwhelmed by the thought that conjugal affection is only one facet of a woman's love. It comprises an intense desire to give oneself away despite all hurdles, all sufferings."³¹ Implicit in this statement is that the other facet of love is spiritual love or devotion to the divine. Ashu babu defines love as a desire to give "oneself away" to the beloved even when this entails embracing suffering.³² This contradicts liberal ideas of the subject both in its emphasis on suffering and its abnegation of the self.³³ As Talal Asad suggests,

outside of a liberal framework it is suffering, rather than the alleviation of suffering, that enables the subject's self-realization.³⁴ Moreover this self-realization through suffering necessarily involves a denial of the self but is distinct from Gandhian notions of suffering and agency in its intertwining of the sexual with the spiritual.

It may appear that this theorization of women's liberation reaffirms conservative ideas that women's self-realization lies in devotion to a man. I argue that outside of a liberal framework *madhur rasa*—the surrender of the self in erotic devotion to a lover—can be a means of self-realization as well. As religious studies scholar Karen Prentiss explains, the worship of god in the *bhakti* tradition is a “theology of embodiment” for it encourages the devotee's active participation in worship through surrender.³⁵ This is a politics of inhabitation, for the body is the ground for this particular articulation of agency; the sexual and the spiritual are made apparent through the instrument of the body.

Thus, although *madhur rasa* as an ontological category involves the surrender of the self to the lover, in itself it empowers the widow protagonists of Saratchandra's novels. For instance, in *The Final Question* Kamal takes several lovers, justifying her decision by stating that there is no reason for continuing her relationship once *madhur rasa* is dead.³⁶ And in *Srikanta* Abhaya abandons her unworthy husband and lives with her lover because it is with him that she can experience *madhur rasa*. Interestingly neither Abhaya nor Kamal is overtly devout, in that we never see them prostrate in prayer; their devotion is apparent in their unstinting care for all who need them—the sickly, invalids, and the dying.

For Mill marriage as an institution, if constructed through an egalitarian framework, could guarantee women their freedom and equality. In contrast these novels suggest that marriage is a problematic institution for women. At the end of *The Final Question* Kamal explains to Ashu babu, “Marriage is one event in life out of many—no more. The day people took it as the ultimate end for a woman—that's the day the biggest *tragedy* [in English] of women's lives began. Before you leave this country, set your daughter free from these shackles of falsehood. That's my last plea to you.”³⁷ *Madhur rasa* exceeds the institution of marriage, which negatively affects women's lives because it chains them to a single man.³⁸ Kamal suggests that women should establish intimate relations, the sex-love connection, based on *madhur rasa* alone. Moreover, unlike in Mill, the sex-love connection is only a path toward a spiritually grounded realization of the self—it is not in itself a form of self-realization.

TOWARD A FEMINIST THEORY OF
EROTIC-SPIRITUAL LIBERATION

As discussed in chapter 2, the domestic novel became a vehicle for social change in late nineteenth-century Bengali *bhadralok* society. As an adolescent Saratchandra was deeply moved by Rabindranath's *A Grain of Sand in the Eye*, and he attempted to rewrite the conclusion in novel after novel. At the end of *A Grain of Sand in the Eye* the widow protagonist Binodini has been offered marriage by Behari, an eligible young doctor whom she has yearned for throughout the novel. Yet Binodini rejects his offer and leaves the upper-caste middle-class *bhadralok* home for Kashi, a place of pilgrimage, where she will spend her life in prayer. The ending has left critics puzzled for it does not cohere with Binodini's feisty character. It has been alternately read as conservative or as conciliatory, depending on the critic's own position.

In part 3 of *Srikanta*, "Forbidden Fruit," Saratchandra explores yet another possibility for Binodini's choice that is not encompassed by either critical position. Kamal Lata's story begins at the point where Binodini's leaves off and in fact contains all the elements of the widow remarriage genre, which is characterized by a widow who, through no fault of her own, is systematically excluded from *bhadralok* society and forced to live a life of asceticism and financial hardship. In keeping with this, Kamal Lata is widowed at a young age, cheated with false promises of love by a servant who makes her pregnant, cast out of *bhadralok* society, and forced to find refuge in a Vaishnava *akhara* (religious retreat); in this she is the composite trope of the widow's suffering. Yet she seems completely happy and fulfilled in the *akhara*, a possibility hinted at in the conclusion of Rabindranath's *A Grain of Sand in the Eye*.

I read Kamal Lata's story as exemplifying an alternative morality for the *bhadralok* widow wherein the ontology of devotion articulated by the Vaishnava *bhajan* (devotional poetry), which repudiates the mores of caste Hinduism, becomes a source of self-realization and fulfillment. Kamal Lata's mode of agency is subversive in its defiance of caste Hinduism and also because it offers an alternative to asceticism and *sati*, the only other options allowed the widow by Brahmanical society in her quest for god. This paradigm of devotion disrupts the fabric of *bhadralok* society within the novel and consequently also the genre of the widow remarriage novel.

This corruption of the genre is reflected in the literary aesthetic of *Srikanta*, in which the prose of the social reform novel is interrupted

by the fifteenth-century *bhajan*. The devotional aesthetics of the *bhajan* provide a new narrative form for focalizing the widow's desires. The Bengali Vaishnava tradition transposes aesthetic concepts from Sanskrit poetry such as *bhava* (intense emotion) and *rasa* (aesthetic pleasure) onto an aesthetics of devotion, such that "*bhava* is the worshipful attitude that the *bhakta* assumes towards Krishna; *rasa* is the experience of the pure bliss of the love relationship between the two."³⁹ Both meanings of *bhava* (as intense emotion and as worship) and *rasa* (as aesthetic pleasure and the "bliss" of love) are present in the Vaishnava *bhajan* in *Srikanta*.

Since the reader meets Kamal Lata only when she has already dedicated her life to becoming a Vaishnavi, her trajectory as a character is dominated primarily by this spiritual quest. Kamal Lata uses the aesthetics and devotional form of the *bhajan* to explicate her ontology of devotion:

Dharam karam jauk tahe na darai
Manor bharame pacche bandhu na harai

I care not for piety, service or creed
For losing myself in thee
I might forget my beloved one.⁴⁰

This *bhajan* seems paradoxical: the devotee's desire for union with her beloved Krishna causes her to forget him. However, this paradox is unraveled if we understand it through the lens of Sanskrit aesthetics and Vaishnava *bhakti*. Here the devotee's intense desire for self-annihilation is both the condition for the possibility of gaining love and a signifier of the impossibility of love. The devotee's union with Krishna involves a complete abandonment of the self. However, this must not result in a destruction of her subjecthood, for then there remains no self that can remember Krishna. The devotee repudiates the *bhava* of self-annihilation, which in other branches of Hinduism is privileged as a form of liberation and is known as *Sayuja Mukti*. She instead embraces the *bhava* of all-consuming love, which leads to the *rasa* of union with Krishna, an embodied form of devotion.

This ontology of devotion challenges the meaning of empowerment as it is articulated in feminist theology and feminist theory. In the context of feminist theory, empowerment is defined primarily as self-fulfillment. In feminist theology, primarily shaped by Judeo-Christian traditions, empowerment is theorized in the context of kenosis, an emptying of the self similar to *Sayuja Mukti*. Some feminists have argued

that kenosis is a debilitating loss of self and is contrary to women's empowerment, others that it signifies a "power-in-vulnerability," as by emptying the self the devotee moves closer to god.⁴¹

The Bengali Vaishnava ontology of devotion is closest to the notion of "power-in-vulnerability" in that the devotee makes herself vulnerable to her lord. However, the Vaishnavas reject the notion of kenosis or *Sayuja Mukti* because in this form of devotion "the released soul loses his individuality and becomes deprived of the opportunity of serving the Lord."⁴² This is exemplified in the *bhajan* quoted above, in the tension between the destruction of the self and devotion to the divine. The individual self is privileged only in her capacity to embody devotion, to forge an erotic, sensuous relationship with Krishna. This is a politics of inhabitation in that the devotee worships through the sensorial bliss of making her body the instrument of worship.

In other words, she exists as an individual only to express her love for Krishna—all other aspects of her individuality are irrelevant. In making god rather than the self primary, this ontology of devotion subverts the notion of an autonomous subject governed by secular norms, for it defines empowerment as the individual's "freedom from mundane existence," an unmooring from the ties of the world that enables her to move closer to the divine.⁴³

In the context of the novel Kamal Lata's love for Krishna enables her to achieve emancipation from her "mundane existence" as a *bhadralok* widow. When Kamal Lata asks Srikanta whether he plans to live with her in the ashram and devote his life to god or to leave the next morning for a life of domesticity with Rajlakshmi, Srikanta replies that he does not know yet. He knows this answer will disappoint Kamal Lata, who hopes to keep him by her side as a fellow devotee of Krishna. Kamal Lata sings the following *bhajan* in response:

*Kabe Chandidas shun Binodini sukh dukh duti bhai
Sukher lagiye je kore peeriti dukh jaye tari thain*

"Listen Binodini—" says Chandidas,
"Happiness and sorrow are twin brothers
If your love is a quest for happiness
Sorrow will follow you for ever."⁴⁴

In this ontology of devotion *peeriti*, or intense love for Krishna, becomes the devotee's mainstay, so that all thought of her pain and

pleasure is absent. The Bengali construction of line 2 places *peeriti* at the center of the line, with *sukh* (happiness) and *dukh* (sadness) at either end, a structural choice that is mirrored in the semantics of the verse. This suggests that love for Krishna, rather than happiness or sorrow, should be the goal of the devotee. Another reading of the verse suggests that the true devotee cannot distinguish between phenomenal happiness and sorrow, which appear to her as “twin” brothers because her entire being is subsumed by love for Krishna.⁴⁵ This happiness in deprivation is possible only because the subject no longer perceives herself as primary in the dialectic between god and herself. Rather, as this *bhajan* suggests, the individual’s desires—her pain and pleasure—are secondary to her love for god, which is all-encompassing. Since her love for Krishna transcends the phenomenal distinction between happiness and sorrow, she is able to endure Srikanta’s indifference toward her and the humiliation of being rejected by him and *bhadralok* society.

Kamal Lata’s love for Krishna enables her to experience the erotic companionship denied her by the injunctions of the *Shastras*. She sings:

Kalo maniker mala ganthi nibo gale
Kanu guno jnsh kane paribo kundale
Kanu anurage ranga basan pariya
Deshe deshe bhoromibo jogini hoiya
Jadunath das kahe

The dark jewel’s garland will I string around my neck
 Kanu’s fair name will hang in rings from my ears
 Saffron robes will I wear for love of my Kanu
 And like a wandering mendicant, roam from land to land.
 Jadunath your slave says.⁴⁶

One of the primary emotions of Bengali Vaishnavism is love for god, conveyed in this poem by *sringarasa*, which means both “fine garments” and “sexual love.”⁴⁷ There is a conflation here between the two meanings: not only is Kanu (another name for Krishna) her adornment (her earrings, her necklace), he is also her object of devotion. The erotic quite literally merges with the spiritual through the plane of the body, a politics of inhabitation.

This conflation is more evident in the Bengali *bhajan* (rather than its English translation), since both line 2 and line 3 both begin with the name Kanu even though he is the object of the sentence in line 2 and

the subject in line 3. This makes explicit that Kanu is central to Kamal Lata's ontology of devotion, for through her devotion she assumes the form of Radha, Krishna's consort and lover. In the realm of the earthly, although she is denied adornment and sexual relations as a widow, her love for Krishna enables her to become a bride and a lover.

In Christian theology the sexual is a metaphor for the dissolution of the self experienced in kenosis, yet here we see that the sexual is constitutive of the devotional relationship. Kamal Lata uses the aesthetic and devotional form of the *bhajan*, which merges *madhur rasa* with *bhakti* to express her attachment to Kanu. This form of worship is Madhurya Bhakti, or pure erotic love "in which the sense of mineness is still more crystallized. This type of *Bhakti* resembles the mad love of a damsel for her amorous comrade or paramour. In Bengal Vaisnavism it had been symbolized by the unparalleled feeling of love displayed by the *Gopis* [paramours] for Krishna."⁴⁸ Unlike in feminist theology, in which God and Christ the son of God are always at one remove from mankind, Krishna is transformed through the devotee's imagination into a human lover.⁴⁹ She experiences herself as Krishna's lover, and experiences also Krishna's love for her; just as she is bereft without Krishna, Krishna is bereft without her.

Kamal Lata's desire for Krishna subverts the plot of the widow remarriage novel in which a widow protagonist falls in love with an unattainable married man who inevitably rejects her. The novel deliberately destabilizes the widow's quest for social acceptance through remarriage by re-creating marriage as devotional attachment to the divine. In fact Kamal Lata destabilizes the *bhadralok* debate on widow remarriage by reconfiguring marriage as a heavenly attachment. She believes that she was married to Srikanta in a previous life and they both served Krishna in Gokul (Krishna's birthplace). Srikanta, the *bhadralok* male at the center of the novel, assumes the role of co-devotee rather than love object. Kamal Lata consequently renames him *gosain* [literally, cowherd], one of the eternal servitors of the Lord, and tells Srikanta, "I'm quite happy, *gosain*. I have dedicated myself to one who will never reject me." Srikanta is astonished and wonders, "I was not sure of her meaning but I dared not ask."⁵⁰ His bewilderment is symptomatic of patriarchal *bhadralok* society's inability to comprehend the widow's desires; just as he cannot accept that Kamal Lata's love for the divine exceeds her love for him, *bhadralok* society cannot account for this ontology of the devotee who chooses her divine lover over the *bhadralok* patriarch.

This disruption of the patriarchal order inevitably has implications for the construction of the *bhadralok* home in the novel. In the widow remarriage novel, the widow protagonist and her lover usually set up a second home, which becomes the epitome of the unhomely, of all that has been repressed in the *bhadralok* home. But Kamal Lata does not seek a second home; she celebrates her homelessness. In part 4 (published as *Journey's End* in 1933), Srikanta begs Kamal Lata to stay with him, but, like Mirabai, she dons the ochre robes of the mendicant devotee and chooses instead to wander the country singing of her love for Krishna. However, unlike the widow protagonists of Bankimchandra's and Rabindranath's novels, her disruption of the boundary between the home and the world does not bring her into the unhomely or the experience of "the world-in-the-home, the home-in-the-world."⁵¹

This is because, for Kamal Lata, the quest for god is not spatially located, as home is where the Lord is, and since her Lord is everywhere, the world is her home. The *bhadralok* distinction between home and world ceases to have relevance for her spiritual trajectory. Moreover, since her wandering does not have a teleological endpoint, it suggests that the quest for god is outside temporal and spatial frameworks.

Kamal Lata's ontology of devotion, as articulated through the *bhajan*, radically challenges both *bhadralok* society and the genre of the widow remarriage novel. Her devotion enables her to repudiate the injunctions of upper-caste widowhood, reject her indifferent lover Srikanta, and leave her life in the ashram for a life of mendicancy, thus overcoming her spatial and moral confinement by *bhadralok* society. In centering god she forges an alternative morality of sensuous devotion with Krishna. Kamal Lata's quest for god exceeds the secular narrative of the widow's role in *bhadralok* society and, by extension, the nation.

THE MODERN SUBJECT OF FEMINISM

What are the implications of this sexual-spiritual feminism for conceptualizations of subaltern agency? As Spivak famously argues, the voice of the third world woman is lost in the discourses of patriarchy, imperialism, and nationalism.⁵² To this triad I suggest a fourth component, the sacred-erotic, which is missing in secular, liberal feminist articulations of agency.

As I have argued in this chapter, Mill's utilitarian, liberal feminist thought is premised on the liberal separation of church and state and

an active denial that the religious can inform notions of agency.⁵³ Feminist critiques of Mill have focused on whether or not his assertions can be conceptualized as an early attempt at theorizing gender equality but have inevitably taken equality as a given good.⁵⁴ Mainstream feminist theory has followed suit in theorizing empowerment through categories that derive from liberal, secular discourse.

In contrast the sexual-spiritual feminism I have outlined suggests that the individual is tethered to god and does not conceive of herself as an autonomous or sovereign subject. Moreover she strives not to extend herself as a subject but to dissolve her own subjectness in her devotion to god, which necessitates the denial of the desires of the self as an autonomous subject and a celebration of her self as a devotee of god. In other words, insofar as she exists as an individual, it is only in her loving relation to god.

This subjectivity is an expression of a particular Bengali modernity, and its formulation in the Bengali novel re-creates the latter as a hybrid aesthetic form, the modernesque novel, which combines elements from British and local narrative forms. More concretely the invocation of the Gaudiya Vaishnava poetic tradition, namely the work of Chandidas and Jadunath in *Srikanta*, suggests that the novel itself derives from this sacred aesthetic tradition. And since this devotional poetry provides an alternate ontology of devotion and agency for the widow protagonist, the reformist agenda of the novel is intimately tied to the reformist aspects of Gaudiya Vaishnava theology.

Similarly *The Final Question* is less a novel than an essayistic foray into the question of women's rights and borrows heavily from Saratchandra's "The Value of Women." Like *Srikanta* its narrative form informs its formulation of a distinctive Bengali feminist consciousness. That is, the novel refracts modern ideas of women's liberation through the prism of religion, marrying the English essay to the novel of ideas. In another vein, *Characterless* experiments with rewriting the widow remarriage novel in its plot and narrative structure and makes self-conscious reference to *A Grain of Sand in the Eye*, *The Poison Tree*, and *Krishnakanta's Will*. We see, then, that the early twentieth-century Bengali novel experiments with multiple narrative forms to explicate an evolving Bengali modernity that is deeply tied to questions of feminist agency.

In the historical context of the early twentieth century the sexual-spiritual feminism of Saratchandra's fiction makes a critical intervention in the women's question. The widow protagonist of the Bengali

domestic novel is no longer the passive ground through which imperialists and reformist nationalists and traditionalist nationalists contest the nation; rather she is a subject whose agency disrupts the dichotomy of the home and the world. In destabilizing these boundaries, the widow's sexual-spiritual desires are political, part of an emerging feminist modernity. This conception of the political is based on feminist theorizations of the personal as political rather than on male homosociality and secularism. Thus for the widow who inhabits Saratchandra's fiction, political liberation is contingent on remaking the self as a primarily erotic-spiritual subject. This chapter thus decolonizes the feminist project by suggesting a different genealogy of modernity for it, one that combines the erotic and the spiritual as articulated in the colonial Bengali novel.

On *Purdah* and Poetry

*Social Reform and the Status of Urdu Poetry
in Nazir Ahmad's and Hali's Fiction*

The Revolt of 1857 had a devastating effect on the social, cultural, and intellectual life of *sharif* (upper-class, feudal) Muslims, who had hitherto been regarded as indispensable intermediaries between the British and the waning Mughal Empire. After 1857 the British regarded Muslims as collaborators in the Revolt and criticized Muslim society as morally suspect and dissolute. They pointed to the decadent literary culture of Muslims and the practice of *purdah*, which confined women to the constricting prison of the *zenana* (women's quarters), where they languished in servitude, as proof that the Muslims were uncivilized barbarians.

The British firmly believed that Muslim society could be improved if women were educated and the decadent influence of Urdu poetry was done away with. To this end, in 1868 they passed the Resolution on Native Female Education, although they doubted its effectiveness in a society that did not value women. Further, the events of 1857 made them wary of using force to implement the Resolution.¹ Simultaneously they encouraged Muslim men of letters to reform Urdu poetry by expunging it of its immoral themes—wine, women, and pederasty—and making it more like English poetry.

In response to British criticisms, Muslim men spearheaded two opposing social movements to improve the lives of *sharif* women: the Deoband movement and the Aligarh movement. The Deoband movement (1858–98) was begun by a group of Hanafi scholars led by

Maulana Qasim Nanotwi. Its purpose was to initiate an Islamic revival in South Asian society, which the reformers believed had been corrupted by British colonialism.² The Deobandi scholars were concerned with improving the lives of women through instruction in the codes of Islam.³ They agreed with the British that Urdu poetry was in large part responsible for the deterioration of Muslim society, but unlike the British they believed the cure for this was Islam.

In contrast the Aligarh movement (1858–98), spearheaded by Sir Syed Ahmad Khan (1817–98), attempted to reform Muslim society by making it more like British society.⁴ Like the British, Sir Syed (as he is popularly known) linked the decadence of Muslim civilization to the immorality of Urdu literary culture. Echoing British criticisms of Urdu poetry, Sir Syed dismissed Urdu poetry as licentious and strove to strip it of its ornate flourishes and make it simple and “natural” (*nechari*, an Urdu term coined by him), adhering to the model of British romanticism.⁵ Likewise he believed that Muslim society could be revitalized if Muslim men were introduced to discipline, order, and high levels of education. When it came to the education of women, Sir Syed, like the Deoband *ulema*, was content to let women be schooled in housework and scripture.⁶ Teaching them to read and write was dangerous because they would write letters to unknown men and become immoral and licentious.⁷

While Sir Syed himself was quite unconcerned about women’s education, his acolytes Nazir Ahmad and Hali were vociferous advocates of women’s education and wrote essays and didactic novels to this end. Ahmad (1830–1912) was trained as a religious scholar and was well versed in Urdu, Persian, and Arabic. While his predecessors could have earned a job in the courts of the princely nobility based on this education, in the aftermath of 1857 there were no jobs for men with Ahmad’s education because the nobility were increasingly financially dependent on the Crown. Undeterred, Ahmad joined the government education service as a teacher; he later became a deputy inspector and then an inspector of schools. Although his father had prohibited him from learning English, Ahmad assiduously taught himself the language, which undoubtedly facilitated his rapid rise in the ranks. Ahmad was deeply committed to social reform through education and he wrote several didactic novels on this topic, including *Mirat ul-Arus* (The Bride’s Mirror, 1869), *Fasana-e-Mubtala* (The Story of Mubtala, 1885), *Ibn-ul-Vaqt* (Son of the Moment, 1888), and *Taubat un-Nasuh* (The Penitence of Nasuh, 1874).

Khwaja Altaaf Hussain (1837–1914), a contemporary of Ahmad’s, better known by his poetic *takhallus* (nom de plume) Hali [literally, the adjective “contemporary”], also received a traditional education in Urdu, Persian, and Arabic. Hali aspired to become a poet and ran away from his home in Panipat to Delhi, where he attended *mushairas* (poetry gatherings) and sought the company of Ghalib, the foremost Urdu poet of the nineteenth century. Under Ghalib’s tutelage Hali was well on his way to becoming an established poet when family pressure and Ghalib’s untimely death forced him to forsake his aspirations and take up a position at the Government Book Depot in Lahore, revising translations from English to Urdu for the Education Department.

Under his new masters Hali changed tack and renounced the Urdu poetic tradition he had once worshiped in favor of British Romanticism, which he vainly attempted to transpose to Urdu poetry. With the blessings of the British, he organized several *mushairas* in which poets were asked to compose *nechari* (natural) poetry. Needless to say, this did not last long, and Hali himself gave up the effort.⁸ In the mid-1870s he returned to Delhi to teach at the Delhi Anglo-Arabic School, where he met Sir Syed, at whose behest he wrote his most famous poem, *Mus-sadas: Madd o Jazr-e-Islam* (The Ebb and Flow of Islam), in which he describes the rich Islamic heritage of Indian Muslims. As an educator, Hali took up the cause of women’s education within *purdah* and wrote *Chup ki Dad* (Homage to the Silent, 1905) and *Majalis un Nissa* (Gathering of Women, 1874).

In this chapter I bring together two bodies of scholarship that have been separated by disciplinary boundaries: the study of late nineteenth-century Urdu literary culture, which has been primarily restricted to area studies departments, and historical studies of social reform at the turn of the century, which has primarily been the domain of historians of South Asia. I argue that the project of reforming women was closely tied to the reform of Urdu poetry as both poetry and the status of women were seen as immoral, licentious, and signs of a deteriorating Muslim civilization.

Nazir Ahmad’s and Hali’s social reform novels are ideologically fraught texts because they struggle with accepting a British view of Muslim civilization. They cannot fully endorse the view that the *purdah-nasheen* woman languishes in sexual servitude while the licentious courtesan traps men in her web. Relatedly they cannot endorse Urdu poetry as degraded, depraved, and in need of reform. The novels fail to forward a coherent reformist agenda because of their vexed

relation to literary modes and, consequently, to reform. I undertake a close reading of the rhetoricity of these novels, paying attention to their textual and paratextual elements, which demonstrate the writers' difficult relation with literary form.

The social reform novels' inability to condemn the poet and to put forward a reformed Urdu literary culture exemplifies the anxieties surrounding the reformist project. The novels' depiction of the educated, modern, Muslim woman—both the courtesan and the respectable women in *purdah*—is similarly rife with contradictions. The cultured courtesan-poet of *The Story of Mubtala* is upheld as the ideal Muslim woman, but she is simultaneously shunned because of her association with poetry, which taints her as immoral and hypersexual. The respectable wife of *The Bride's Mirror* is modeled on the courtesan in her intellectual and cultural achievements and in her ability to wield influence over men and their affairs. Consequently the norms of *purdah*, which separate her from the courtesan and grant her respectability, are not constraints but rather are instrumental to her social power and influence. I consider the implications of these dissident subjectivities for the formulation of a new Muslim modernity in the Urdu novel.

THE STATUS OF URDU POETRY AND SOCIAL REFORM

Look at the Sahibs of England.
 Look at the style and practice of these,
 This is the people that owns the right to Laws and Rules
 None knows to rule a land better than they,
 Justice and Wisdom they've made as one
 They have given hundreds of laws to India.
 Look at the businesses of the knowledgeable ones:
 In every discipline, a hundred innovators!⁹

In his youth Sir Syed aspired to be a historian of Delhi and produced a scholarly edition of Abul Fazl's *Ain-e-Akbari*, a biography of the Mughal Empire under Akbar. Eager to have Ghalib's approval for this enterprise, Sir Syed approached him for a *taqriz*, or laudatory foreword. In response Ghalib produced the poem above, which not too subtly criticizes the project for its exaltation of the dead and directs the

reader instead to recognize his true master, the British. Needless to say, Sir Syed was disheartened by the message of the *taqriz* and published volumes 1 and 3 of the *Ain-e-Akbari* in 1855 without it.

Two years later the Revolt of 1857 shattered whatever was left of Sir Syed's aspirations to become a historian. As has been recounted in many biographies and scholarly essays on Sir Syed, the events of 1857 turned him into a reformer who wanted to better Muslim society by making it more like British society, following Ghalib's advice inadvertently.¹⁰

British criticisms of Muslim society in the wake of 1857 radically challenged the aesthetic and moral norms of Muslim society. Ahmad's novel *Son of the Moment* grapples with Muslim society's struggle to define itself in the face of these criticisms. The eponymous protagonist, Ibn-ul-Vaqt, rescues an Englishman, Noble Sahib, from mutineers and harbors him in his house during the Revolt. After the Revolt, Noble Sahib rewards Ibn-ul-Vaqt by granting him estates and a post in the British government. Like Sir Syed, Ibn-ul-Vaqt must adapt to a wholly new style of governance and a new set of mores. The name Ibn-ul-Vaqt literally translates as "Son of the Moment" but also connotes "opportunist." Also like Sir Syed, Ibn-ul-Vaqt is determined to reform Muslim society by making it more like British society, such that "the Indians should be made Englishmen in their food, dress, language, habits, ways of living and thinking, in everything as far as possible."¹¹ The novel subtly critiques this notion of reform, famously forwarded by Macaulay, by caricaturing Bengalis who have taken Macaulay's advice to heart. As a consequence they are despised by the British and by other Indians. At the end of the novel Ibn-ul-Vaqt's cousin Hujjat-ul-Islam (Proof of Islam) berates him for aping Englishmen and estranging himself from his fellow Muslims. He advises him to return to the fold, for true reform can come about only when Muslims retain their culture.

Son of the Moment thus puts forward a notion of reform that acknowledges that the Muslim world has irrevocably changed after 1857. While Muslims must adjust to this world, adopting its manners and customs, they must also retain a distinctive Muslim culture. It is no accident that the novel defines Muslim culture primarily in terms of religion, which could safely be regarded as moral, while the rest of Muslim culture—specifically literary culture—was a different matter.¹²

Asif Farrukhi argues that Sir Syed's influence led both Hali and Ahmad to condemn classical poetry and literature: "Nazir Ahmad is just as clear in his mind in condemning classical poetry and went

even further than his contemporary Altaf Hussain Hali, who wanted to replace the old kind of poetry with a new one, which he regarded as ‘natural’ poetry.”¹³ Contrary to Farrukhi, I argue that Ahmad and Hali, while certainly influenced by Sir Syed, differ from him substantively in their views of poetry and consequently of the need to reform Muslim society by cleansing it of its decadent literary culture, primarily because they use literature as a vehicle for reform.¹⁴

Ahmad’s novels *The Penitence of Nasuh* and *The Story of Mubtala*, both ostensibly written with the vision of reforming Muslim society by making it more Islamic, have a conflicted relationship to Urdu literary culture. Although the novels disparage poets and poetry, the narrator in both is sympathetic to the poet protagonist’s moral and aesthetic dilemmas. Similarly the moral texture of Urdu poetry itself becomes the source of much anxiety in the narrative.

The Penitence of Nasuh opens with the eponymous protagonist suffering from a bout of cholera, which renders him unconscious. In this dreamlike state he realizes the error of his ways: he had forgotten god because of his indulgence in the finer things of life, such as poetry, wine, and pigeon flying. He awakens a changed man and sets about the task of reforming his household. However, his eldest son, Kaleem, a connoisseur of literature and a poet, refuses to give up poetry and leaves the house, hoping to earn his living by his pen. Since this is a didactic novel, nothing good can come of rebellion, and after a series of misadventures Kaleem realizes the value of his father’s advice and on his deathbed forsakes poetry for god.

Mubtala, the protagonist of *The Story of Mubtala*, is also a poet whose verses are on the lips of the residents of Delhi. Like Kaleem, he is spoiled, indulgent, and given to frivolity. Despite being married to a respectable woman, Mubtala marries the courtesan Begum. The novel ends with Mubtala realizing the error of his ways and being rescued by his first wife, Ghairat begum.

It is curious that the protagonists of two novels ostensibly concerned with making Muslim society more Islamic by cleansing it of decadent literary culture are both accomplished poets. Kaleem is described as reinventing the Urdu poetic tradition through his artistry: “The *ode* is about to receive a new lease of life, owing to Kaleem, for the first time since the work of the old master, Sauda. . . . Around a hundred or two hundred of his *ghazals* must be on the tongues of the populace in the city.”¹⁵ Mubtala is similarly endowed: “The poetry of Mubtala’s mature years is akin to Ghalib’s poetry in its beauty, grace, ornamentation and

delicacy. There are no words to describe the reaction when he reads his verses in poetry gatherings. The audience exclaim ‘Wonderful,’ just as they did for the poet Mir, and beg him to recite his verse again.”¹⁶

Not only are both men accomplished poets, but they are also comparable to some of the greatest poets in the Persio-Urdu literary tradition: Sauda, Mir, and Ghalib. Both are credited with resuscitating Persian and-Urdu poetry through their artistry and skill. The novels are peppered with the verses of these accomplished poets. While the verses themselves are not noteworthy, their existence in the text serves as a metatextual commentary on the novelist’s fraught relation to Urdu poetry: he can no more do away with poetry than his characters can.

Yet in both novels the characters’ love for poetry ultimately leads to their downfall: “What else ailed Kaleem? Those very books were the snakes whose poison had got into his veins. That was the spell Satan cast on him.”¹⁷ The novel wrestles with two conflicting views of the effect of Urdu literature on Muslim society: Muslim society as enriched by its Urdu literary tradition, the spell that bewitches all who come in contact with it, and Muslim society as degraded by immoral Urdu poetry, a venomous snake that bites unsuspecting victims.

The novel’s inability to reconcile old and new views of Urdu literary culture is literalized in *The Penitence of Nasuh*. When Kaleem refuses to grant his father, Nasuh, an audience, an enraged Nasuh storms into Kaleem’s private chambers, where he beholds Kaleem’s enormous library of Persian and Urdu literary texts. The omniscient narrator remarks:

All books, whether in Urdu or Persian, had similar content: false stories, inanities, vulgar themes, obscene implications. . . . When Nasuh considered the beautiful bindings of the books, their fine calligraphy, the quality of paper, the beauty of the language and the excellence of writing, the books appeared to him to be a treasure trove. But as far as their contents and sense were concerned, every book appeared to be fit for burning and destruction. . . . While Nasuh thus vacillated, the afternoon was upon him. . . . Over and over again he would pick up the books, look at them again, and put them down. Finally he thought it best to burn them.¹⁸

Nasuh is spellbound by calligraphy, bindings, and paper—in short, the outward appearance of the books—but is disgusted by their content. He makes a distinction between the beautiful language and the

immoral content, a schism that echoes the Urdu writer's dilemma: How might the writer preserve the aesthetic sensibility of Urdu poetry while radically altering its themes and subjects to make them more moral?

C. M. Naim reads Nasuh's decision to burn the books as a "rejection of the 'old' by the 'new,' of literary excellence in favor of social usefulness, of 'metaphor' in favor of 'realism.'"¹⁹ Another possible reading of this incident is that Nasuh's ambivalence indicates that far from rejecting the old, he remains deeply invested in it. Rather than an outright rejection of the Persio-Urdu literary tradition, his ultimate decision to burn the books reflects his inability to reconcile the old with the new, the metaphors of the Urdu poetic tradition with the realism of the British novel, and his difficulty with resolving the contradiction between the pleasure derived from the books' articulation of ideas and his disparagement of the ideas themselves.

As we see, the poet protagonist is a deeply ambivalent figure in the novel: on the one hand, he is praised and extolled, but on the other hand, the very poetry that garners him fame causes his downfall. The poet thus becomes an iconic figure for the tensions that beleaguer the Urdu novelist at the turn of the century, caught between competing discourses of Urdu literary culture. These novels struggle with articulating a coherent reformist agenda primarily because they can neither dismiss the literary merit of Urdu poetry nor believe in its supposed immorality.

COURTESANS IN A NEW MUSLIM POLITY

Ahmad's fiction is overwhelmingly ambiguous about the supposed immorality of poetry; consequently the reformist agenda of his novels is rendered incoherent and muddled. This ambivalence is particularly evident in his treatment of the courtesan, whose association with poetry and familiarity with sex made her the deferred object of reform. By this I mean that while the reformist men were unconcerned with reforming the courtesan, the reform of the respectable woman in the *zenana* rested on distinguishing her from the courtesan. As an educated woman, the courtesan could not simply be wished away, but her existence needed to be rationalized and then discarded by the reformist novel. Thus, like the moral ambiguity that permeates the discussion of Urdu poetry, the project of reforming the respectable Muslim woman is also beset with anxieties and contradictions.

In *Homage to the Silent*, Hali exhorts women to gain an education if they wish to keep their husband: “You should consider the man a thirsty traveler and the woman a spring. If the spring happens to be located in the shade of a tree and there is greenery all around and a nice cool breeze, then the traveler, after quenching his thirst, will want to spend several hours enjoying the environment. There may be plenty of other springs which do not have such a pleasant atmosphere where he would simply quench his thirst and go his way.”²⁰ Although the courtesan is not explicitly mentioned here, the spring surrounded by greenery and a cool breeze is an elaborate metaphor for her and her charms. The courtesan’s beauty and her artistic and literary accomplishments create a “pleasant atmosphere” for men who seek intellectual companionship.²¹

Gail Minault asserts that Hali overturns the argument against women’s education by contesting its central premises: “This argument held that if women became educated, they would become disrespectful or even immoral, like courtesans. Hali argues that, on the contrary, there will be no further need for courtesans and a tremendous increase in public morality on the part of men, if wives replace courtesans in their husbands’ affections.”²² I complicate Minault’s argument to suggest that in the reformist novel the courtesan becomes the model for the educated woman and acts as her narrative double. She is all that the wife is not: educated, skilled, and adept at managing the household. Yet she never gains respectability within the narrative because of her acquaintance with sex and her education in poetry. In this, like the *bhadralok* widow of the Bengali social reform novel, she becomes the unhomely counterpart to the respectable wife, a spectral presence who haunts the reformist novel.

In *The Story of Mubtala* the narrative doubling of wife and courtesan is made explicit in both plot and character. Mubtala is married to Ghairat begum, an uneducated woman from a respectable family. As an aesthete and poet, he is frustrated with his wife because she lacks beauty and education. He starts frequenting Begum’s *kotha* (brothel) and becomes besotted by her charm, beauty, and erudition. In a carefully wrought plan Begum convinces Mubtala to marry her, and he renames her Hariyali.

In the tradition of morality tales, characters are given names that describe their traits; the name Mubtala means “the sick one” and is supposed to designate Mubtala’s weak character, his decadent lifestyle as a poet, and his immorality. Ghairat means “jealousy,” and

this becomes the defining trait of her character. Significantly the name Hariyali means “greenery,” a representation perhaps of Hali’s description of the courtesan: a shady tree where a traveler weary from the world might rest.

Afraid to incur Ghairat’s wrath, Mubtala introduces Hariyali to his household as a maidservant. He convinces Ghairat that although Hariyali was a prostitute, she has forsaken her profession and now wants to earn an honest living. Within a matter of days Hariyali takes charge, bringing order and cleanliness to the household and thereby heightening the contrast between the two women. The third-person omniscient narrator remarks, “There is no doubt that the household desperately needed a skilled woman and this became Hariyali’s way of establishing herself in the household.”²³ The novel implies that Ghairat begum’s mismanagement of the household drove Mubtala into the arms of a courtesan and that Hariyali’s education that makes her adept at household tasks. Thus the courtesan turned housemaid is upheld as the exemplary woman of the home.

This role reversal is made explicit when Ghairat discovers Hariyali’s identity. She storms into Hariyali’s room and sarcastically tells an old maidservant present at the scene of confrontation, “Main raandh hoon yeh suhaagan hai. Main laundi hoon yeh begum hai, main chudail hoon yeh hoor hai, yeh miyaan ki laadli hai [I am a prostitute, she is a married woman. I’m a woman of the streets and she’s a respectable woman, I’m a witch and she’s a fairy, she’s my husband’s favorite].”²⁴ (I give the original Urdu text here because the terms used to highlight the doubling are particularly significant.) The word *raandh* was used to refer to courtesans, but under the aegis of the reformist movement of the late nineteenth century it acquired negative connotations and was used as a slur. Similarly *laundi* simply means “young girl,” but in contrast with “begum” or “respectable woman,” it implies a woman who is sexually available (and hence like a young girl). The term *chudail* (witch) is contrasted with *hoor*, a fairy or divine being promised to good Muslims when they reach heaven. Hence *chudail* connotes un-Islamic witchcraft used by courtesans to beguile men. Each of the terms Ghairat uses for herself connotes women’s sexuality outside the bonds of marriage.

In the context of the reformist novel the ambivalence surrounding women’s sexuality is thus made evident, for it is the respectable woman, not the courtesan, who is the prostitute, woman of the streets, and witch. One assumes that Ghairat’s tone is sarcastic, but if read as

heartfelt, this statement implies an acknowledgment of her own failings. She realizes that the only way she can earn her husband's favor is by becoming Hariyali. We see here an interesting shift: the courtesan becomes the model for the educated respectable woman, who aims to emulate her, yet the courtesan herself, despite her marriage, can never become a respectable woman.

The axis of respectability has two poles: on one end is Hariyali's education, which makes her proficient in household tasks, and at the other end is her profession as a courtesan, which continues to haunt her even when she has forsaken it. Hariyali acknowledges the disrepute attached to her profession and mourns its role in estranging her from respectability. She tells Mubtala:

Our profession is so defamed that even if we were to wear garments sown with verses of the Quran, no one would believe us. Believe it or not, I am the daughter of a respectable family—god unfortunately wrote my fate such that I am now in a bad situation and languishing abroad [in Delhi]. My state is like the following *Qata* [poem]:

I live in a place where I know no one
 No one speaks my language, no one understands my words
 If I fall sick, no one would care for me
 And if I died, no eulogist would recite *nohas* [eulogistic verses] for me.²⁵

Her florid lament is meant to convince listeners—both Mubtala and the reader—that although a courtesan by profession, she is at heart a respectable woman. The metaphor of clothes is significant here because it suggests that her habitation of a pious subjectivity would be seen as external, as easily removed as clothes, rather than a part of her. The courtesan's inhabitation of respectability is never seen as such but rather is disregarded as yet another instance of her skillful dissimulation.

It is also significant that she uses poetry to explicate her condition, for, as discussed earlier, poetry's association with decadence immediately marks her as immoral, and in this the poem serves as a self-referential metatextual exegesis on her condition. While the *mazmun*, or theme of the poem, is alienation, it has multiple *ma'ni*, or meanings. A literal reading suggests that Hariyali regrets her move from Lucknow to Delhi, where she feels alienated and isolated because no one knows her and she lacks admirers and well-wishers. The poem invites Mubtala to take the place of her Lucknow admirers.

Alternatively one can read the poem as a lament for Hariyali's impossible subject position. Written in the optative voice, the poem is not about the past or the present but about a perpetual state of becoming rather than being. The temporal voice of the poem creates a liminal space for the speaker, the courtesan, who is caught between the disrepute of her profession and her piety.

Her habitation of this subject position cannot be known to any other person: "No one speaks my language, no one understands my words." When she speaks she cannot be heard because her words are a foreign language, spoken by one who inhabits two contradictory subject positions. As Spivak suggests, even when the subaltern speaks, we are not equipped to hear her.²⁶ In this instance the courtesan is made subaltern by her impossible subject position, and neither Mubtala nor the reader can hear her or understand the pain she experiences. Whether read literally or metaphorically, Hariyali's poem suggests her alienation from Lucknowi society and from the attainment of respectability.

With her marriage to Mubtala, the axis of respectability seems to shift in her favor, yet the narrative desists from legitimizing her claim to the home, for she enters his house as a maidservant. Thus marriage does not grant her respectability but merely changes the modes through which her labor is monetized—the sexual labor of the courtesan is transformed into the domestic labor of the maidservant. As feminist scholars have argued, upper-class status in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century South Asia was marked by women's non-participation in paid labor.²⁷ On the one hand, Hariyali's labor in the house marks her as the ideal Muslim woman who excels in household tasks, but on the other hand, the monetization of this labor marks her as lower class and outside the domain of respectability.

Like the male poet, the courtesan is extolled for her education and her skill in poetry, yet her acquaintance with poetry makes her depraved and immoral. The implication is that despite her performance of skillful efficiency in the household, Hariyali's true nature is morally depraved. Surely enough, at the end of the novel Mubtala discovers that Hariyali married him not for love but for his money. He abandons her and returns to Ghairat begum, who has reformed herself in the interim and is now skilled in household management. It is almost as though the novel, having used the courtesan as a model for the respectable woman, can safely discard her once the respectable woman has all the accomplishments of the courtesan. Like the

Bengali widow, the courtesan acts as the narrative double of the respectable wife, and like her she is ejected from the home once the narrative proves that she has exceeded the domain of respectability.

NEGOTIATING THE NORMS OF PURDAH

On a voyage to England in 1869 Sir Syed met Mary Carpenter, an advocate of women's education and a close friend of the prominent Bengali reformers Raja Ramohan Roy and Keshub Chandra Sen. When Carpenter quizzed him on his views on women's education, Sir Syed was of the firm opinion that women's education should not come at the cost of their modesty. That is, they should be educated only on the condition that they follow the norms of *purdah*.²⁸

Like other imperial feminists of the time, Carpenter criticized *purdah* as the blight of Muslim society. As has been widely argued by feminist scholars, the imperial feminist view of *purdah* produced the *zenana* as a prison, a space of sexual servitude, and also as an Orientalist harem, a hypersexualized space of perversion. This became one of the justifications of empire. Sir Syed thus responded to Carpenter's critique of the practice by insisting that education within *purdah* would make women better Islamic subjects.²⁹

The political theorist Faisal Devji argues that in response to colonial criticisms, *purdah* changed from being a symbol of women's erotic power to a symbol of women's seclusion in the nineteenth century.³⁰ Like the Bengali reformers, the Aligarh reformers believed that *purdah* could seclude women from the corrupting influences of colonialism and render them "guardian[s] of orthodoxy" who could preserve Muslim culture for the Muslim man.³¹

While Sir Syed was definitely of this view, the social reform novel tackles the question of *purdah* and women's education with more ambivalence.³² Since the respectable woman was modeled on the courtesan, she needed to exercise power in the home and the world. However, unlike the courtesan, she was restricted by the norms of *purdah*, which were intended to limit her mobility and guarantee her respectability. Consequently the educated respectable woman renegotiated the norms of *purdah* such that they became instrumental to her agency.

More specifically *purdah* in Ahmad's novel *The Bride's Mirror* does not signify seclusion and an implied restriction of agency but rather becomes the means by which Asghari, the protagonist, exercises

agency. As Mahua Sarkar explains, when feminists read the *purdah* and the *zenana* as spaces of empowerment, they “are recuperated (or made visible) within the enlightened folds of feminist accounts only as exceptions—as instances of feminist consciousness out of time/place.”³³ I suggest that Asghari’s agency, rather than being an instance of “feminist consciousness out of time/place,” is situated in the very particularity of her historical moment, when the meaning of *purdah* and the *zenana* was being debated; thus these are not merely spaces of seclusion but also spaces that make possible particularly feminine modes of agency.

The Bride’s Mirror is a morality tale of two sisters, Asghari (“the modest one”) and Akbari (“the great one”). Akbari, the elder of the two, is rude and spoiled and ruins the unity of her husband Muhammad Aqil’s household, forcing him to forsake his family and move to an independent establishment. The third-person omniscient narrator hints that Akbari’s faults stem from her lack of education, for education gives women the virtues of economy and patience. When Asghari’s marriage to Muhammad Kamil, Aqil’s younger brother, is arranged, the sisters’ mother despairs that Asghari too will tear the family apart and bring financial ruin upon them. However, unlike her sister, Asghari is educated, and her knowledge of arithmetic enables her to catch a cheating maidservant and her skilled sewing and embroidery saves the household needless expenditure at the tailor. The novel implies that Asghari excels at household management because of her education.

She takes over the education of her sister-in-law, Mahmuda, and, hearing of her reputation, Sultana, a wealthy noblewoman, pleads with Asghari to teach her spoiled daughter, Husnara. Over the course of the novel these lessons expand into a multifaceted girls’ school. Asghari uses her connection to Husnara’s family to arrange Mahmuda’s marriage to Husnara’s brother, whose family’s wealth and station in society far outstrips that of Mahmuda’s natal home. Through all this Asghari is a devout Muslim woman, observing religious fasts and remaining in *purdah*.

How does the novel reconcile Asghari’s efficiency with her status as a *purdah-nasheen* woman, supposedly secluded from the world? In the introduction to *The Bride’s Mirror*, Ahmad explicates the relation between *purdah* and education for his female reader: “For you there is little hope of escape from your seclusion. . . . Learn to read, and while you are seated behind the *purdah* you may make a tour of the whole world.”³⁴ This statement suggests that *purdah* is a mere

inconvenience that women must learn to circumvent if they hope to have any power—in the home and, more importantly, in the world.

Frances Pritchett suggests that Asghari's efficiency "calls into question the neat role division Nazir Ahmad has laid down between men and women; she is almost an honorary man."³⁵ In contrast I argue that Asghari's agency stems from her location in *purdah* and is a particularly feminine mode of agency. In other words, the conditions of Asghari's subjection, both her coming into being as a subject through the norms of *purdah* and her confinement in the *zenana*, become the means of her agency.

As Butler argues, "The body in subjection becomes the occasion and condition of its productivity, where the latter is not finally separable from the former."³⁶ That is, the subjection of the body by the material conditions of its subjection (in Foucault, the prison) substantively shapes the conditions of its productivity. The material limits of the *zenana* substantively shape Asghari's subjection, which in turn influences her formulation of agency. I am not suggesting that the *zenana* is a prison—an Orientalist argument made by imperial feminists, among others. Rather I am suggesting the opposite: that the *zenana* acts as the site of agency through its effect on the materiality of the body; Asghari's confinement to the *zenana*, the conditions of her subjection, also become a means for her productivity.

Asghari's school exemplifies this mode of subjection as agency. The school functions as a space within the home that extends into the world outside, both spatially and literally, for it brings together girls from different families, almost impossible in the *sharif* world where girls were restricted to visiting extended family and rarely met unrelated girls of their age. In bridging the chasm between home and the world, the school becomes both the platform for Asghari's feminist ideology as well as the means for implementing this ideology.

The dissemination of this ideology takes place in the course of instruction. When Asghari's student Safihan questions her about women's roles in the world, Asghari cites powerful women such as the Begum of Bhopal and Queen Victoria, both of whom skillfully rule over their subjects: "She [Queen Victoria] does exactly the same things that men do who are kings. She governs the country; she protects her subjects." This feminist ideology considers men and women to be equal and sees women as capable rulers and administrators. Safihan counters that these women have power only because they "gad about" outside of *purdah*, and no *purdah-nasheen* respectable woman would suffer

the shame of unveiling simply to exercise power.³⁷ This link between women's helplessness and the veil reflects reformist anxieties that the veil deters women's education.

Asghari responds by resignifying the veil: "In the Mutiny time our family took refuge in a village where there was no custom of the *purdah*. . . . But . . . I observed such a modesty and propriety of demeanour among those women—going about as they did, as I would that God might grant to us women of the *purdah*."³⁸ This view of *purdah* suggests that the materiality of the practice should be irrelevant to a pious woman whose internalization of norms of modesty veil her more than any physical barrier. This reading separates the form of *purdah* from its meaning: in form it is merely custom, but in meaning it is the inhabitation of propriety and modesty.

Asghari's actions exemplify the way the inhabitation of these norms of propriety and modesty enable her agency. In accordance with *sharif* norms of propriety, she refuses payment for Husnara's education, and in doing so puts herself on an equal social footing with Husnara's family. When it is time for Mahmuda to be married, Asghari uses their social equality as leverage to arrange her marriage to Husnara's brother, Dildar Jahan. When the family objects to the match because of their unequal economic status, Asghari retorts, "Begam sahib, I simply made a proposal on behalf of the girl's marriage. I left no message that there was any girl for sale. Although the code of morals in this city has greatly deteriorated, I have never yet heard of a betrothal being made a mercantile transaction."³⁹ By linking the financial arrangements of the betrothal to deteriorating morality, Asghari effectively uses reformist arguments against dowry to make her case. This also acts as a shaming device because it likens this marriage practice to prostitution, a "mercantile transaction," which flouts the conventions of *sharif* society. Note that in both instances Asghari uses *sharif* norms of respectability to arrange Mahmuda's marriage into a wealthy and noble family.

Once Mahmuda establishes herself in Dildar Jahan's home, Asghari uses her influence over Mahmuda to control large sums of money: "All this time Asghari has been living in a state of poverty. As the proverb says: 'Without clothes no woman can go bathing; what is she to *wring out*?' But *now*, God keep her! Power and affluence have fallen to her lot. The fullest scope and opportunity have been given her for the exercise of her administrative tact and ingenuity. The things which she achieved under these conditions—for all that she was a woman—will no doubt remain in the world as memorials of her to the last day."⁴⁰

The third-person omniscient narrator's analogy between money and clothing is instructive because it locates power within a woman's habitus. While it might seem that bathing is best done without clothes, for a *purdah-nasheen* woman, bathing must be done with her clothes on because they maintain her modesty and simultaneously indicate her social status.

This analogy exemplifies the nature of Asghari's power. In this instance her actions produce a specifically feminine form of power, which is located in the habitus of the *zenana*. Just as bathing needs clothes that can be wrung out, a woman needs money that ostensibly does not belong to her to exercise power. In other words, a woman needs to maintain the illusion that she is financially dependent on a man, which marks her respectability and modesty (hence the analogy to clothes), as she wields power.⁴¹

It is evident that the *zenana* was far from being the Orientalist confining prison envisioned by imperialists or the repository of orthodox Islamic culture espoused by the traditional reformists (the Deobandis). Instead the *zenana* became the space for the articulation of a specifically new Muslim and feminine form of agency in which the norms of *purdah* were used to garner social and political power within the home and the world. Asghari's inhabitation of norms of modesty brings the politics of the world into the home and thus radically challenges the signification of the *zenana* as a space of seclusion.

RETHINKING MUSLIM MODERNITY

At the end of *Son of the Moment*, Hujjat-ul-Islam berates Ibn-ul-Vaqt for aping Englishmen. He advises him to return to the fold, for true reform can come about only when Muslims retain their culture: "If we wish to repair a house, it does not mean that we should raze it to the ground and build a new house instead. In the same way, reform of Muslims will be called a reform only when they remain Muslims, that is, they follow the religion of their ancestors, and when they are distinguished as Muslims even at a distance by their very appearance."⁴² Here the Muslim *quam* (community) is likened to a house, a significant spatialization of church and state. Like the Bengali *bhadralok*, the home becomes the sphere of Muslim culture, here defined explicitly as Islam, and its primary inhabitant, the *purdah-nasheen* woman, becomes a symbol of Islamic virtue. Similarly the Muslim reformers

believed that no matter what changes were implemented in the world outside, no matter how much Ibn-ul-Vaqt was forced to adopt the manners and customs of the British, the home and its primary inhabitant, the *purdah-nasheen* woman, would remain a repository of Islam, and she would save the Muslim man through her spirituality.

This dichotomy of home and the world rests on the assumption that the house of the *quam* is indeed in need of repair. In other words, the formula for reform works only if the Muslim *quam* has been corrupted by the immorality of its poetry and the licentiousness of its woman. However, as I have argued, the social reform novels have a vexed relation to these critiques of Muslim society and the project of reform is fraught and confused. Consequently the dichotomy of the home and the world in these novels is riddled with contradictions.

In *The Story of Mubtala* the unveiled courtesan enters the home and becomes the narrative double of the wife, excelling her in household tasks and in her control over the patriarch. The courtesan's presence challenges the notion of the home as the space of asexual spirituality, for it is now permeated by the courtesan's sexual desires, indicated by her acquaintance with poetry and men. Thus her presence calls into question the boundedness of the home, as the skills of the brothel are used to transform the *zenana*, and the home consequently becomes the site of the unhome.

Similarly in *The Bride's Mirror* Asghari's tactics challenge the notion of the home as the space of sacrosanct spirituality, removed from the world. Her machinations in arranging Mahmuda's marriage and her subsequent use of Mahmuda's money to effect changes in the world bring the world into the space of the home. In addition her maneuvers to increase her husband's salary and ensure his job suggest that her influence extends into the world.

These articulations of agency subvert the boundaries of the home and the world. In doing so they reconfigure the relation between the private and the public, the personal and the political, that undergirds the dichotomy of the home and the world. These acts of agency resignify the personal, the space of the *zenana*, as always already political and simultaneously suggest that the political outside is implicated in the dynamics of the home. In this the novels suggest an alternative Muslim modernity, one in which the erotic and religious is intimately tied to the political.

Poetry, Piety, and Performance

*The Politics of Modesty in M. H. Ruswa's
Umrao Jaan Ada and Junun-e-Intezaar*

As discussed in chapter 4, in the late nineteenth century two different perspectives on the courtesan and her role in Urdu literary culture wrestled to gain ground. These perspectives were moored to ideological debates on the status of Urdu poetry, which underwent critical scrutiny in the aftermath of the Revolt of 1857. By the mid-nineteenth century the power of the Mughals, the traditional patrons of the arts, had declined considerably. Awadh, with its center at Lucknow, became the hub of literary and artistic culture. The nawabs of Awadh were known for their patronage of the arts and received scholars, painters, and architects from Delhi and Iran at their courts. Lucknow is the birthplace of several new art forms, such as *kathak* (a dance form) and *thumri* and *khayal* (derived from Hindustani classical music), which were made famous by the courtesans of Lucknow, who performed for the nawabs in their homes and at their *kothas* (brothels). It was customary for nawabs to have a courtesan or two in their pay, a sign that the nawabs had arrived in polite society.

As Pritchett argues, this was also the heyday of Urdu and Persian poetry, as the Mughal Court in Delhi and the nawabs of Awadh patronized poets of all stripes, including courtesans. Courtesans were highly regarded for their skill in the *ghazal*, monorhymed lyric poetry, in both Persian and Urdu.¹ The foremost poet of this century, Ghalib (1797–1869), speaks highly of his association with a courtesan who was a connoisseur of poetry and a poet in her own right.² This was also the

moment when Urdu literary poetics was articulated as a critical tradition, distinct from Persian and Indic poetry.

In Urdu poetics, poetry is the self-conscious articulation of a poetic voice, in which the *mazmun*, or subject of the *ghazal*, is split off from the *ma'ni*, or meaning of the *ghazal*. Faruqi writes, “The recognition of the poem being splittable in ‘What is it about?’ [*mazmun*] and ‘What does it mean?’ [*ma'ni*] meant that the poet could assume any persona—now it was not, for instance, Vali the person, who was speaking in the poem, but there was a voice, and Vali the poet was only the articulator of that voice.”³ This delightful split between subject and meaning alters the ontological status of the lover and the beloved into ideal types. The lover suffers madness because his beloved is cruel and indifferent, caring nothing for him. This is an articulation of a poetic voice, and the poet herself or himself is not implicated as the subject of the voice. This meant that while the poet might write poetry about love, erotic encounters, and madness, she did not necessarily live in a state of intoxicated licentiousness.

Unfortunately this critical poetic framework was ignored in the reformist zeal unleashed after the Revolt of 1857. The British viewed Urdu poetry as decadent and immoral because they read it through the same literary-critical lens that they used for their own poetry, namely Wordsworthian Romanticism, ignoring the conceptions of poetry internal to the Urdu literary tradition. Hence for them the subject of the poem was the poet’s own personal vision of the world, and from this they concluded that Urdu poets were a morally decadent, depraved lot. As purveyors of this art, courtesans came under the same punitive scrutiny and were regarded as immoral and licentious. As Inderpal Grewal argues, the courtesan or “nautch-girl” of the colonial imagination represented the dark, illicit mysteries of the East. The civilizing mission of empire thus involved disciplining courtesans’ sexuality, a mission that was mirrored in the rhetoric of social reformers of the period.

Grewal suggests that this move to “civilize” “Eastern” women was grounded in the colonial desire to “make them less opaque, to strip them of their veils, and to remove them from harems where they lived lives hidden from the European male.”⁴ The veiled woman’s invisibility to the European male was thus construed as a threat to the civilizing mission of empire. Colonial discourse produced the women’s quarters as a “harem” where the veiled woman led a blighted life. Unveiled women who lived outside the home in the brothel represented the erotic

and exotic mysteries of the East and were thus the target of colonial critiques of Indo-Muslim society and the object of Orientalist fantasies.

As discussed in chapter 4, the reformist novels of the Aligarhists Nazir Ahmad and Hali have trouble articulating a coherent reformist agenda. While these novelists concurred that the veiled, respectable woman should be taught codes of conduct that would enable her to become a better Islamic subject and that the veil was a symbol of women's adherence to Islamic tenets of modesty and piety, they were more ambivalent about the courtesan. They agreed that the unveiled courtesan was the "other" to the respectable veiled woman because she wrote and recited erotic *ghazals* that betrayed her education, her familiarity with men, and her sexual desires, all of which made her impious and immodest. But they had trouble accommodating her within a reformed Islamic society.

As Devji explains, prior to colonialism the public was the space for Islam, but with the advent of colonial rule the public was characterized by secularism.⁵ Consequently Islam had to move into the sphere of the private, which had hitherto been marked as pagan. Thus the Aligarh movement was characterized by an anxiety to re-Islamize the private sphere of the *zenana* through education so that the respectable woman could retain the core values of Islam, which were being eroded in the public. Within this context the *kotha* took on the eroticized elements of the *zenana* and became the socially sanctioned counterpoint to the women's quarters of the respectable home.

In this chapter I argue for an alternative conception of the courtesan that deconstructs the Aligarh reformers' dichotomy between the modest, pious woman in *purdah* and the immodest, unchaste, impious courtesan through a close reading of two novels by Mohammed Hadi Ruswa: *Umrao Jaan Ada* (1899) and *Junun-e-Intezaar ya'ni Fasana-e-Mirza Ruswa* (The Madness of Waiting: The Story of Mirza Ruswa, 1899).⁶ These novels perform Islamic modesty while simultaneously acknowledging sexual desire, and the modesty-desiring yet sexual courtesan disrupts both reformist and imperialist notions of the home and, by extension, of the nation. I chose these novels because, although they were written several decades after the Revolt of 1857, both are situated in the literary and cultural milieu of Lucknow before the Revolt and in the period immediately following it, and thus they reflect the tensions between the two perspectives of the courtesan and Urdu poetry.

The novel *Umrao Jaan Ada* is a fictionalized biography of the courtesan Umrao Jaan, who narrates the events of her life to an interlocutor,

Mirza Ruswa. (I refer to him thus to distinguish him from the author, whom I refer to as M. H. Ruswa or simply Ruswa.) In the course of the novel we learn that she is a poet of some renown herself and takes on the *takhallus* (pen name) Ada (“coquetry”). The novel has a loose episodic narrative structure in which we learn of Umrao Jaan’s affairs with various men, as well as the affairs of her sister courtesans, Bismillah Jaan and Khurshid Jaan. It ends with Umrao Jaan abandoning the life of the courtesan and living as a respectable woman of modest means.

The story of Umrao Jaan’s interaction with Mirza Ruswa does not end with the conclusion of the novel but continues in *Junun-e-Intezaar* (The Madness of Waiting), supposedly authored by Umrao Jaan herself but in reality published by Ruswa as an April Fool’s joke to capitalize on the success of *Umrao Jaan Ada*.⁷ In this novella Umrao Jaan tells her audience that Ruswa has disgraced her by publishing the memoirs of her life without her permission and that the novella is an attempt to avenge herself. She claims to have come upon the intimate details of Mirza Ruswa’s private life in a *mathnavi* called *Naala-e-Ruswa* (The Lament of Ruswa), in which he narrates the story of his love affair with Sophia, an Anglo-French woman who eventually abandons him and leaves for Paris.⁸

In both works Umrao Jaan emerges as a cultured and educated woman, well versed in the art of poetry and flirtation. It is tempting to see her as a nostalgic portrayal of the cultured, sophisticated courtesan of pre-1857 Lucknow who enjoyed the company of men and reveled in Urdu poetry.⁹ Yet this idealized picture is disturbed by the narrative construction of Umrao Jaan as also a modesty-desiring subject who decries her profession and occasionally laments her fate.

I suggest that these are ideologically fraught texts that battle disparate views of the courtesan and Urdu poetry through their discursive production of the courtesan. Spivak posits the “rhetoricity of a text” as a “way to the political, not just of plot summary and characterology as ‘representation.’ It is a consideration of the rhetorical dimension of *Heremakhonon*, then, that has allowed us to think of the text as a historically irreducible *vis-à-vis* of subaltern ‘memories.’”¹⁰ Similarly I argue that the “rhetorical dimension” of both *Umrao Jaan Ada* and *The Madness of Waiting* is crucial to untangling the political representation of the courtesan. As literary texts their narrative and poetic structures are necessarily implicated in the battle of literariness, that is, the status of Urdu poetry and the status of the courtesan as a performer

of poetry. Thus rhetoricity here maps onto the poetic text and narrative strategy of both novels.

The rhetoricity of the text constructs Umrao Jaan as an ostensibly modesty-desiring subject in each of her three roles in the novels: narrator, poet, and courtesan. I read the rhetoricity of the text as an act of veiling that allows the plot and character to frame Umrao Jaan as a performer of poetry (poet), of love (courtesan), and of text (narrator and author) while shielding her from the negative connotations of immodesty associated with this performance.

As has been widely argued by feminist scholars, the veil itself has shifting significations within narratives of agency. Early feminists such as Katherine Mayo condemned it as a practice of sexual segregation that perpetuated patriarchal sexual control over women and their bodies.¹¹ This view has been challenged by postcolonial feminists who assert that the changing signification of veiling in different contexts and societies makes it difficult to signify it as a mere symbol of oppression.¹² Although radically opposed in their perception of the location of feminist agency, both views of the veil reinforce the notion that resistance, to the veil or through the veil, is essential in formulations of feminist agency.

As discussed in chapter 4, in the context of the social reform movements the veil moved from symbolizing women's erotic power to becoming a symbol of women's seclusion. I invoke both of these meanings; I understand veiling as an aesthetic and corporeal practice that enables the discursive site of the courtesan to be constructed by both sexuality and piety. In other words, Umrao Jaan's veiling (I speak here not merely of character but also, to return to my earlier point, of the poetic and narrative register) enables her to be both a sexual, sensuous courtesan and a pious subject; it is a rearticulation of social norms of modesty through the very constructs that signify licentiousness. Just as Asghari in *The Bride's Mirror* resignifies the norms of veiling through the politics of inhabitation, the corporeal and poetic inhabitation of practices of veiling radically resignify the meaning of veiling.

I look first to the performative aspects of the nonpoetic text of both works, arguing that the plots act as pretexts for their own narration. Thus, although the plots cast Umrao Jaan as narrator and author, through a variety of narrative techniques, such as layered narration and first-person declamations, she is constructed as a moral, modest subject. In this case the narrative strategy acts as a veil that shields her from the gaze of her male reader and thus explicates her modesty.

Further, the poetic text of both works constructs Umrao Jaan as a high-class Urdu poet who is familiar with the work of literary greats such as Ghalib and Mir. However, her verses shy away from the eroticism evident in their verses. Instead the poetic text performs a metaphoric veiling that is closely aligned with the Islamic ideals of the reformers. Through this the courtesan is created as an educated, sexually aware yet pious subject.

Last, in the context of Urdu poetics, the courtesan's performance of coquetry—both in terms of the narrative staging of this performance and the poetic performance of coquetry—acts as a literary veil that shields the speaker (the courtesan-poet in this instance) from the covetous gaze of the lover, even as they seduce the lover (and the audience).

Thus the rhetoricity of the text suggests practices of veiling that differ significantly from those prescribed by the Aligarh and Deoband reformers but which are ironically closer to the signification of the veil as an embodiment of modesty. This textual production of the courtesan as a sexually aware yet pious subject destabilizes the reformers' notion of the home (and, by extension, the Muslim nation) as the space of the asexual sacred and the world as the space of the illicit and immoral. It calls for an affective reconfiguring of the home as nation to include the sexual as an integral part of the sacred.

NARRATIVE PERFORMATIVITY AND MODESTY

Set in the literary and cultural milieu of pre-1857 Lucknow but grounded in the realities of Lucknowi society at the end of the nineteenth century, Ruswa's novels must reconcile two very different perspectives of the courtesan and her role in society. As an educated, public woman who is not veiled and freely interacts with men, Umrao Jaan is susceptible to the accusation of immodesty by her late nineteenth-century readers. The narrative strategy of the novels reconciles this dilemma through genre and narration. More specifically, the subject of the novels (the life of a courtesan) is reconciled with the morality of its readers through a narrative veil that protects Umrao Jaan from immodesty.

At this historical moment the life of a courtesan could be rendered in any one of four genres. In Urdu the two primary genres for this were the didactic novel of reformers such as Hali and Ahmad, which openly condemned courtesans as illicit and immoral, and novels in the genre of *rekhti*, usually lewd, licentious accounts of the sexual experiences

of women.¹³ Similarly the Victorian novel could be divided into the haute literary novel written by Dickens and Thackeray and the cheap, sensationalist novel, popularly known as the “penny dreadful,” manufactured weekly for popular entertainment. While the didactic novel of the reformers and the haute Victorian novel condemn prostitutes to a life of penury and decrepitude, the penny dreadful and *rekhti* dwell with glee on the lascivious details of the prostitute’s sexual escapades.

The first extant review of *Umrao Jaan Ada* claims that the novel is loosely based on G. W. M. Reynolds’s *Rosa Lambert*, a Victorian penny dreadful wildly popular at the time.¹⁴ In this novel a young woman, Rosa Lambert, is abducted from her father’s house by villains and sold into prostitution. The subsequent events delve into the moral dilemmas of the protagonist as Rosa attempts but fails to preserve her “honor” from being sullied by rogues, dandies, and other immoral men. As is common to this genre, the novel vacillates between Rosa’s lamentations of her tragic fate and lascivious details of her transgressions.

Although the circumstances of Umrao Jaan’s abduction are similar to Rosa’s, the protagonists differ quite considerably in morality. It would be easy to read Ruswa’s novels as *rekhti*, not only because the protagonist is a courtesan but also because the novel is narrated from her perspective; that is, for the most part the novel is narrated in a first-person female voice. I suggest, however, that this is not the case because of the layered narrative structure of both *Umrao Jaan Ada* and *The Madness of Waiting*.

The preface of *Umrao Jaan Ada* acts as a narrative frame for the rest of the novel. The first pages depict a *mushaira* (poetry gathering), in which a group of men recite poetry. Mirza Ruswa, the narrator, is among them and recites a *shair* (a monorhymed couplet) to the acclaim of his all-male audience. Umrao Jaan is not present but lives in the next house and happens to overhear his recitation. She exclaims her approval but does not show herself. When urged by the others to join their party, she refuses and sends a message to Mirza Ruswa asking him to see her privately. When they meet she explains her refusal: “I couldn’t help myself shouting out in praise. I heard someone calling me to join you, but modesty forbade me. I thought it better to keep silent, but finally I was unable to restrain myself.”¹⁵ This tension between voice and silence is symptomatic of the politics of modesty that pervades the novel. Umrao Jaan’s profession as a courtesan enables her to be a connoisseur of poetry and a speaking subject, while her desire to conform to the norms of modesty silences her.¹⁶

This conflict between voice and silence is resolved through the narrative frame. A first-person narratorial voice gives primacy to Umrao Jaan's experiences and establishes her agency as a speaking subject, but the novel uses the narrator as an interlocutor who shields her from the gaze of the reader. Umrao Jaan's narrative voice is thus doubly mediated—first by Ruswa the author, and then by Mirza Ruswa the narrator. She is thus shielded from the reader, who is also imagined as male, given the context of late nineteenth-century *sharif* society. (The existence of reform movements to promote women's education and literacy suggests that the reading public was largely composed of men, who had access to education.) In signifying the reader as male, the novel's narrative strategy fuses the violating male gaze of Umrao Jaan's audience with the gaze of the imagined reader, who also threatens to unveil her through his scopophilic gaze.

The poetic text and narrative strategies of *The Madness of Waiting* also act as veils, shielding the courtesan from the public eye. The frontispiece accords authorship to Umrao Jaan Ada. From the outset, then, Umrao Jaan as author and as public woman is strategically veiled by textuality.

The preface rehearses a similar dynamic. Umrao Jaan (character, narrator, and, here, ostensible author) tells her audience that Mirza Ruswa has disgraced her by publishing the memoirs of her life without her permission and that the work they are about to read is her revenge. She establishes her credentials for this task by composing a verse that demonstrates her skill as a poet. Although the Urdu poetic tradition demands a distinction between poet and persona, because the verse so closely mirrors the text of the narrator it is possible to read it as a presentation of the narrator's intentions:

Dushnaam dey key mujhko buhut khush na ho jaiyey
*Kiaa keejyey aap jo meri zubaan khulee*¹⁷

Be not too contented, having cursed me just so,
 What would you do, if my tongue had been a bit looser like
 yours?¹⁸

The first line reiterates the poet's desire for modesty: Mirza Ruswa has "cursed" Umrao Jaan by publishing her story, making public the intimate details of her life and ruining her reputation. The second line, however, throws into question the claim of the modesty-desiring

persona. Here the persona threatens to avenge herself by loosening her tongue, that is, by revealing the intimate details of Mirza Ruswa's life. This contradicts the notion of the modest subject, who, according to the reformers, veils herself and would not publicly contest the defamation of her character. We see here a troubling contradiction: the persona of the verse claims that she has been ruined because her life has been made public, but to avenge herself she will have to reenter the very same sphere of the public.

This tension is resolved by narrative layering. As the novella opens, Umrao Jaan tells the reader that she began investigating Mirza Ruswa through his servants and well-wishers. One day, while searching his house, she chanced upon *The Lament of Ruswa*, wherein Mirza Ruswa narrates the story of his scandalous love affair with Sophia. From this point on, *Junun-e-Intezaar* is largely the text of *Naala-e-Ruswa* with occasional interjections by Umrao Jaan (the narrator). Umrao Jaan (as author) can expose Ruswa without herself being exposed in the process. In other words, the layered narrative structure of this text acts as a veil in that it shields her from the direct gaze of the reader through the elaborate artifice of the *mathnavi*, for it is not her but the *mathnavi* that exposes the intimate details of Mirza Ruswa's life. Moreover the device of the *mathnavi* allows the narration of a rather scandalous story without any of the scandal attaching to its presenter, for she (as author) merely makes available an already extant narrative.

Both *Umrao Jaan Ada* and *The Madness of Waiting* make available the speaking subject of the courtesan through a narrative veil—whether it is the interlocutor Mirza Ruswa of the former or the *mathnavi* authored by Mirza Ruswa in the latter. These narrative strategies perform the task of obscuring Umrao Jaan as author, poet, and narrator, while at the same time allowing her (as character) to claim each of these roles. The rhetoricity of the narrative text thus produces the courtesan as a discursive site that is simultaneously an educated, public subject and a private, modest one.

REKHTA, ISLAM, AND THE POLITICS OF POETRY

In the context of the “poetry wars” or the debate surrounding what constituted “proper” Urdu poetry, the poetic text of these novels assumes great significance. On the one hand, the British-inspired reformers attempted to cleanse Urdu poetry of its moral decadence.

On the other hand, the staunch adherents of the Urdu literary tradition defended the oeuvre of Ghalib, Mir, and Zauq as true Urdu poetry. As discussed earlier, the courtesan's close association with Urdu poetry made her the focal point of these battles.

The poetic text of both novels resolves this debate by creating a schism between form and content: while the poetic text adheres in form to the Urdu poetic tradition, in content the verses are more closely aligned with reformist (and, by extension, Victorian) notions of propriety, piety, and morality. As the speaker or performer of these verses (and the contextual clues in the narrative suggest that we read the speaker as Umrao Jaan and not a poetic voice), Umrao Jaan is produced as a pious subject and as a serious poet working within the Urdu poetic tradition. In this instance the rhetoricity of the poetic text counteracts the immodest courtesan's public recitation of poetry by throwing a veil of modesty and piety, as it were, over the performance.

In the preface to *Umrao Jaan Ada*, Mirza Ruswa cajoles Umrao Jaan to join the poetry gathering composed wholly of men. When she arrives she is pressed to recite a *ghazal*, which she does after much protestation. One verse from this *ghazal* exemplifies a performance of both piety and literary accomplishment:¹⁹

*Kaabe main jaa ke bhool gaya raah der ka
Eeman bach gaya mere maula ne kher ki*

On my visit to the Ka'aba I forgot the road to the
Church
My faith was saved (because) my Lord was merciful.²⁰

The speaker presents us with a dilemma: in line 1 he forgets the road to Christianity on his way to the Ka'aba, the holy shrine of the Muslims; in line 2 the dilemma is resolved because God draws him to the correct path—Islam.

After Umrao Jaan recites the verse, Khan sahib, an alleged connoisseur of poetry, asks why she refers to herself as a male in the verse. An incensed Umrao Jaan retorts by asking Khan sahib whether he thinks she is only capable of composing *rekhti*. Khan sahib responds by saying that only *rekhti* befits a woman. Sukrita Paul Kumar reads Umrao Jaan's response as an instance of "false consciousness": "Though Umrao herself is a woman and poet in her own right, her assertion that she would not want to write in the feminine idiom or language, shows

how she has internalized the male poetic conventions and assumptions, accepting male hegemony of language.”²¹

However, Umrao Jaan’s assumption of the male poetic voice is not an internalization of “male poetic conventions” when read within the literary and cultural milieu of the novel. As I mentioned, *rekhti* as a genre was largely associated with ribald stories about the affairs of courtesans penned by male Urdu writers in the female voice. By the late nineteenth century works composed in this genre were associated with *begumati zaban* (women’s language) or the language of prostitutes. Khan sahib becomes a mouthpiece for reformist rhetoric in his insistence that, as a courtesan, Umrao Jaan must compose verse in *rekhti*.

Umrao Jaan’s refusal to compose *rekhti* is not a disavowal of “feminine idiom or language” but rather the assertion of a poetic presence. This is because the normative voice of Urdu poetry, *rekhta*, is always male, and the adoption of a male voice was a common practice among both male and female Urdu poets from the eighteenth century onward.²² The adoption of the normative male voice suggests that the poem clearly conforms to Urdu poetic conventions. Hence its speaker is a serious poet (Umrao Jaan) working within the haute Urdu literary tradition.

The content of the poem similarly aligns itself with both the Urdu literary tradition and the agenda of the reformers. The *mazmun* (theme) of the verse I have quoted is quite clearly inspired by the verses of the great nineteenth-century *ghazal* poet Ghalib. He writes:

*iimaa;N mujhe roke hai jo khai;Nche hai mujhe kufr
ka((bah mire piichhe hai kaliisaa mire aage*

faith/integrity stops me, {since / while / in that}
infidelity/unbelief draws me on
the Ka’aba is behind me; the church, before me²³

In the first line the speaker presents us with an enigmatic statement. We imagine faith and disbelief as tangible objects, ropes perhaps, that tug at him from opposite directions. We learn that this is a crisis of faith only in line 2, when the speaker discloses that the Ka’aba is behind him, exerting its forceful influence on his being, literally stopping him in his tracks, while the Church entices him onward. Unlike the speaker of Ruswa’s text, this speaker does not explicitly state his choice. Ghalib sets up the dilemma with far greater eloquence than Ruswa’s narrator,

Umrao Jaan, yet the *mazmun* and the *ma'ani* (meaning) are too similar to be merely coincidental. It is clear that the verse in Ruswa's novel draws on Ghalib's. This riffing off the master poet signifies not only its speaker's accomplishment as a poet but also her familiarity with the Urdu literary and critical tradition.

Hali, the student and biographer of Ghalib, suggests that this verse was inspired by Ghalib's encounter with British derision of Indo-Muslim society: "One day in my presence he [Ghalib] expressed extreme regret at [an incident that showed the disgrace of Muslims] and said, 'There's nothing of Muslimness in me, so I don't know why I feel such grief and regret over the disgrace of Muslims.' But since his temperament was extremely mischievous [*sho;x*], when any hot [*garm*] idea occurred to him, he couldn't stand not to express it, even if people considered him an infidel or a rake or an apostate."²⁴ This incident suggests that Ghalib perceived the British as a threat to Indo-Muslim society. In this context the verse can also be read as the predicament of the colonial subject—caught between the "modernizing" impulse of the British state, with its dictate to have a new and revised Urdu poetry, and the draw of Indo-Muslim literary culture, with its traditional *mazmuns* of love and eroticism. While Ghalib's speaker does not make a decisive choice between the two, Umrao Jaan's speaker is drawn to the correct path.

What does the "correct path" refer to? Is it the path of Islam? Or is the meaning of the verse more allusive, and does the correct path refer to an entire culture of writing Urdu poetry? If we take the first to be the case, then the *mazmun* of the verse is Islamic piety, and the *ma'ani* is a crisis of faith. A visit to the Ka'aba reinstalls the speaker's faith in Islam and makes him forget the Church, which is a metonym for the proselytizing Christian missionaries.²⁵ Just as the Ka'aba reinducts the Muslim man into the fold of Islam, the Muslim man re-Islamizes the Muslim woman through his careful guidance and support.

As Faisal Devji argues, the Muslim man threatened by colonialism sought to reestablish his sovereignty by re-Islamizing the world of the *zenana*, for the anxiety surrounding Muslim manhood could be countered only by "hegemonically incorporating the youth and the woman into the new *sharif* polity by education or Islamization."²⁶ Thus the male speaker of Umrao Jaan's verse becomes an agent for the larger project of Islamizing the women's quarters. In assuming this male poetic voice, Umrao Jaan aligns herself with the ideals of the Aligarh movement and, in doing so, is implicated in the codes of conduct that define the Muslim male's relationship to the *zenana*. Alternatively the

verse could be read as a response to colonial attempts to reform Urdu poetry. Here the “correct path” would be an embrace of the Urdu and Persian poetic tradition, which had hitherto been the languages of high culture but were being challenged by the British.²⁷

I suggest Ruswa’s verse encompasses both these readings for, given the context of the Ghalib verse I quoted, the Islamist reading is not incompatible with the reformist agenda, and its adherence to the Urdu poetic tradition is reinforced by its form. Thus the rhetoricity of the poetic text acts as a veil that allows its speaker to enter the space of the public even as it shields her from it. Her embodiment of respectability troubles the assumptions of her society because she uses that which makes her immodest, namely her education in literature and literary form, to perform her modesty.

THE COURTESAN’S PERFORMANCE OF LOVE

In addition to being a performer of poetry, the courtesan is also, by definition, a performer of coquetry. How do we reconcile her role as a performer of coquetry with the politics of modesty? Umrao Jaan interrupts the narration of her life story with meditative expositions on the courtesan as a performer of coquetry. These expositions can be read as verbal stagings of the veil, as articulations of modesty that are self-consciously performative. Following this the poetic text that she recites as part of her public performances (and hence as enactments of coquetry), read through the lens of Urdu poetics, is a performative act that dissembles coquetry and is in fact an articulation of modesty.

In *Umrao Jaan Ada*, Umrao Jaan openly confesses to her interlocutor, Mirza Ruswa, that a courtesan is expected to perform love or coquetry to beguile clients: “I have followed the profession of a courtesan, and there is a saying about people like us that when we wish to pull a man into our net, we die for him. . . . Heaving long sighs, weeping and beating our breasts . . . these are all tricks of the trade . . . but I can tell you truthfully that I have never really been in love with anyone nor anyone with me.”²⁸ Here she explicitly foregrounds the courtesan’s coquetry as a performance. While the text describes in some detail the performances of her sister courtesan Bismillah Jaan, who manages to garner much money and fame through her coquetry, demanding hearts only to break them, it does not depict Umrao Jaan engaging in any “tricks of the trade”—no sighing, weeping, or beating of the breast.

How, then, do we read this narrative interlude? If coquetry is a dissimulation of love, then by disavowing love at the close of the interlude the text disengages Umrao Jaan from both the dissimulation of love and love itself. From the reformers' perspective, love is wholly unnecessary in the marital relation and should be assiduously avoided at all costs by the respectable woman. As I argued in chapter 4, in Ahmad's *The Bride's Mirror* the respectable woman need only be literate and well-versed in household arts and possess knowledge of the Quran. Knowledge of Persian tales of romance such as *Laila-Mejnun* and *Alif-Laila*, which described love as an all-consuming madness, were unnecessary and in fact harmful for the veiled woman for they were likely to give her fanciful ideas about love and romance. And from the reformist perspective, no veiled woman should be so immodest as to fall in love, for an Islamic marriage was based on a clear demarcation of gender roles and did not need anything as frivolous as love to be successful.

As a courtesan Umrao Jaan is educated in Persian tales of romance so that she may be well versed in the art of professing love. However, since she is also educated in the Quran, she is able to recognize that the love portrayed in the Persian tales is fanciful and morally deleterious: "Men and women do love each other, but in love there is often an element of self-interest. Selfless love like that of Laila and Majnu, Shirin and Farhad, only exists in tales. People say that love cannot be one sided. I have even seen this with my own eyes, but I think we must regard it as a kind of aberration. And why should it be necessary for men and women to be crazy?"²⁹ In this exposition on love Umrao Jaan dismisses undying love as the stuff of fiction, which is not manifest in the real world. From her own experience in the business of love, she regards love as an "aberration," a frivolous pursuit wholly unnecessary for a successful marriage or, in her case, a successful liaison with a client. The prose here is staged as an echo of reformist rhetoric that considers love to be an infectious madness, and the rhetoricity of the narrative stages the norm of modesty through the disavowal of love. As Butler argues in the context of the creation and sustenance of gender norms, "The norm of sex takes hold to the extent that it is 'cited' as such a norm, but it also derives its power through the citations that it compels."³⁰ In this case the norm of modesty derives its power through its "citations," the disavowal of love.

The final chapter of the novel enacts this staging more fully. The first half functions as a retrospective account of the courtesan's life. Umrao Jaan discusses the meaning of her life as a courtesan and gives

us an account of her failures and disappointments. In the second half she praises her sisters in *pardah* and concludes by saying that although she regrets her profession, she has learned no other way to earn her livelihood. This second half is a meditation on the morality of the courtesan's life in the context of social reformist notions of the moral respectable subject.

Once again there is a discussion of love and respectability. In the instance cited earlier, Umrao Jaan declares that since love is a courtesan's profession, she can never fall in love, for being in love would interfere with the performance of love. However, in this instance love appears not as disavowal or dissimulation but rather as the prized reserve of the virtuous: "My poor, simple prostitutes! Never entertain the false hope that any man will ever love you with a true heart. The lover who gives his body and soul to you will depart in a few days. . . . Only the virtuous, who see one face and never turn to another, will have the pleasure of true love."³¹ Love is the prerogative of the "virtuous," defined by the reformers as the respectable women of the *zenana* who "never turn to another." The courtesan, however, will be abandoned by her lover, and in this she becomes the "other" to the respectable veiled woman, a reinforcement of the reformist rhetoric on the courtesan.

I suggest an alternative reading in keeping with the literariness of the narrative itself. The courtesan, abandoned by her lover, inhabits the discursive space of the quintessential lover of Urdu poetry, who pines and mopes for her fickle, heartless love. The invocation of this trope suggests that the courtesan's suffering has less to do with the immorality of her profession than with the nature of romantic (as opposed to conjugal) love, a trope that abounds in the *ghazal* universe and one with which the courtesan as a poet is familiar. The staging of this text as advice to the courtesan suggests that to maintain her modesty the courtesan unites the performance of coquetry required by her profession with the performativity inherent in the Urdu poetic tradition.

To unravel the textures of this subject formation I turn to the poetic text of Umrao Jaan's public performances, wherein the performativity inherent in the Urdu poetic tradition intersects with the courtesan's performance to produce a modesty-desiring subject. As I explained earlier, the Urdu poetic tradition insists on a split between subject and meaning. Faruqi gestures to the eighteenth-century poet Mir's deployment of the tension between subject and meaning in his *ghazals*. In Mir's poetry the subject of the *ghazal* could be love professed to a young boy;

however, this did not necessarily mean that the poet was professing love to a young boy. This is because the purpose of poetry was to throw “a veil over the real utterance, or speech . . . which remains unheard and unrevealed. Poetry veils the true utterance, and dissembling is the true art of the poet.”³²

This dynamic is at play in Umrao Jaan’s public performance as a courtesan. Her first public performance as a poet-entertainer is simultaneous with her initiation into the profession. The convergence of these two events results in a *ghazal* whose subject is love—the most common trope of the *ghazal* tradition and of course a mark of the courtesan’s profession. The speaker of the *ghazal* expresses the trials and tribulations she endures for falling in love with an indifferent lover:

ishq maiN hasrat-e dil ka tou nikalna kaisa
dam nikalne maiN bhee kambakht maza hota hai

What shall I say of the pleasures of fulfilled desires
In love, there is pleasure even in dying!³³

In the first line the verb *nikalna* (literally, to leave) is coupled with the noun *hasrat-e-dil* (the pleasures of the heart) and in this context means the fulfillment of these pleasures. In the second line *nikalna* is coupled with the noun “breath” to connote the leaving of breath, that is, death.

In the context of Umrao Jaan’s profession, this performance of poetry is par for the course. We expect that as a courtesan she will recite such verses to entertain men. In the novel this verse has the effect of beguiling Nawab sahib, a wealthy aristocrat who subsequently becomes her lover. The performance of the verse gives the appearance of a substance, what Butler calls “a constructed identity, a performative accomplishment which the mundane social audience, including the actors themselves, come to believe and to perform in the mode of belief.”³⁴ Butler suggests that there is no ontological subject prior to performance, that the subject is constructed through her performance of discrete acts, both corporeal and discursive, which become her. In this instance we could read the poem, the discursive text, as constructing Umrao Jaan as a courtesan.

However, I suggest that we also take into account the specific characteristics of the discursive text, namely the verse, which must be read within the Urdu poetic tradition, so that the text is itself a performative utterance, here exemplified by the verb *nikalna*. Poetically speaking

the verse implies that for the lover even death is pleasurable because the beloved is the cause of death, and every aspect of the beloved, even the indifference that causes death, becomes a source of pleasure for her. Here *nikalna* connotes both the fulfillment of desire and death, and in fact enables us to equate death with the fulfillment of desire. Although this may seem an excessive expression of love, if the verse is read through the lens of English Romanticism, in the context of the Urdu poetic tradition, the verse merely performs love in the recognized tropes of Urdu poetry.

It is in fact loosely inspired by Ghalib's *divan*, specifically *ghazal* 219: One verse from the *ghazal* illustrates this quite clearly:

*mu;habbat me;N nahii;N hai farq jiine aur marne kaa
usii ko dekh kar jiite hai;N jis kaafir pah dam nikle*

- 1) in love, there's no difference of living and dying
- 2) having seen only/emphatically her, we live—that infidel over whom the breath would “emerge” [and depart]³⁵

Here are similar tropes of love, death, and dying expressed by some of the same words. Once again the performance of the verse hinges on the verb, this time *nikle*, which signifies both departure and emergence. The connotative meaning is that the sight of the beloved enables the lover to live but is also the reason for the lover's death.

The similarity of Umrao Jaan's verse to Ghalib's *ghazal* suggests that the former merely plays out the tropes of love, desire, and death common to the *ghazal* tradition and is not meant to be read as an expression of the poet's desires. This modifies Butler's argument in that the discursive text does not tell us anything about the courtesan's subject formation other than that she is a poet. In other words, the performativity inherent in the verse prevents us from reading it as constitutive of the ontological subject. We cannot know this self; we can only narrativize its effects.

Toward the end of the novel this performance of love is played out in reverse. Umrao Jaan is invited to perform for her friend Ram Pyari, a respectable veiled woman, and discovers that she is married to the nawab, the very man who was once Umrao Jaan's client and lover. The nawab recognizes Umrao Jaan but pretends that he does not. Umrao Jaan likewise feigns ignorance. This incident parallels Umrao Jaan's first performance of poetry in that the actors and the setting are

the same, but the consequences of the performance are different. She recites the following verse:

*tum judaai maiN buhut yaad ayey
maut tum se bhee sawaa yaad aai*

I thought of you much during our separation
I thought of death a little more.³⁶

In this verse Umrao Jaan expresses a trope common to the *ghazal* tradition, that is, that separation from the beloved is like death for the lover. In her study of *ghinnawas*, a Bedouin genre of poetry, Lila Abu-Lughod writes that its formulaic poetic form allowed women “a modest way of communicating immodest sentiments of attachment and an honorable way of communicating the sentiments of dependency.”³⁷ In the context of Umrao Jaan’s profession and the plot of the novel, the verse could be read as a reference to her affair with the nawab and their subsequent parting.

Alternatively one could read the verse as a lament for a lost world, a meaning that exceeds the subject of the verse. In the first line the speaker uses the pronoun *tum* (you), which refers to the lover but could also refer to her life before the abduction, which is lost forever. Knowing she cannot return to the past, she thinks continually of a release from the present in the form of death. In the context of Urdu poetics, neither reading of the verse necessarily implicates its speaker. In other words, this profession of desperation and death in the absence of her lover and her previous life could be read as a semantic play in the context of the *ghazal* tradition, in which the beloved routinely forsakes the lover who bemoans her fate and thus cannot be mapped onto the poet’s own emotions.

How do we read the performativity of the verse with the courtesan’s profession as a performer of coquetry? I invoke Butler’s notion of the speech act as both theatrical and linguistic.³⁸ The poem is at once a linguistic performance in the context of the Urdu *ghazal* and a theatrical performance in the context of Umrao Jaan’s profession as a courtesan. The linguistic level is itself open to contradictory interpretations: while on the one hand it can be read as a profession of love, on the other hand, in the discursive tradition of Urdu poetry, this profession of love has no bearing on its subject. So it is simultaneously a profession and a disavowal of love.

The theatrical setting of the verse as a performance of coquetry adheres to the linguistic level insofar as it is read as a profession of love, but not when it is read as a disavowal of love. This disjuncture between the linguistic and the theatrical level of the speech act produces what Butler calls a “performative contradiction: an act of speech that in its very acting produces a meaning that undercuts the one it purports to make.”³⁹ The verse enacts a performative contradiction in that its performance as an act of coquetry undercuts its meaning entirely. In other words, the performativity of the verse separates the poet from the content of the poem, such that Umrao Jaan’s recitation of the verse is a mere performance of coquetry and is not coextensive with her as a subject.

The narrative and the poetic text concerned with coquetry can be read as a performative contradiction: although the subject of the text is coquetry, its meaning is the opposite: modesty. I read Umrao Jaan’s specifically literary form of veiling as confounding reformist notions of the courtesan educated in literature as immodest and also troubling reformers’ notion of the modest woman. This is because Umrao’s textual *purdah* transforms *purdah* from a material practice of modesty into an internalization of modesty. This practice of *purdah* is closely aligned with the reformist ideal of the veiled woman as one who does not simply veil herself but who embodies Islamic notions of modesty and propriety. The rhetoricity of the text thus produces the courtesan as a modesty-desiring subject through the very tropes that signify her immodesty, namely her profession as a performer of poetry and of coquetry.

THE COURTESAN AND THE NATION

The reformist and imperialist notions of the courtesan imply her unbridled sexual desires, which make her immodest to the nationalist and exotic to the imperialist. What, then, of the modesty-desiring yet sexual courtesan? What space does she occupy in the dichotomy between home and the world?

In *Umrao Jan Ada*, Umrao Jaan’s home is a shadowy space, populated by its mistress and her servants but never specifically described. As we learn from the introduction, this home is not located in the courtesans’ quarters but in a respectable locality. This location is crucial to the narrative for it gives the character access to the interlocutor, Mirza

Ruswa, and the poetry gathering, which becomes the occasion for the novel. For the duration of the novel Umrao Jaan remains in a single room with Mirza Ruswa as she recounts the story of her life. However, this narration sweeps the reader away from the confines of her room (the home) and into the world as Umrao travels both within the city of Lucknow and between cities of the United Provinces (present-day Uttar Pradesh). This travel is enabled by her profession as a courtesan and would have been impossible and inappropriate for any *pardah-nasheen* woman to undertake alone.

This juxtaposition of the stationary narrative present, in which Umrao Jaan is located firmly in a habitus with the peripatetic past, in which “home” is not a space but a location of memory, of archive, suggests that her inhabitation, however precarious, of the material home enables her to narrate home as archive.⁴⁰ And it is in narration and in the site of narration that the home is also reconfigured as a locus for the political. For the act of narration is premised on the notion of the home as the private sphere, and the narration commences on this assumption—Umrao Jaan believes that Ruswa will not make public the details of her life. In this she locates herself squarely in the narrative of the private/public, which structures the life of the *pardah-nasheen* woman.

This structure is violated by the publication of the novel *Umrao Jaan Ada*, and in the penultimate chapter she decries its publication. In narrative terms this metatextual violation of the public/private becomes the pretext for *The Madness of Waiting*. Consequently Umrao Jaan is compelled to move out of the private, the material home and the historical archive of memory, to avenge herself. Paradoxically, in order to preserve her modesty she must necessarily undertake an excursion outside of the confines of the home, the space of respectability, which then casts her as immodest.

The spatial and temporal paradoxes that structure the narrative (the stationary present and the peripatetic past, the move into the corrupt world to protect her honor) suggest that the courtesan cannot be confined to the dichotomy of the home and the world. Rather she exists in a liminal space between the two worlds. This space is the physical structure of the home without a patriarch, a home that is in fact materially sustained by a woman.

Her liminality also extends to her performance of femininity, which does not cohere with the reformist formulation of the courtesan. As Butler explains, “The anticipation of an authoritative disclosure of

meaning is the means by which that authority is attributed and installed: the anticipation conjures its object."⁴¹ The courtesan's performance of an erotic femininity cannot be anticipated because it unfolds temporally through this performance. It thus calls for a radical rethinking of the authoritative narratives of femininity as modesty and for the asexual Islamic nation to include a religiously informed articulation of eroticism. In the final instance it calls for a rewriting of woman as nation from within the affective history of the courtesan.

Toward a Feminist Modernity

The Religious-Erotic Politics of the Modernesque Novel

The specter of Charulata, the protagonist of Rabindranath Tagore's *Nashtanir* (The Broken Nest), haunts this project. In chapter 1 I gestured to Charulata as a figure whose unrealized, inchoate desire for companionship and illicit yet never fully realized liaison with her brother-in-law disrupt nationalist and imperialist models of the asexual, pious woman as the proverbial "angel in the house." Just as Charulata's sexual desires exceed the frame of wifedom set out for her by her society, the figures of the widow, the wife, and the courtesan in the social reform novel disrupt reformist attempts to recuperate "fallen" women, as their agentive practices refuse the narrative trajectory of victimhood so common to the reformist novel.

The social reformers' desire to remake women into bastions of virtue and spirituality was a response to colonial criticisms of Indian society. More problematically this attempt to shore up the Indian "angel in the house" was meant to overturn the colonial relation by creating the home as the site of Indian spirituality, the antithesis to the corrupt world of British politics. However, the ideological drama played out in the social reform novel is fraught with tension, since the protagonists' articulations of agency refuse definitions of the political and the religious that construct the dichotomy of the home and the world. I suggest that this religiously inflected, specifically feminine mode of agency disrupts contemporaneous theorizations of nineteenth-century modernity, which are premised on patriarchal constructions of the political

and the religious. In its stead I offer a paradigm of feminist modernity that draws on my reading of the social reform novel.

This modernity could not be encapsulated within extant literary forms. Thus the Bengali and Urdu novels became the site for an ideological battle about the “reformed” woman and also a site wherein reformer-novelists battled old and new ideas about literary form and, in the case of the Urdu novel, its relation to women’s morality. I redefine the reformist novel as *modernesque* because it innovates with literary form and genre to accommodate new theorizations of modernity. The continuing relevance of these social reform novels is evident in South Asia, where they have been made and remade into films in both the colonial and postcolonial nation. In each of these cinematic iterations we see the nation-state’s anxieties about the “women’s question” at the historical moment of the film’s production.

RETHINKING NATIONALIST DISCOURSE

One of the most influential studies of Indian nationalism is Partha Chatterjee’s *Nationalism: A Derivative Discourse*, where he argues that nationalism in the subcontinent was not, as Benedict Anderson claims, a derivative discourse but rather was defined by its “*difference* with the ‘modular’ forms of the national society propagated by the modern West.”¹ In the Indian context this was manifest in the decidedly spiritual nature of nationalist discourse, which was associated with women. Chatterjee’s theory is well known; less well known is that it is based on Bankimchandra’s colonial history of the nation, in which the (Hindu) Indian nation is essentially spiritual, while the Western world is material. In an essay on Bankimchandra, Chatterjee writes that this was a “cultural ideal which retained what was thought to be distinctively Indian, while subsuming what was valuable in the culture of the West.”² Chatterjee reads Bankimchandra’s work as making a definitive dichotomy between India and the West, perhaps because Chatterjee reads Bankimchandra’s ideas through his role in the colonial state—he was a deputy magistrate by profession and a staunch Hindu Brahman by faith.

I suggest, however, that far from being fixed and mutually exclusive, these identities were in constant flux. We see this in Bankimchandra’s 1879 essay “*Samya*” (Equality), on widow remarriage: “We shall say widow remarriage is neither good or bad; that every widow should

get married is never good, but it is good that all widows should have a right to marry if they so wish.”³ Through complex intellectual convolutions, Bankimchandra decides neither in favor of nor against widow remarriage, a stance that is also visible in the narrative dissolution and ideological incoherence of his widow remarriage novel. His views on colonialism and social reform were by no means ideologically coherent. However, in his formulation of the nation, Chatterjee solidifies Bankimchandra’s tenuous dichotomy between the spiritual East and the material West, transfers it to the inner and outer spheres of Bengali society, and genders it. By remaking Bankimchandra’s ideas, Chatterjee flattens the complexities of nationalist modernity at this historical moment, especially in his account of women’s role in the nation.

Chatterjee’s theory has been very influential for recent theoretical analyses of nationalist modernity, most notably in the work of the historian Dipesh Chakrabarty. Chakrabarty describes an alternative modernity in the nationalist movement in Bengal in which “a religious sensibility [used] a political structure and a political vocabulary as a means to achieve an end . . . in the interest of an imagined life form in which the political could not be told apart from the religious.”⁴ His foremost example is Gandhi’s merging of the religious and the political in his anticolonial tactics—from Gandhi’s use of *khadi* to mobilize the masses to his concern with cleanliness and sanitation. While Chakrabarty allows Gandhi’s religious practice to be read as political, the female figures he analyzes are necessarily apolitical.⁵ This is because Chatterjee’s and Chakrabarty’s theorizations of nationalist modernity share a definition of the political as the domain of men. The political sphere is defined in terms of male homosociality, in which “the power relationships between men and women appear to be dependent on the power relationship between men and men.”⁶ Thus only this limited participation in male institutional structures is conceptualized as political, and women are conceptualized as apolitical.

In the work of Chatterjee and Chakrabarty women’s claim to citizenship in the Hindu or Muslim nation is premised on their spirituality.⁷ Thus women’s spirituality is mobilized as a tool for women’s citizenship in much the same way that secularism became the means for nationalist men’s claim to citizenship in the world. Feminized forms of worship are expunged from Hinduism and replaced with a more scripturally based idea of worship, in which the upper-caste Hindu male served as the conduit through which women could access the divine. In *Anandamath*, for instance, Bankimchandra relies on the upper-caste male

Master to foment political revolt in his disciples (both male and female) and instill in them the virtues of political and spiritual devotion. Perhaps what is most troubling about their theorizations is that they base this idea of the spiritual, feminine, asexual nation on a single strand of Bankimchandra's work, which, as I have argued, struggled to define women's place in the nation. Just as the nineteenth-century imperial feminist project of "soul making" for the British woman necessarily made the "native" woman an object, the nationalist project as theorized by Chatterjee and Chakrabarty invokes women's "spirituality" to erase the troubling markers of their difference—their sexual desires and their lower-class status borne of their servitude in the home—to make them citizens of the home but not of the world.⁸

I have argued that "soul making" is an ideologically fraught project for the social reform novel, as it attempts to account for women's place in the world through the home. By this I mean that the novels attempt to reconcile the orthodox religious doctrine of the world with the heterodox religious practices embraced by women in the home. The female protagonists' articulation of agency through strains of Hindu and Islamic piety that have been discarded from normative Hindu and Muslim versions of spirituality suggests that spirituality becomes a differentiating practice of the self, which foregrounds rather than obliterates their sexual desires and their desire for servitude.

This formulation of the self redefines the religious as not merely a patriarchal system of power that subjects women to male authority but as an ontological formation wherein the subjugation of the self is both desired and necessary for an extension of the self. As Sangari concludes in the context of Mirabai's devotional poetry, this devotional paradigm implies that those who are already subaltern—the *shudras* (untouchables) and women—are closer to reaching god because they are better prepared for the complete subjugation and devotion required from the devotee. Sangari writes that this inversion of subalternity endows the devotee with power: "Because submission is voluntary, and not merely a duty, social behaviours of enforced dependence are displaced and become the qualities of the believer."⁹ By encoding the devotee's *bhakti* in a narrative of choice versus duty, subjugation as voluntary rather than compulsory, Sangari privileges a discourse of free will and choice, which, as Talal Asad and Saba Mahmood describe it, underpins secular, liberal ontologies of the self.¹⁰

From the perspective of a religious ontology of the self, the devotee's devotion is not enacted within the framework of choice and duty but

rather is situated in the affective registers of faith.¹¹ That is, within the framework of Vaishnava devotion, the self is not conceptualized as an individuated subject but as a fragment of a larger divinity.¹² The subject desires to become one with this larger divinity but at the same time to bring this divinity closer to her as an individual. Thus her submission to divine will is threaded through with her own desires, and in this she re-forms submission to make it her own (hence the first-person confessional voice of Mirabai's poetry) and changes it through what I term the politics of inhabitation.

In the context of Islam the subject's agency is contingent on her inhabitation of modesty, which necessitates the subjugation of her own will as an individual to a divine power. In other words, modesty is premised on the devotee's humility before the divine and thus necessarily entails a submission of the self. And because the very act of submission is shot through with her sexuality and her desire for influence in the world, she radically reformulates the reformist paradigm of modesty and makes it her own.

Theorizations of alternative modernities have relied primarily on one religious tradition: nineteenth-century Hinduism. However, the marked similarities in the subject formation of the socially marginalized protagonists of the Bengali and Urdu social reform novels suggest that we need to rethink this framework of alternative modernities. It is not Hinduism or Islam per se that accounts for these dissident subjectivities but rather the subject's own formulation through heterodox norms *and* her social marginalization—as a veiled wife, as a *bhadralok* widow, or as a sexually active courtesan—that exceeds any one set of religious norms. It is precisely the inchoate desires that emanate from the subject—the sexual desires of the widow, the veiled woman's desire for power, and the courtesan's for modesty—which become the terrain of ideological contestation for the male reformers and simultaneously the means by which the women are able to reformulate that which forms them.

The subject's capacity to alter the devotional paradigms she inhabits asserts a reformulation of the religious as always already political. By this I mean that the subject's ability to remake that which makes her is a political act, but one that cannot be understood through the binary of resistance and submission. In the politics of inhabitation the subject is formed through power, but in the act of inhabiting these norms she also changes the structures of power itself; she is in a state of perpetual becoming rather than being.

This radical challenge to power makes these formulations of agency political, but they are not seen as such because the political has been theorized primarily in terms of male access to state institutions and male negotiations of colonial hierarchies of power (see the discussion of the unhomely in the context of the home and world debate in chapter 1). I have drawn attention to feminist understandings of the personal as political: acts of agency within the home are not political merely because they reflect on larger national political processes, which of course they do, but because they engage with the self and its desires.¹³ In this my reading of these novels leads to an alternative feminist conception of nationalist modernity in which the self's erotic-religious desires are always already political.

THE MODERNESQUE NOVEL

The social reform novel, although ostensibly unconcerned with the nationalist movement, was written in response to colonial critiques of the status of Indian women and was thus at least in part a nationalist endeavor. Partha Chatterjee asserts that the fundamental contradiction in Asian and African nationalist discourse was that “the pursuit of nationhood . . . remains trapped within European post-Enlightenment rationalist discourse.”¹⁴ In this context the social reform novel becomes the site for rethinking the contradictions of the nationalist project for it offers a radically different mode for thinking the nation. The post-Enlightenment rationalist discourse that structured colonial legislation on women undoubtedly influenced the ideological tenor of the novels, but the novels also needed to situate reformist ideas within their social contexts. Hence European rationalism had to be reconciled with an evolving indigenous modernity in both the ideological and narrative forms of the novel.

Thus instead of reading all novels on the model of the British novel, we have a nuanced understanding of the narrative form of Bengali and Urdu novels in the context of their own distinct linguistic traditions.¹⁵ This attention to the formal features of the social reform novel offers a new method of doing comparative literature in the languages of the Global South, one in which “the diversity and singularity of idiom [of the subaltern languages of the world] remain a constant reminder of the singularity of languages.”¹⁶

While the social reform novel has been studied in conjunction with British literature, these studies do not see it as a distinct narrative

form with its own generic conventions that depart significantly from the British novel.¹⁷ I contend that the literary conventions of the British novel could not simply be transplanted onto the Bengali and Urdu social reform novels because the disparate historical contexts of the British and Indian reform movements led to the formulation of distinct notions of reform. Further, the British and Indian novels had very different literary genealogies. The Bengali and Urdu-speaking elite did not simply imitate the British novel but self-consciously reworked it to accommodate their needs. And since they could not simply discard the conventions of their own literary traditions, they strove to remake them to bear the weight of modern ideas. Thus the social reform novel emerged as a hybrid genre, the modernesque novel.

As I discussed in chapters 2 and 3, the fraught ideology of the Bengali social reform novel disturbed the narrative conventions of both the British domestic and didactic novel and the Bengali literary tradition. For instance, the third-person omniscient narrator of Bankimchandra's *Krishnakanta's Will* does not unequivocally condemn Rohini but mediates his judgment of her by interrupting the narration to allow us access to her interiority, her struggle with the mores of her society. Rohini's interiority is presented in two ways: as a first-person interior monologue, in which she ponders the injustice of her situation and her plight in the context of *bhadralok* society, and as third-person "character-narrators" who represent her interiority. The latter is a curious narrative device, used at moments when Rohini contemplates acting on her desires. At this time the first-person narrative voice is replaced by a dialogue between two women, Sumati ("virtue") and Kumati ("vice"), who debate Rohini's problem in the context of the norms of *bhadralok* society. With this innovation in presenting a character's interiority the novel does not simply imitate the format of the Victorian didactic or domestic novel but adjusts its framework to accommodate oral literary traditions (such as the Bengali *natak* [play]) in which narrator-characters comment on the action and the characters.

In addition the Bengali novels are marked by a literary trend of *anuvad*, a "speaking after," as each subsequent generation self-consciously rewrites the plotlines and tropes of its literary predecessor. In the British literary tradition, Harold Bloom theorizes the rewriting of plotlines and tropes as a product of the writer's persistent anxiety to oust his literary predecessor.¹⁸ Bloom's theory does not necessarily hold true for the creative process in the Bengali literary tradition, wherein the notion of writing as rewriting was very common and an accepted mode

of literary production. *Bhasha* (modern Indian language) literature was composed largely by its “translation” or rather transcreation of Sanskrit literature, such that “enough of the original remained in the new texts for listeners—later readers—to be able to relate it, if they wanted, to the old texts,” but the texts were nevertheless literary creations in their own right.¹⁹

The Bengali writers I examined were well versed in the Sanskrit and *bhasha* literary traditions. Bankimchandra, for instance, was educated in traditional Vedic scriptures and literature, and Rabindranath freely utilized *rasa* theory, developed by the tenth-century poet Abhivana-gupta to theorize the creative process. Saratchandra was also a deep reader of Sanskrit literature; his novella *Parineeta* is loosely based on the Sanskrit poet Kalidasa’s epic poem *Shakuntala*. It could therefore be inferred that the literary rewriting of these writers and their recreation of themes came from a desire to emulate models of creativity put forth by *bhasha* literature’s engagement with Sanskrit literature.

Rewriting was not seen as imitation, a desire to replace by complete absorption, but as a desire for creating art by perfecting a motif already present, and in doing so remaking the originary text. G. N. Devy notes in his study of Indian literary theory, which he contends is shaped around *bhasha* literature’s rewriting of the Sanskrit literary canon, “Elements of plot, stories, characters, can be used again and again by new generations of writers because Indian literary theory does not lay undue emphasis on originality. . . . The true test is the writer’s capacity to transform, to translate, to restate, to revitalize the original.”²⁰

In his essays on literature and literary creation Rabindranath makes explicit this notion of revivification through imitation: “Throughout human society, the thoughts of one mind strive to find fulfillment in another, thereby so shaping our ideas that they are no longer exclusive to the original thinker.”²¹ Thus Bankimchandra’s reflection on the condition of widows in *The Poison Tree* and *Krishnakanta’s Will* was taken up in *A Grain of Sand in the Eye* by Rabindranath, whose fiction both drew upon and problematized the theme of unfulfilled desire prevalent in the work of his literary precursor.

Likewise Saratchandra self-consciously made use of the same characters, names, and plotlines that were present in the work of both of his literary forbearers. In a parodic moment in his novel *Characterless*, Saratchandra’s character Divakar, a naïve aspiring author, writes a story entitled “The Poisoned Knife,” whose characters have names similar to those in Bankimchandra’s *The Poison Tree* so that Kundanandini and

Nagendra of *The Poison Tree* become Nagendranandini and Vijoyendra in “The Poisoned Knife.” By making explicit the process of *anuvad* Saratchandra simultaneously pays homage to his literary predecessors and departs from them.

Similarly, in the Urdu social reform novel the battle between old and new literary traditions is worked out in narrative and stylistic innovations. Sean Pue and M. A. R. Habib date Urdu modernism to the early twentieth century, when poets such as Noon Meem Rasheed and Miraji, inspired by European modernism, began experimenting with literary form.²² I have suggested that the late nineteenth-century Urdu novel had already commenced its negotiation with the modern in its subject matter, which led to a host of stylistic innovations; consequently we see that literary innovation in the modernesque novel arose independently from the advent of European modernism.

M. H. Ruswa, Nazir Ahmad, and Hali reject the fantastical mode of the contemporaneous Urdu novel and break from the ornate prose of Persian-Urdu literary tradition by using simple, colloquial Urdu in their novels, perhaps because their primary audience was the newly literate female reader.²³ Further, they rework the British novel by incorporating indigenous literary conventions within their narrative structures. Ruswa’s *The Madness of Waiting* challenges the linear form of the didactic novel by deploying several narrative layers, which serve to obfuscate the speaking voice of the text.²⁴ The narrative conventions of Hali’s novel borrow from the Sufi *majalis* (gathering), in which Sufis give advice to their disciples,²⁵ while those of *The Bride’s Mirror* are based on the Persian “mirror for princes,” a type of political writing that instructs princes on good government. In this the novels depart from both Urdu and British conventions of narrative form.

These novels also play with the idea of the omniscient narrator, a staple of the didactic novel. As in Bankimchandra’s work, Ruswa’s novel *Umrao Jaan Ada* deploys a narrator-character, Mirza Ruswa, who serves as a mouthpiece for reformist ideas, which the eponymous protagonist complicates through her own narration. Similarly the narrator of Hali’s *Gathering of Women* is a character who creates a frame story within which the events of the narrative unfold, in the tradition of Indian fables such as the *Panchatantra*. In this the novels deploy narrative devices common to indigenous oral traditions with as much ease as they do third-person omniscient narration.

All of the novels I have discussed break from the conventions of the didactic and domestic novel by incorporating poetry. The Bengali

novel's attempt to reconcile the widow's desires with the orthodox mores of Hindu caste society leads to the incorporation of devotional poetry from the Gaudiya Vaishnava literary tradition. These poems act as an alternative mode for narrating the widow's dissident subjectivity and for suggesting a more radical reformist version of Hinduism. Similarly the Urdu novel's vexed relationship to poetry is manifest in its innovative incorporation of the otherwise freestanding poetic genre of the *ghazal*. The erotic desires of the courtesan appear in the form of *ghazals*, draw on Persian-Arabic conventions in their imagery, metaphors, and highly ornate language but are used toward a different end. *Ghazals* in these novels further the plot and illustrate a character's feelings, a radical departure from the conventions of the *ghazal*, which, as discussed in chapter 5, was not necessarily an indication of the poet's true feelings. Thus, like Bengali poetry, the Urdu *ghazal* becomes an alternative means of narrating the courtesan's subjectivity within the restrictive mores of Islamic society.

It is no accident that we see similarities between the literary conventions of novels in disparate linguistic traditions, for these novels were often translated into other South Asian languages such that Bengali writers were reading Hindi and Urdu novelists in Bengali translation and vice versa. Thus the themes of widow remarriage, wifely devotion, and the immoral courtesan recurred in their fiction. For instance, Ruswa's *Umrao Jaan Ada* is deeply influenced by Hasan Shah's Persian courtesan novel *Nashtar* (The Knife, 1790), which was translated into Urdu by Sajjad Hussain Kasmandavi in 1893. The protagonist of *Nashtar*, Khanum Jaan, is a courtesan who secretly marries a respectable man but is compelled to abandon him when the Englishman who supports her can no longer pay for her upkeep. She moves with her troupe to Lucknow, where she dies pining for her husband. In *Umrao Jaan Ada*, also set in Lucknow, Ruswa names the owner of the brothel Khanum Jaan. Ruswa's Khanum Jaan inspires respect and terror in all whom she meets—an intertextual move that gives new life to Hasan Shah's woebegone courtesan.

Saratchandra reconfigures the courtesan protagonist of his Bengali novel *Devdas* as a devotee of Krishna, reworking tropes from the Urdu and Bengali literary traditions. His biographer, Ila Chandra Joshi, explains the critical consensus on Saratchandra's fiction at the time: "Sarat [was] unique because even though he has described society's irresponsible behavior towards widows and courtesans, especially their cruel treatment of romantic relationships between these women and young men, he has not destroyed the traditions of our culture."²⁶

Saratchandra's fame was such that two later Hindi novelists, Munshi Premchand and Ila Chandra Joshi, were deeply influenced by him; Premchand in fact wrote two Hindi and Urdu novels, *Prema* (Love, 1907) and *Pratigya* (The Vow, 1925), focused on widow remarriage in northern Indian Hindu society.

As I have argued elsewhere, these interliterary networks are most apparent in Premchand's famous courtesan novel published in Urdu as *Bazaar-e-Husn* (The Marketplace of Beauty) and in Hindi as *Sevasadan* (The House of Service, 1917). This novel draws on the Bengali widow remarriage novel in its critique of Hindu marriage, condemning wifely devotion (*satita* in Bengali and *pativrata* in Hindi) as a patriarchal imposition that binds women to unworthy men. Further, it draws on the Urdu and Bengali courtesan novel in its portrayal of the courtesan as an educated, sophisticated woman who strives to be reincorporated into Hindu society. Published in the throes of the nationalist movement, *Sevasadan* attempts to accommodate its protagonist in a Gandhian nationalist framework, but like the other social reform novels, it fails to resolve the problem of its protagonist's dissident desires, which cannot be accommodated by any ideology—reformist or nationalist.²⁷

These examples demonstrate that the preoccupation with the “women's question” was not restricted to a particular literary culture or to a particular religion, as novelists in disparate linguistic cultures were concerned with renegotiating women's place in South Asian society. In drawing attention to these interliterary networks, I suggest that the term *modernesque* describes not only formal innovations in the novel form but also because of these novels' persistent preoccupation with attempting to account for marginalized figures within the fabric of the social. The fact that this preoccupation was pervasive in multiple literary traditions points to the significance of the literary form of the novel, which acted as a crucible for competing ideas about women's roles in society at this historical moment.

This book's layered account of nineteenth-century social reform movements' intimate relationship with Bengali and Urdu literature and its exploration of the deep and unexpected interconnections between these literary traditions suggests a “worlding” of the South Asian novel.²⁸ I offer a new mode of doing comparative literature in which the material and linguistic histories of third world literary traditions are made visible so as to highlight the literariness of the vernacular novel of the Global South. In other words, by analyzing the vernacular

novel as a literary and ideological form with distinct features rather than simply an imitation of the British novel, this book “provincializes” the British novel.

THE SOCIAL REFORM NOVEL IN THE POSTCOLONIAL STATE

The late nineteenth-century social reform novel has had an enduring hold on the South Asian imaginary. These novels have been translated into other South Asian languages and have been reimaged as films, television shows, and theater pieces from at least the beginning of the twentieth century. The novels of the Bengali writer Saratchandra Chatterjee alone have been made into sixty-five films in India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh in languages as diverse as Bengali, Urdu, Assamese, Tamil, and Hindi.

What accounts for the enduring popularity of the late nineteenth-century social reform novel in postcolonial South Asia? These novels remain relevant because their articulation of the “women’s question” continues to resonate in the postcolonial nation-state, which narrates its own anxieties about women’s place in society through its cinematic reinterpretations of these texts. While the numerous cinematic adaptations and their varying historical contexts are beyond the scope of this book, two examples exemplify cinema’s reinterpretation of the “women’s question” in the context of contemporary political events.

In postcolonial India two political events have undermined women’s citizenship in the nation. In 1987 a Rajput woman, Roop Kanwar, committed *sati*, an event that triggered debates among secularists, feminists, and religious fundamentalists about the role of women in the Indian polity. The feminist scholar Ania Loomba famously argues that various political factions rehearsed colonial arguments of tradition and modernity in an attempt to stake a claim to the nation-state by using the Hindu widow’s body.²⁹ Similarly the ascendancy of the Hindu Right in the 1990s has led to the murders of minorities, most notably Muslims, thus making Muslim women’s claims to the nation tenuous. Specifically, in the Godhra riots of 2002 Hindu right-wing forces massacred Muslim men, raped Muslim women, and burned Muslim homes, leaving thousands of Muslim women poor, widowed, and homeless.

In the context of these political events the Bengali widow remarriage novel has become a significant ur-text in redefining norms of secular

citizenship for women who have been marginalized by the nation. Rituparno Ghosh's *Chokher Bali* (A Grain of Sand in the Eye), a 2003 cinematic adaptation of Rabindranath's 1902 Bengali novel of the same name, attempts to resolve some of these anxieties through the figure of the late nineteenth-century Bengali widow. Although Ghosh's film is set in the same period as Rabindranath's novel, it is shadowed by the contemporaneous nationalist movement, in which Bengalis protested Lord Curzon's 1905 law dividing Bengal into Hindu and Muslim states. This political background is markedly absent in Rabindranath's novel. The film's nationalist context allows a very different ending for its widow protagonist, Binodini. She leaves the *bhadralok* home not for a life of devotion (the ending of Rabindranath's novel); rather she leaves it to become a nationalist subject. Binodini justifies her decision in a letter to her one-time rival, Asha:

Despite being very different in their beliefs and temperaments, the people of this nation have long learnt to live harmoniously with one another—just as you and I did. . . . If Lord Curzon's law is passed and this country is divided into two nations, then you and I will live in different nations, and despite living in two nations if we continue thinking about our own sorrows, then we will have lost from the very beginning. In truth, a nation is formed within one's mind. . . . If we ever truly loved one another then Lord Curzon can never separate us. When I left our home and reached Kashi, I learnt what truly constitutes a nation. . . . There is a big world outside the home. . . . I beg that you will not confine your unborn child, whether a girl or a boy, to the four walls of the home. This child will one day show you what truly constitutes the nation.³⁰

The film resolves the dichotomy between the home and the world by reincorporating its widow into the world through the secular nation, which transcends communal and gender differences. In this the film reinscribes the history of postcolonial India as a history of loss, in which the Hindu-Muslim unity of the anticolonial movement is lost but can be recovered in the future, here signified by the unborn child.

The unborn child is at once a symbol of the nascent anticolonial movement, which knows no communal difference, and of the future of postcolonial India, which maintains its promise of secularism. The potential feminine gender of the child does not become a deterrent to her citizenship—she will not face the social ostracism of the Hindu

widow nor the spatial confinement of the Hindu wife, for secularism will erase gender inequality in much the same way as it erases religious difference. Thus the film resolves contemporary India's anxieties about the status of women and of Muslims in the supposedly secular nation by re-creating a mythology of the nation-state as free from communal and gender differences through the figure of the newly emancipated nineteenth-century Hindu widow.

The anxieties of defining the nation as Islamic in postcolonial Pakistan become displaced onto the nineteenth-century courtesan of the reformist novel. Ruswa's 1899 novel *Umrao Jan Ada* has been made into one Pakistani film (1972), a Pakistani TV series (2003), and two Indian film adaptations (1981, 2006) of the same name. These adaptations transform the nineteenth-century courtesan's desire for respectability into a contemporary damaged heroine's yearning for love, translating the eroticism of the *ghazal* onto the body of the female actor. Hasan Tariq's 1972 Pakistani film adaptation exemplifies the focalization of nationalist anxieties through the figure of the courtesan.

The late 1960s and early 1970s were a time of great political upheaval in Pakistan as it struggled to forge a national identity that could join two geographically distinct regions, West Pakistan (present-day Pakistan) and East Pakistan (present-day Bangladesh), into a single South Asian Muslim nation. In 1969 President Yahya Khan announced that general elections would be held the following year, as many in East Pakistan contested the legitimacy of West Pakistan's Ayub Khan military dictatorship. The Awami League of East Pakistan won the general election of 1970, but the West Pakistanis refused to consider their victory legitimate and prevented them from forming a government. This led to the Civil War of 1971 and the formation of Bangladesh as a separate nation-state.

Against this political backdrop Tariq's *Umrao Jan Ada* attempts to define Pakistani as a Muslim nation through the figure of the courtesan. As discussed earlier, Ruswa's novel is set in the period just before the momentous political events of 1857, which led to the consolidation of the British Empire. One of the most significant catalysts for the events of 1857 was the deposition of the nawab of Awadh (present-day Lucknow), Wajid Ali Shah, in 1856 and his forced exile to Calcutta. In 1857 Lucknow became one of the key sites of the Revolt, as Indian forces attacked the British Residency at Lucknow, leading to the death of several hundred English men and women (the Siege of Lucknow).

While Ruswa's novel uses the Revolt of 1857 to harken back to a precolonial past when the courtesan's prowess in poetry enabled her

inhabitation of late nineteenth-century reformist Islamic norms of modesty, the film uses the events of 1857 to rewrite the history of Pakistan. In the film *Umrao Jaan* gains respectability and fame as a courtesan when she performs at the court of Wajid Ali Shah, and she loses status when she is forced to flee because of the Siege of Lucknow. The film depicts the court of Wajid Ali Shah as the peak of Urdu artistic and literary culture, an ideal Muslim past that was ruptured by the events of 1857, in much the same way that the unity of the contemporary Pakistani state is sundered by the civil war. Thus the film's Muslim courtesan reflects a yearning for an Islamic past untouched by colonialism and also creates a mythology of the ideal South Asian Islamic state. The social reform novel's numerous adaptations in South Asian cinema refract the anxieties of the postcolonial nation-state, whether in defining norms of citizenship in a supposedly secular polity (India) or in defining the ideological foundations of the nation (Pakistan).

The contemporary rearticulations of the nineteenth-century social reform novel become a site for rethinking the contradictions of present-day nationalist projects in South Asia. These novels' continued popularity suggests that their formulation of the "women's question" remains crucial for thinking about the South Asian nation today. Thus my reading of the social reform novel as a site of an alternative feminist modernity not only reshapes scholarly understandings of late nineteenth-century social reform movements in South Asia but can also serve as a lens for considering the articulation of erotic-religious feminist modernities in the contemporary political moment.

Glossary

I use the term “Hindustani” to refer to the colloquial, spoken language that served as the lingua franca of the subcontinent. Other linguistic traditions (Urdu, Bengali) often adopt words from Hindustani, and these words are therefore part of multiple linguistic traditions. The designation of certain words as Hindustani is based on my sense of everyday usage rather than strict dictionary definitions. Please note that Hindustani does not refer to the language Hindi, though it does include it.¹

akhara (Hindustani, Bengali): religious retreat

anuvad (Sanskrit): speaking after; a term used in *bhasha* (modern or vernacular Indian languages) literary theory to denote the rewriting of classical Sanskrit texts

ashraf (Urdu): upper-class, feudal, respectable, Muslim; the word connotes “respectable people” and refers to the Muslim elite in this book

bhadralok (Bengali): upper-caste, middle-class, Bengali

bhajan (Hindustani, Bengali): devotional poetry

bhakti (Hindustani, Bengali): devotion

bhasha (Hindustani): modern Indian languages

bhava (Sanskrit): intense emotion; worship

- chudail* (Hindustani, Urdu): witch
- dukh* (Hindustani, Bengali): sadness
- Gaudiya Vaishnava (Hindustani, Bengali): religious sect founded by Chaitanya Mahaprabhu focused on devotion to Krishna
- ghazal* (Hindustani, Urdu): monorhymed lyric poem
- gopi* (Hindustani, Bengali): cowgirl; devotee of Krishna
- gosain* (Hindustani, Bengali): cowherd; devotee of Krishna
- hoor* (Hindustani, Urdu): fairy
- kotha* (Hindustani, Urdu): brothel
- laundi* (Hindustani, Urdu): young girl
- ma'ani* (Urdu): the meaning of a poem
- madhur rasa* (Sanskrit and Bengali): literally, “honey juice” in Sanskrit; used to connote erotic love in Saratchandra’s Bengali essay “Narir Mulya”
- madhurya* (Bengali): amorous conversation
- majalis* (Urdu): gathering of people (originally used in the context of Sufism)
- mathnavi* (Urdu): a form of verse in Arabic, Persian, Urdu, and Turkish; a long poem that usually tells a story and is written in internally rhyming couplets that all have the same meter
- mazmun* (Urdu): the theme of a poem
- mushaira* (Hindustani, Urdu): poetry gathering
- natak* (Hindustani, Bengali): play, drama
- nechari* (Urdu): natural
- pabitrata* (Bengali): purity
- peeriti* (Sanskrit, Bengali): intense love
- prem* (Hindustani, Bengali): asexual love
- pardah* (Hindustani, Urdu): the veil
- pardah-nasheen* (Hindustani, Urdu): veiled woman
- qata* (Urdu): four-line poem
- quam* (Hindustani, Urdu): community
- raandh* (Hindustani, Urdu): courtesan, prostitute
- rasa* (Sanskrit, Hindustani): aesthetic pleasure, the bliss of love
- rasa theory* (Sanskrit): theory of Sanskrit literature proposed by Abhinavagupta, a literary scholar of the tenth century

- rekhta* (Urdu): linguistic register used for haute poetry; another term for Urdu the language
- rekhti* (Urdu): linguistic register used in narrating the licentious accounts of the sexual experiences of women
- Sabk-e-Hindi* (Urdu): Indian style (of poetry)
- sat* (Sanskrit): spiritual purity
- sati* (Hindustani, Bengali): self-immolation on funeral pyre
- satita* (Bengali): wifely devotion
- satyagraha* (Sanskrit): insistence on truth; used by Gandhi as a form of civil disobedience
- sayuja mukti* (Hindustani): kenosis
- sharif* (Hindustani, Urdu): respectable
- she'r/shair* (Hindustani, Urdu): monorhymed couplet usually part of a *ghazal*
- sringarasa* (Sanskrit): fine garments; sexual love
- sukh* (Hindustani, Bengali): happiness
- takhallus* (Hindustani, Urdu): pen name
- tatvajnana* (Sanskrit): truth-knowledge
- tawaif* (Hindustani, Urdu): courtesan
- thumri* (Hindustani): erotic poetry sung to music
- Vaishnava (Hindustani, Bengali): devotee of Krishna
- vaishya/baishya* (Hindustani, Bengali): prostitute
- zaif* (Urdu): literally, "weak"; here, used for women
- zenana* (Hindustani, Urdu): women's quarters

Notes

CHAPTER I

1. Most audiences know this novel in its famous cinematic adaptation, *Charulata* (1964), by Satyajit Ray.

2. Chow, *The Age of the World Target*, 77.

3. Spivak, *Death of a Discipline*, 18

4. See Rebecca Walkowitz, "Close Reading at a Distance," in *Born Translated*.

5. Chow, *The Age of the World Target*, 85

6. My translation with Taimoor Shahid of *Junun-e-Intezaar* has been published as *The Madness of Waiting*.

7. I address the interconnectedness of literary traditions and their significance for understanding the South Asian novel in my concluding chapter.

8. Seminal works on the Revolt of 1857 include Clare Anderson, *Indian Uprising of 1857–8: Prisons, Prisoners and Rebellion* (New York: Anthem Press, 2007); Christopher Bayly, *Indian Society and the Making of the British Empire* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1988).

9. The serial publication of novels in reputable literary journals such as *Jamuna*, *Bharatbarsha*, and *Prabashi*, edited by luminaries such as Rabindranath Tagore and Dijendranath Roy, made them the subject of serious consideration for the *bhadralok* (upper-caste, middle class) reading public, who voiced their concerns and often compelled the author to reconsider the plot of his story.

10. See Pritchett, *Nets of Awareness*.

11. The British government's fear that any move in the direction of female education would jeopardize its colonial hold led it to declare in its Resolution on Native Female Education of 30 April 1868 that efforts to promote female

education “would not meet with any great success” (quoted in Bilgrami, “Sir Syed’s Views on Female Education,” 78).

12. Minault, “Sayyid Ahmad Dehlavi and the Delhi Renaissance,” 290.

13. Inderpal Grewal argues in *Home and Harem* that the ideal Indian woman was created as the mirror opposite of the Victorian woman, even as she embodied Victorian virtues.

14. As Faisal Devji asserts, every one of the reformers saw the woman, the primary inhabitant of the private, “as the agent of a sinister, debilitating corruption that attacked vulnerable Muslim men from the inside, paganizing them and rendering them unable to defend the faith. . . . Such a paranoid situation could only have arisen when these men had themselves been marginalized by colonialism” (“Gender and the Politics of Space,” 150).

15. A notable feminist collection of Indian women’s writing is Tharu and Lalita, *Women Writing in India*.

16. Rajan, *Real and Imagined Women*, 31.

17. *Ibid.*, 10.

18. Spivak, “Deconstructing Historiography,” 203.

19. In his study of the tenth-century Kashmiri historian Kalhana, Ranajit Guha explicates the nature of the “cathexis” that occurs in the writing of historiography. He suggests that Kalhana’s historiography is necessarily contaminated by feudalism, which “was branded on the body of the dominant consciousness itself, [and that] historiography, unable to jump out of its skin, was forced to work from within the ruling culture” (“Dominance without Hegemony and Its Historiography,” 219). This visceral metaphor encapsulates the bounded nature of human narrative. Since historiography cannot “jump out of its skin” to critically interrogate its formation of history, a writer too is implicated in the “dominant consciousness” of the “ruling culture” within which he writes.

20. Spivak, *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason*, 114.

21. Chow, *The Age of the World Target*, 79

22. Nazir Ahmad’s *The Bride’s Mirror* won a prize from the Crown for its depiction of the condition of native women. Bankimchandra Chatterjee served as a civil administrator for most of his life.

23. Spivak, “The Staging of Time in *Heremakhonon*,” 88.

24. In *En-gendering India* Sangeeta Ray explores constructions of gender and nation in a number of late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century works, both Indian and Victorian, to suggest the multitudinous ways in which the gendered subject is usurped for the nationalist project. In one of her chapters she studies Chatterjee’s mapping of woman onto nation in the context of novelists who grapple with this representation (Rabindranath Tagore) and others who reject it outright (Rokeya Sakhawat Hossein) in their fiction. In “Left to the Imagination,” Tejaswini Niranjana grapples with Chatterjee’s formulation of the inner and outer spheres in the context of Caribbean national identity.

25. P. Chatterjee, *The Nation and Its Fragments*, 9, 126.

26. “Colonial attitudes toward nationalist women depicted them as beings dependent upon their husband’s agency, and this idea of the ‘dependent subject’ was replicated in the way nationalist ideology rendered women as

domestic(ated), and not political subjects” (Visweswaran, “Small Speeches, Subaltern Gender,” 86).

27. See Bannerji, “Pygmalion Nation.”

28. Mahmood, *Politics of Piety*, 17.

29. *Ibid.*, 28.

30. “The fact that women engage in SM with other women does not obscure this fact. Indeed, it brings it into greater relief. Women, lesbians, even purported feminists, can internalize the degradation of women into sexual objects as a value without realizing that they have bought into patriarchal culture” (Hopkins, “Rethinking Sadomasochism,” 118).

31. Quoted in *ibid.*, 119–20.

32. The feminist legal scholar Ratna Kapur argues, “In the arena of sexuality, pleasure, desire and agency are invariably assumed to be associated with the West, while the third world gendered and sexual subject is constructed almost exclusively through the lens of violence, victimization, impoverishment and cultural barbarism” (“Out of the Colonial Closet, but Still Thinking inside the Box,” 382).

33. Butler critiques Simone de Beauvoir’s notion of seeking emancipation through transcending the body: “Insofar as transcendence appears a particularly masculine project, her prescription seems to urge women to assume the model of freedom currently embodied by the masculine gender” (“Sex and Gender in Simone de Beauvoir’s *Second Sex*,” 43). For Butler freedom, or more broadly agency, is an embodied practice.

34. Butler, “Bodies and Power Revisited,” 187.

35. Rajan, *Real and Imagined Women*, 21.

36. Freud, “The Uncanny,” 243.

37. Bhabha, “The World and the Home,” 14.

CHAPTER 2

1. For more details, see Lata Mani, *Contentious Traditions: The Debate on Sati in Colonial India* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998).

2. Mahua Sarkar argues, “For all their differences, both the reformers and the Hindu revivalists, much like the British, were invoking the woman question as a means first of establishing their adequate manliness—defined, presumably, by the degree to which they could control or co-opt women within the family—and then of asserting and justifying their respective claims to or desire for political power” (*Visible Histories, Disappearing Women*, 53).

3. In her analysis of colonial discourse on *sati* Mani writes, “The widow thus nowhere appears as a full subject. If she resisted, she was considered a victim of Hindu, male barbarity. If she appeared to consent, she was seen to be a victim of religion. Colonial representations further reinforced such a view of the widow as helpless by ‘infantilizing’ the typical *sati*. The widow is quite often described as a ‘tender child’” (“Contentious Traditions,” 69).

4. Tanika Sarkar argues that the figure of the widow enabled the construction of a pure spiritual sphere in the nineteenth century because “strict

ritual observances root [the widow's] body in ancient India, thus miraculously enabling her to escape foreign domination. The cloth she wears is necessarily indigenous, the water she drinks is to be carried from the sacred river and not through foreign water pipes. . . . Ergo, the nation needs ascetic widowhood" (*Hindu Wife, Hindu Nation*, 42). Sarkar's reading of nineteenth-century nationalist discourse excludes the possibility of the widow's sexual desires. She reads *prima facie* the widow's relegation to the ancient and the traditional as concomitant with her lack of agency.

5. See Samita Sen, "Offences against Marriage."

6. *Ibid.*

7. For instance, the reformer Ishwarachandra Vidyasagar's debate with Radhakanta Deb in 1856 regarding widow remarriage was broadly disseminated through journals.

8. In her study of the widow character Susie Tharu writes, "It could be argued, and I am going to do so, that when a writer features a widow as protagonist he or she is, consciously or unconsciously, making an intervention in a debate centered on this figure. . . . Widow stories therefore are invariably also subtly modulated historical engagements with questions of governmentality and citizenship" ("The Impossible Subject: Caste and the Gendered Body," 188).

9. As Lucy Carroll argues, the passing of the law did not mean that widows were getting remarried, because widow remarriage was still prohibited by customary law (when a certain practice is considered legal by its participants even though it is not officially codified as law): "What about Customary Law, which by definition rests not in literary works but in the mores and behaviour of the people? The British-Indian courts gave lip-service to Customary Law, but in actual practice it was extremely difficult in most cases to prove custom in the face of the judicial presumption that Hindu (book) Law applied" ("Law, Custom and Statutory Social Reform," 88).

10. B. Chatterjee, "The Confessions of a Young Bengali," 140.

11. For a detailed explanation of *bhakti* practices in Bengal see Dimock, "Doctrine and Practice among Vaisnavas of Bengal." For a detailed account of Chaitanya Mahaprabhu's life and teaching see Hopkins, "The Social Teaching of the *Bhagavata Purana*."

12. The lecture on Vaishnavism by the prominent nationalist Surendranath Bannerjee (1848–1925) at the meeting of the Students' Association in Calcutta in the early 1870s was instrumental in spearheading a full-scale revival of Gaudiya Vaishnavism. In addition, Chaitanya Mahaprabhu's vision of *bhakti* was popularized in the late nineteenth century by Bijoy Krishna Goswami, an ardent worshiper of Krishna who became associated with Rammohun Roy's Brahma Samaj but eventually withdrew from it to revive Krishna worship in the tradition of Mahaprabhu: "Bijoy's [Krishna Goswami] partial disillusionment with the [Brahmo] Samaj led him to study the *Chaitanya Caritamrita*, a biography of the great *bhakti* saint, under the guidance of Harimohun Pramanil. Bijoy visited various Vaishnava *gurus* but did not break with the Samaj. Instead in 1869 he returned to his work as a Brahma missionary, yet Bijoy increasingly blended devotional Vaishnavism as taught by Chaitanya with his

own concept of Brahmoism. . . . In 1899 he finally broke completely with the Brahmo movement and began his career as a spokesman of revived Vaishnavism” (Jones, *Socio-Religious Reform Movements in British India*, 40). See Jones’s monograph for a detailed understanding of Bijoy Krishna Goswami’s contribution to the revival of Vaishnavism.

13. Kedarnath Dutta’s treatise on Chaitanya Mahaprabhu, *Sri Chaitanya: His Life and Precepts*, was published in the late nineteenth century. For more details see Rosen, “Who Is Shri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu?”

14. B. Chatterjee, *Krishnakanta’s Will*, 13.

15. *Ibid.*, 29.

16. Spivak, “Can the Subaltern Speak?” (2006), 300.

17. In her essay on Mirabai, Kumkum Sangari contends that *bhakti* was an inherently feminized form of worship and was especially apparent in its Bengali manifestation. She cites the Bhagwat Purana as stating that the essential nature of the male devotee is that of a *gopi* (cowgirl) so that “one of the relations it is possible to have with Krishna, among others, is that of a lover” (“Mirabai and the Spiritual Economy of *Bhakti*,” 1537).

18. Quoted in *ibid.*, 1549–50.

19. Sangari, “Mirabai and the Spiritual Economy of *Bhakti*,” 1549–50.

20. In keeping with this, the metaphor of “dry wood” also becomes significant in the context of *The Poison Tree* (1873), where the adulterous love of a widow and a married man is called the “fruit” of the poison tree.

21. Tagore, *A Grain of Sand in the Eye*, 60.

22. Ferguson, “Sex War,” 110.

23. Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe*, 141.

24. B. Chatterjee, *Krishnakanta’s Will*, 57.

25. The term *satita* comes from Sati, the mythological goddess who was married to the Lord Siva. Legend has it that Sati’s father, Lord Daksha, invited all his other daughters and their husbands to a great holy sacrifice but neglected to invite Sati and her husband, Siva, because he was embarrassed by his son-in-law’s hermitic appearance and unpredictable behavior. When Sati learned of the sacrifice, she went to her father’s palace and threw herself into the holy sacrificial fire because her father had insulted her husband. The term *sati*, then, came to be synonymous with the good woman, and by extension the good woman was the one who would willingly immolate herself on her husband’s funeral pyre; likewise the term *satita* came to connote devotion, both conjugal and spiritual, to one’s husband, whether alive or deceased.

26. *Rana* translates as “king” and in this case connotes Mirabai’s husband.

27. Quoted in Sangari, “Mirabai and the Spiritual Economy of *Bhakti*,” 1467.

28. Tagore, *A Grain of Sand in the Eye*, 193.

29. Sangari explains that “since Krishna is a god, their *sej* (marital bed) can be an abstraction, and *bhakti* a path” to reach Krishna (“Mirabai and the Spiritual Economy of *Bhakti*,” 1467).

30. B. Chatterjee, *Krishnakanta’s Will*, 110.

31. Grewal, *Home and Harem*, 25.

32. B. Chatterjee, *Krishnakanta’s Will*, 126.

33. For more details see Rao, “Thumri as Feminine Voice.”

34. Note that Bankimchandra demonstrated an abiding hatred of Muslims. In his early nationalist novel *Anandamath*, the protagonist fights against Muslim rule. This was read by both imperialists (who banned the book) and nationalists (who celebrated it) as a thinly veiled allegory for British rule.

35. Tagore, *A Grain of Sand in the Eye*, 167.

36. Tagore, “Literary Creation,” 153.

37. Padikkal, “Inventing Modernity,” 223.

38. Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe*, 141.

39. Tagore, *A Grain of Sand in the Eye*, 66.

CHAPTER 3

1. Tagore, “An Ordinary Woman,” in *The Essential Tagore*, 281.

2. Bimala, the upper-caste, upper-class protagonist of Rabindranath’s novel, must choose between her husband Nikhil’s perspective on Swadeshi as reform and his friend Sandeep’s blustery rhetoric deifying Bimala as the mother of the Bengali nation. Through Bimala’s interiority Tagore presents a critique of the nationalist deification of women in the cause of the nation, suggesting that the lives of real women cannot accommodate this imposition.

3. For Saratchandra, like his idol Tolstoy, the social realist novel is a vehicle for forwarding a radical feminist politics. In a letter to his friend and editor Pramathanath, Saratchandra writes, “Have you read Count Tolstoy’s *Resurrection*? This great book of his has a prostitute as its central figure. In our country we have not yet reached the stage when we could appreciate that kind of art. I can’t hate art just because it is all-embracing” (quoted in Prabhakar, *Awara Messiah*, 142).

4. James Mill’s *History of British India* (1817) was integral to shaping colonial debates on the status of Hindu women in India. Unlike the Orientalists, who praised the “ancient” culture of the Hindus, Mill considered the Hindus a barbaric race who mistreated their women: “Nothing can exceed the habitual contempt which Hindus entertain for their women. . . . They are held in extreme degradation, excluded from the sacred books, deprived of education and (of a share) in the paternal property. . . . That remarkable barbarity, the wife held unworthy to eat with her husband, is prevalent in Hindustan” (quoted in Chakravarti, “Whatever Happened to the Vedic Dasi?,” 35). Chakravarti argues that Mill’s work served as an essential justification for the perpetuation of empire, which now came to include “saving” brown women from brown men. Although his son John Stuart Mill disagreed with him on the women’s question as it was articulated in England (women’s right to vote, for instance), it is evident that J. S. Mill’s liberal feminist project was constructed in contradistinction to the backward, decadent Orient.

5. Saratchandra also quotes extensively from Spencer’s *Descriptive Sociology* in his essay “The Value of Woman” (1923) to bolster his argument that women are oppressed the world over.

6. Chakravarti writes, “Since the upper caste woman in *brahmanical* patriarchy is primarily a vehicle for reproduction, the sexual death of a woman is simultaneously a social death” (“Gender, Caste and Labour,” 2250).

7. See Chakravarti, “Whatever Happened to the Vedic Dasi?”

8. S. Chatterjee, letter to Pramathanath, undated, 79, translated by Sreemati Mukherjee and Krupa Shandilya.

9. While Sabitri’s narrative is indeed unconventional in the genre of the widow novel, it was by no means an uncommon story in *bhadralok* society, whose cruel mistreatment of women often compelled them to resort to different forms of paid labor—from sex work to indentured labor.

10. Visweswaran demonstrates the demonization of lower-class women by both nationalist and imperialist discourse: “The moral character of middle-class women activists was never called into question, but Kanthiamathi and Perianachi [lower-class women] are called ‘bold and bad,’ ‘the common street-walking type,’ ‘poor,’ ‘illiterate,’ ‘insignificant persons’ and ‘people of no consequence’” (“Small Speeches, Subaltern Gender,” 124).

11. S. Chatterjee, *Charitraheen*, 70.

12. “The idea of a ‘speaking subject’ is of course central to the philosophies of humanism. Speech as agency invokes the idea of self-originating presence, so that conversely, lack of speech is seen as absence” (Visweswaran, “Small Speeches, Subaltern Gender,” 91).

13. Sangari, “Mirabai and the Spiritual Economy of *Bhakti*,” 1467.

14. In another letter to Pramatha, Saratchandra upholds Sabitri as a bastion of virtue: “You people have seen Sabitri as an ordinary maid servant without knowing the ending. Pramatha, you have mistaken a diamond for a piece of glass” (in S. Chatterjee, letter to Pramathanath, mid-April to mid-June 1913, 34, translated by Sreemati Mukherjee and Krupa Shandilya).

15. Visweswaran writes, “Elite nationalists and colonial administrators shared similar attitudes towards lower-caste, poor women. Such women were not considered appropriate representatives of the nationalist movement, either by the British or Indian nationalists” (“Small Speeches, Subaltern Gender,” 124).

16. S. Chatterjee, *Charitraheen*, 216.

17. In an interview with his uncle, Saratchandra explicitly states that Kiron and Surbala are but two aspects of a single character: “Surabala [was] . . . a faithful and devoted wife full of love, respect and attraction for her husband. . . . Kiron I have built with the same ingredients of whose existence I came to know through Surbala’s teaching” (quoted in Prabhakar, *Awara Messiah*, 120–21).

18. Significantly in another intertextual moment Kiron bolsters her claim to devotion by using the example of the widow Rohini in *Krishnakanter Uil*, whose union with a married man was frowned upon by the omniscient narrator but which Kiron defends by saying, “No love can ever be detestable” (S. Chatterjee, *Charitraheen*, 253). In framing Rohini’s sexual desires as love, Kiron legitimizes them and so subtly condemns the mores of *bhadralok* society, which decree Rohini’s love as illicit.

19. At the time of the novel a large Bengali population had migrated to Arakan, Burma, to search for work and as a result was stigmatized by Bengali society as not being truly Bengali (i.e., not being caste Hindus).

20. It is possible that Saratchandra himself was not pleased with the end of the novel and that the furor created by *Characterless* could have compelled him to change the conclusion. In a letter to Pramatha he writes, “I cannot hate or disapprove of Art. But I will see to it that *Charitraheen* is ‘in [the] strictest sense moral’ [in English]. . . . If you can write and let me know what kind of work you want, that would be very kind” (in S. Chatterjee, letter to Pramathanath, undated, 79, translated by Sreemati Mukherjee and Krupa Shandilya).

21. In a letter to the renowned Hindi novelist Ila Chandra Joshi, Saratchandra writes, “I place humanity much above womanly virtues. . . . A woman’s compassion, her maternal propensities are far more important than her chastity. . . . I have known fallen women who were oozing with maternal instinct and whose hearts were flowing with the milk of human kindness” (quoted in Prabhakar, *Awara Messiah*, 281).

22. In his biography of Saratchandra, Vishnu Prabhakar tells us that “Narir Ithas” consisted of a history of five hundred “fallen” women but sadly was lost in a house fire. For more details see Prabhakar, *Awara Messiah*, xiv.

23. John Stuart Mill, *The Subjugation of Women* (New York: D. Appleton, 1869), 160.

24. S. Chatterjee, *Srikanta*, 153.

25. S. Chatterjee, “Narir Mulya,” 950, translated by Sreemati Mukherjee and Krupa Shandilya.

26. “Liberal individualism is attacked by Marxists and neo-conservatives alike as wrongly encouraging the disintegration of affective bonds and replacing them with merely self-interested economic and contractual ties. Mill’s essay, however, emphasizes the value of noninstrumental relationships in human life. His depictions of both corrupt and well-ordered marriage trace the relationship of family order to right political order” (Shanley, “Marital Slavery and Friendship,” 230).

27. S. Chatterjee, “Narir Mulya,” 972.

28. *Ibid.*

29. S. Chatterjee, *The Final Question*, 120.

30. Gandhi’s *Satyagraha* was an attempt to transcend the discourse of masculine colonialism imposed by the British by privileging womanliness. Commenting on the brave action of Mohanlal Pandya (a *satyagrahi*) who stole onions from a field to get himself into prison, Gandhi writes, “He did not like the campaign to end without someone undergoing suffering in the shape of imprisonment for something done consistently with the principles of *Satyagraha*” (*An Autobiography*, 536). Implicit in this comment is the assumption that the correct enactment of *Satyagraha* necessitates suffering and by extension becoming more womanly.

31. S. Chatterjee, *The Final Question*, 314.

32. In the novel *Srikanta*, Srikanta explicates the relationship between sorrow and self-realization to Abhaya: “It is through my suffering that I’ve

stumbled upon an important truth. Sorrow is not the negative emotion we think it is. Sorrow signifies neither absence nor loss. If unaccompanied by fear, it can be sensed and even enjoyed as fully as happiness” (S. Chatterjee, *Srikanta*, 155).

33. As Appiah argues, “Mill was a sort of utilitarian and believed, in general, that pleasure was good and pain bad. . . . So he certainly thought that because the satisfaction of desire brings pleasure (and its obstruction, pain) what is good depends on what people desire” (“Liberalism, Individuality, and Identity,” 316).

34. Asad, *Formations of the Secular*, 78.

35. Prentiss, *The Embodiment of Bhakti*, 6.

36. When Shibnath decides to leave her, Kamal defends his decision: “Shibnath is a worthy person. I don’t have many complaints against him. And what’s the use of complaining? In the heart’s court, ex parte justice is the only kind of justice available; there isn’t any appeal bench either.’ Harendra said, ‘That means you don’t accept any bond other than that of love’” (S. Chatterjee, *The Final Question*, 191).

37. *Ibid.*, 317.

38. At the end of *The Final Question*, Nilima, a widow who has hitherto lived a life confined by the injunctions of Hindu scriptures, reconsiders her decisions in light of Kamal’s arguments and the example of her life. She declares, “‘Women’s liberty,’ ‘women’s independence’ are words on everybody’s lips these days; but they stay on the lips and don’t go any further. Do you know why? I’ve now found out that liberty can be obtained neither by . . . pleading justice and morality, nor by staging a concerted quarrel with men at a meeting. . . . Looking at Kamal, you can easily understand that it comes of its own accord—through one’s own fulfillment, by the enlargement of one’s own soul” (*ibid.*, 274). Women’s liberation here is explicitly tied to the “enlargement of one’s own soul,” a primarily spiritual enterprise, and love for a man is only one of the means by which this is achieved in Saratchandra’s fiction.

39. Dimock, “Doctrine and Practice among the Vaisnavas of Bengal,” 48–49.

40. S. Chatterjee, *Srikanta*, 344.

41. This is exemplified in the debate between Daphne Hampson and Sarah Coakley. Hampson argues that *kenosis* is a patriarchal model and that it “may [be] appropriate [in] the male understanding of God. But for women, the theme of self-emptying and self-abnegation is far from helpful as a paradigm” (“On Autonomy and Heteronomy,” 2). Coakley responds to this by suggesting that the dependence on god need not be self-abnegating: “The *right* sort of dependence on God is not only empowering but freeing. For God is not a rapist, but the source of my very being; God is *closer* than kissing (I am happy to put it thus, metaphorically); indeed God, being God, is closer to me even than I am to myself” (“Afterword,” 170). See also Sarah Coakley’s “Kenosis and Subversion: On the Repression of ‘Vulnerability’ in Christian Feminist Writing” in *Powers and Submissions*.

42. Chakravarti, *Philosophical Foundation of Bengal Vaisnavism*, 239. This is explicit in the *Chaitanya Charitramrta*, the biography of Chaitanya,

the founder of the Vaishnava school: “Sayuja sunite bhaktera haya ghrnabhaya / ‘naraka’ banchaye, tabu sayuja na laya [On hearing of *sayuja* the devotee is filled with repulsion / hell is preferable to *sayuja*]” (*Caitanya-caritamṛta* 2.6.268, quoted in Chakravarti, *Philosophical Foundation of Bengal Vaishnavism*, 238).

43. Chakravarti, *Philosophical Foundation of Bengal Vaishnavism*, 243.

44. S. Chatterjee, *Srikanta*, 342.

45. Chakravarti explains, “The sacrifice of his own happiness does not cause pain, for it is more than compensated by the consciousness of the happiness of the beloved object. Thus, even in the state of deprivation the lover feels a peculiar happiness in his own self” (*Philosophical Foundation of Bengal Vaishnavism*, 249).

46. S. Chatterjee, *Srikanta*, 344.

47. *A Practical Sanskrit Dictionary with Transliteration, Accentuation, and Etymological Analysis Throughout*, 318.

48. Chakravarti, *Philosophical Foundation of Bengal Vaishnavism*, 218.

49. In his essay “Only a Suffering God Can Save Us,” Slavoj Žižek analyzes the Judeo-Christian “double kenosis” as operative in man’s worship of God: “Man’s alienation from God (the fact that God appears to him as an inaccessible In-itself, as a pure transcendent Beyond) must coincide with the alienation of God from himself (whose most poignant expression is, of course, Christ’s ‘Father, father, why have you forsaken me?’ on the cross): finite human consciousness only represents God because God re-presents itself; consciousness is only at a distance from God because God distances himself from himself.” In this analysis God is made human at the expense of rather than as a feature of his godness. In contrast, in Bengali Vaishnavism, Krishna’s avatar as a god-like human lover is just one more of his divine attributes and not an “alienation of God from himself.”

50. S. Chatterjee, *Srikanta*, 344.

51. Bhabha, “The World and the Home,” 445. As the title of Rabindranath’s 1916 novel *The Home and the World* suggests, the *bhadralok* home continued to retain its importance in the national imaginary even when the woman’s question had been purportedly resolved. That novel reflects the new nationalist framework, in which the home became the site of *bharat mata*, the Indian woman as Mother India.

52. “Between patriarchy and imperialism, subject-constitution and object-formation, the figure of the woman disappears, not into a pristine nothingness, but into a violent shuttling which is the displaced figuration of the ‘third world woman’ caught between tradition and modernization” (Spivak, “Can the Subaltern Speak?” [2006], 306).

53. J. S. Mill was deeply influenced by his father’s criticisms of Christianity, especially James Mill’s “The Church and Its Reform” (1835). He also absorbed Bentham’s skepticism about the utility of religion and was particularly influenced by Bentham’s arguments in “Analysis of the Influence of Natural Religion on the Temporal Happiness of Mankind” (1822). For more on this see Mill, *Three Essays on Religion*, especially 14–20.

54. In her essay on Mill's delineation of the marital relation, Shanley cogently argues for Mill as a feminist thinker. She counters feminist critiques of Mill as a conservative thinker by arguing that "the fundamental assertion of *The Subjection of Women* was not that equal opportunity would ensure the liberation of women, but that male-female equality, however achieved, was essential to marital friendship and to the progression of human society" ("Marital Slavery and Friendship," 229).

CHAPTER 4

1. "Education came to be viewed by some as the major cause of the uprising. The British Government's fear that any move in the direction of female education would jeopardize their colonial hold led it to declare in its Resolution on Native Female Education of 30 April 1868 that efforts to promote female education would not meet with any great success" (Bilgrami, "Sir Syed's Views on Female Education," 78).

2. For more on the Deoband movement see Metcalf, *Islamic Revival in British India*.

3. To this end Maulana Ashraf Ali Thanvi wrote *Bhishti Zewar* (Heavenly Ornaments), a moral guidebook on living a virtuous Islamic life, which soon became a part of every Muslim married woman's trousseau. In her incisive study of Muslim reform movements, Gail Minault writes, "[The Deoband school's] advocacy of a reformed Islam led the Deoband ulama to champion women's education in order to suppress many customary practices and to Islamicize women's religious observances" ("Other Voices, Other Rooms," 109).

4. Sir Syed's disdain for his countrymen's "native" indifference to their condition was heightened after a visit to Britain. He returned brimming with ideas for reforming Muslim society: "The natives of India . . . when contrasted with the English in education, manners and uprightness, are like them as a dirty animal is to an able and handsome man" (quoted in Jones, *Socio-Religious Reform Movements in British India*, 65).

5. Sir Syed writes, "If our old literature was effete and decadent and if it would help us regain our self-respect were we to reject that decadent literature and embrace a new regime, so be it" (quoted in Faruqi, "From Antiquary to Social Revolutionary").

6. At the Muhammedan Educational Conference in Lahore in 1889 he strongly opposed schools for women, insisting that they were unnecessary as well as unsuitable for maintaining *purdah*: "They were 'neither suitable to the conditions [of women in purdah] nor there would be any need for them for our women thousands of years to come'" (Bilgrami, "Sir Syed's Views on Female Education," 80).

7. He writes, "Let girls be taught their proper duties such as the management of a household, and living behind the purdah, modesty, shame etc. By no means teach them to read and write, merely explain the precepts of religion

and have them taught such occupations as needle-work, spinning etc.” (quoted in Bilgrami, “Sir Syed’s Views on Female Education,” 80).

8. See Pritchett, *Nets of Awareness*.

9. Ghalib, quoted in Faruqi, “Conventions of Love, Love of Conventions,” 18.

10. One of Sir Syed’s cherished aims was “to unite England and India socially even more than politically. The English rule in India, in order to be good, must promise to be eternal; and it can never do so until the English people are known to us as friends and fellow subjects, rather than as rulers and conquerors” (quoted in Faruqi, “From Antiquary to Social Revolutionary”).

11. Ahmad, *Son of the Moment*, 60. “Sir Sayyid in fact deliberately echoed Macaulay’s words: the aim of the Muhammedan Anglo-Oriental College he founded at Aligarh in 1875 was ‘to form a class of persons, Muhammedan in religion, Indian in blood and colour, but English in tastes, in opinions, and in intellect.’”

12. As the omniscient narrator of Ahmad’s *Son of the Moment* explains, “For Indians it is not just a change of rule but a change of world. All the former contacts and links have been broken and are of no use, their former talents do not help, and all their prudence is of no avail” (81). In this context a man’s education in Urdu poetry was of no use to him in a British-dominated polity but still remained an integral part of his sociocultural milieu.

13. Asif Farrukhi, foreword to Ahmad, *The Penitence of Nasoob*, xxv.

14. Pritchett suggests that Hali struggled to fit Urdu poetry into the Romantic schema:

Poetry must be natural—and poetry must also be moral. If the classical *ghazal* depicted real, actual loves, as natural poetry should, then it was thoroughly immoral: it spoke of a society obsessed with adultery, illicit seduction, prostitution, and pederasty. But if the *ghazal* in fact indirectly depicted (by exploiting its immense metaphorical resources) morally correct loves, then it had to be seen as so arcane, complex, and conventionalized that it could never be described as natural. Try as they might, Azad and Hali could never manage to make the *ghazal* both natural and moral at the same time. But they could never afford to abandon their grip on either adjective. For while the *ghazal* couldn’t really be seen as having both virtues, it could all too easily be seen as having neither. And to be both unnatural and immoral was to be utterly decadent, to be without redeeming social importance, to be part of a page of history that had already been turned. (*Nets of Awareness*, 182–83)

15. Ahmad, *The Penitence of Nasoob*, 141.

16. Ahmad, *Fasana-e-Mubtala*, 1. All translations of *Fasana-e-Mubtala* are mine.

17. Ahmad, *The Penitence of Nasoob*, 138.

18. *Ibid.*, 134.

19. Naim, “Prize-Winning Adab,” 312.

20. Hali, *Voices of Silence*, 63.

21. Hali urges the *pardab-nasheen* woman to get an education because the relationship between client and courtesan was akin to the relationship

between husband and wife, since both were characterized by fidelity and often a lifetime of companionship. What differentiated these relationships was that while marriage was a duty incumbent upon every Muslim man, the relationship between a courtesan and her client was a pleasurable choice entered into at will by both parties and was premised on love rather than duty.

22. Minault, introduction to Hali, *Voices of Silence*, 48.
23. Ahmad, *Fasana-e-Mubtala*, 115.
24. *Ibid.*, 116.
25. *Ibid.*, 94. Original Urdu text:

Begum: hum log ka kam najatas tarah ka bada pasha hai ke quran ka jamaa pehen le tab bhi koi eitbaar naheen karta. Aap ko yakeen aaye ya na aaye main ek izzatdaar khan daan ki beti hoon khuda jaane yeh bhi karam main likhata hai ke eise bure ahaawul se pardes main padi hoon. Mera haal us qaatey ke mudaak hai:

Qaata:

rehte bus aisi jagah koi na ho
 hum sukhan koi na ho aur hum zubaan koi na ho
 padte gar beemaar tou koi na ho teemar daar
 aur agar mar jaaye tou noha khawaan koi na ho.

26. Rajeswari Sunder Rajan, reading Spivak's essay, suggests that it is not that the subaltern does not speak but that speech here signifies the failure of agency: "Friday [the subaltern character in J. M. Coetzee's *Foe*, a postcolonial rewriting of Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*] may be the *literal* example of the subaltern who cannot—but also will not—speak (his tongue, after all, has been cut out). Bhubaneswari on the other hand serves as the *figural* example of the subaltern who cannot—but, in fact, does—speak. 'Cannot' in this instance signifies not speech's absence but its failure. While Friday's silence may be read as resistance (as willed refusal or simply the lack of the desire to communicate), her speech serves as an instance of failure, at the site of a strenuous attempt to communicate" ("Death and the Subaltern," in Morris, *Can the Subaltern Speak?*, 121).

27. As Visweswaran argues in the context of women participating in *satyagraha*, respectability was linked to social status, which in turn was linked to marriage: "Married women arrested for such activities were considered respectable, especially if they could affirm their social status in the home with evidence of servants to perform their domestic chores. Their political motives, therefore, remain unquestioned. Unmarried women, lower class women, or women who could not otherwise establish respectability—that their lives were 'no better than other women attending to household duties themselves, without assistance of servants'—might have the labels 'prostitute' or 'paramour' attached to them, and their political motives were suspect" ("Small Speeches, Subaltern Gender," 89–90).

28. In "The Rights of Women," Sir Syed writes, "In admitting the superiority of the state of women in developed countries, we have not considered the matter of their freedom from the veil, because in our opinion, to the same

extent as there is excess in this respect in India, there is excess [of another kind] in advanced countries” (161).

29. When Sir Syed advocates women’s education, he restricts himself to an Islamic education: “The men who are your bread winners have acquired the knowledge, because it was the need of time. But no change has taken place in the requirements of educational need for you. It is your duty to know about your religion (Islam) and its precepts and you should recognize the qualities of God worship” (ibid., 248).

30. “The body of the *zaiif* [literally, weak—here used for women] was eroticized to such an extent that the woman, for instance, came to be commonly described as a living sexual organ (*awrat*) which had to be hidden” (Devji, “Gender and the Politics of Space,” 145).

31. . As Mahua Sarkar notes, the practice of *purdah* was not restricted to Muslim society but became widespread as a cultural practice among Hindus, where it took on similar connotations, but it was regarded by reformist Hindu women of the late nineteenth century as an import of Islam (“Muslim Women and the Politics of Invisibility” 234).

32. “Nazir Ahmad concedes that *purdah* exceeds the Koranic injunctions and the Hadis, whose aim is a chaste and pure life and not women’s seclusion or segregation. However, he holds strictness to be necessary, and if *purdah* is an innovation, it is an innovation for the good, because ‘our nature is so rotten.’ He puts forward other arguments in the second volume of *Al-Huquq wa al-Faraiz*, but their overall implication is that, without *purdah*, the Muslims would be thrown into a cultural crisis characterized by distress and with potentially disruptive effects” (Hasan, *A Moral Reckoning*, 166).

33. Sarkar, “Looking for Feminism,” 327.

34. Introduction by Nazir Ahmad, in Ahmad, *The Bride’s Mirror*, 15.

35. Frances Pritchett, afterword to Ahmad, *The Bride’s Mirror*, 214.

36. Butler, *The Psychic Life of Power*, 187.

37. Ahmad, *The Bride’s Mirror*, 141.

38. Ibid., 143.

39. Ibid., 168.

40. Ibid., 187.

41. In his introduction to the novel, Ahmad cites the example of exceptional Muslim women who have commanded great respect, such as Nur Jehan, the wife of Emperor Jahangir, and Zeb-un-Nissa, the talented daughter of Emperor Aurangzeb, because they “have administered the affairs of nations of the whole world, not of a little home and family” (ibid., 15). Without exception each of the women Ahmad cites lived unconventional lives and circumvented the norms of *purdah* in spirit if not in form through the power they had over both the home and the world. Nur Jahan ruled over the Mughal Empire by wielding considerable influence over her opium-addled husband, and Zeb-un-Nissa was an accomplished Persian poet who counseled her father on affairs of state. From this it is evident that Ahmad’s ideal woman is hardly the submissive, subservient woman described by Sir Syed. Yet, significantly, none of these women have direct access to power but rather rule by controlling men.

42. Ahmad, *Son of the Moment*, 235.

CHAPTER 5

1. “*The Garden of Poetry* includes fifty-three Delhi poets who seem from their names to be Hindus (mostly Kayasths and Kashmiri Brahmins) and describes a scattering of poets from unexpected walks of life. . . . ‘Zarafat’ (Wit), a lady with a colorful past who had now settled into respectability; ‘Banno’ (Girl), a courtesan who had caught the taste for poetry from her lover” (Pritchett, *Nets of Awareness*, 10).

2. “And my friend I have often heard [of the beauty of Mirza Hatim Ali] from Mughal Jaan. In the days that she was in Nawab Hamid Ali Khan’s service I used to know her extremely well, and I used to spend hours together in her company. She also showed the verse you wrote in praise of her beauty” (quoted in Russell, *Ghalib*, 14).

3. Faruqi, “Conventions of Love, Love of Conventions,” 6.

4. Grewal, *Home and Harem*, 49.

5. See Devji “Gender and the Politics of Space” 148.

6. The character of Umrao Jaan Ada is briefly mentioned in Ruswa’s incomplete novel *Afsha-e-Raaz*. Because this novel has not been located by contemporary scholars my study is confined to Umrao Jaan’s representation in *Umrao Jaan Ada* and *Junun-e-Intezaar*.

7. The novella was published on 1 April 1899.

8. *Mathnavī* is a form of verse in Arabic, Persian, Urdu, and Turkish. It is a long poem that usually narrates a story, and is written in internally rhyming couplets, each with the same meter.

9. Zaheer Fatehpuri demonstrates that Ruswa copied entire sections from *Qaisar al Tawārik’h* (The Shah/Sultan of Histories), Kamaluddin Haider’s historical treatise on the architecture and literary culture of Awadh before 1857. A telling example of this is the following: “Mirzā Barjis Qadar arrived . . . the Kashmīrīs sang the following *ghazal* for him: / Birjis Qadar is the honour of the moon / Birjis Qadar is a unique jewel” (Haider quoted in Fatehpuri, *Ruswā Kī Nāvil Nigāri*, trans. Shandilya and Shahid, 130). Birjis Qadar’s eleventh birthday was celebrated with much pomp and splendor. In this gathering the Kashmīrīs sang the following poem for him: “Birjis Qadar is the honour of the moon / Birjis Qadar is a unique jewel” (Ruswa, *Umrāo Jān Adā* [trans. Matthews], 184).

10. Spivak, “The Staging of Time in *Heremakhonon*,” 93.

11. Mayo writes, “When a man has his women shut up within his own four walls, he can guard the door.” She goes on to give several examples of veiled women who long to break free of the shackles of patriarchal control (*Mother India*, 153).

12. “To assume that the mere practice of veiling women in a number of Muslim countries indicates the universal oppression of women through sexual segregation is not only analytically reductive, but also proves to be quite useless when it comes to the elaboration of oppositional political strategy” (Mohanty, “Under Western Eyes,” 75).

13. In “*Rekhti* in Urdu Poetry,” Carla Petievich argues that *rekhti* belittled women by representing their experiences in ribald and licentious terms. Further

these poems were created in a conversational Urdu register, which differed greatly from the formal register of *rekhta* (Urdu) and were thus not taken seriously.

14. Naim, “The Earliest Extant Review of *Umra’o Jan*.” In *In Another Country* Joshi argues that the Victorian fiction that became popular in the subcontinent was that which the British literati considered “low-brow.” Hence G. W. M. Reynolds’s penny dreadfuls were more popular among readers than many a literary novel.

15. Ruswa, *Umrao Jaan Ada*, xvii.

16. The modest woman was one who knew how to keep her own counsel. For instance, Ahmad’s *The Bride’s Mirror* clearly suggests that Ashgari was an excellent wife and homemaker because she was quiet and soft-spoken and maintained the decorum necessary for a woman of the *zenana*.

17. I use the English translation when I think it adequately conveys the meaning of the Urdu, and I undertake my own translation when I want to dwell on the literary registers of the Urdu text.

18. Ruswa, *The Madness of Waiting*, 1.

19. Since each verse of the *ghazal* does not necessarily have to connect to the next, the *ghazal* can be taken apart and analyzed verse by verse.

20. Ruswa, *Umrao Jaan Ada* (trans. Krupa Shandilya and Taimoor Shahid), *re*.

21. Kumar, “Aap Beeti or Jag Beeti,” 35.

22. Naim’s article is useful for understanding the different modes used in writing poetry in the subcontinent: “In the ‘Persian’ mode, the poet used a masculine voice for himself, and addressed a beloved who could be male or female. (This mode later gained exclusive dominance in the Urdu *ghazal* in all parts of India.) In the ‘Indic’ mode, on the other hand, the poet/lover adopted a feminine voice for himself, while addressing a beloved who was always male” (“Transvestic Words?,” 6).

23. Pritchett, “Ghazal 208, Verse 9.”

24. Hali, *Yaadgar-e-Ghalib*, 75.

25. The visit to the Ka’aba is metonymic for the Hajj, an act incumbent upon every devout Muslim.

26. Devji, “Gender and the Politics of Space,” 150.

27. As Faruqi argues, “Persian, and Urdu continued to be languages of high culture in India for a long time, until late in the nineteenth century” (“Unprivileged Power,” 16).

28. Ruswa, *Umrao Jaan Ada* (trans. Matthews), 83–84.

29. *Ibid.*, 56–57.

30. Butler, *Bodies That Matter*, 13.

31. Ruswa, *Umrao Jaan Ada* (trans. Matthews), 200.

32. Faruqi, “The Poet in the Poem,” 187. Faruqi exemplifies this poetic trope by quoting the following *she’r* (couplet) from Mir’s first *Divan*: “I used *Rekhta* as a veil / over my true utterance; / And now it has been fated / to stay as my art” (132).

33. Ruswa, *Umrao Jaan Ada* (trans. Shandilya and Shahid), 42.

34. Butler, “Performative Acts and Gender Constitution,” 519.

35. Pritchett, “Ghazal 219, Verse 8.”

36. Ruswa, *Umrao Jaan Ada* (trans. Shandilya and Shahid), 168.
37. Abu-Lughod, *Veiled Sentiments*, 240.
38. "In *Excitable Speech*, I sought to show that the speech act is at once performed (and thus theatrical, presented to an audience, subject to interpretation), and linguistic, inducing a set of effects through its implied relation to linguistic conventions" (Butler, *Gender Trouble*, xxvi–xxvii).
39. Butler, *Excitable Speech*, 84.
40. Feminist historians have suggested that the historical archive for women is located in the construct of home, as women write their narratives through and to the home. Antoinette Burton explains the significance of the home for women: "I want to emphasize, in other words, the importance of home as both a material archive for history and a very real political figure in an extended moment of historical crisis" (*Dwelling in the Archive*, 5).
41. Butler, *Gender Trouble*, xv.

CHAPTER 6

1. P. Chatterjee, *Nationalist Thought*, 5.
2. P. Chatterjee, "Culture and Power in the Thought of Bankim Chandra," 79.
3. B. Chatterjee, "Samya," in *Renaissance and Reaction in Nineteenth Century Bengal*, 193.
4. Chakrabarty, *Habitations of Modernity*, 23.
5. In chapter 5 of *Provincializing Europe* Chakrabarty analyzes Rabindranath's Binodini as enacting a religiously inflected notion of *pabitrata* (purity) and insists that her desire is apolitical.
6. Sedgwick, *Between Men*, 25.
7. See especially Chakrabarty's *Provincializing Europe*, chapter 5, "Domestic Cruelty and the Birth of the Subject."
8. Spivak outlines the colonial feminist project of "soul making" as British women claiming subjecthoods and a role in society that exceeds mere sexual reproduction. In this case the colonized woman is "not almost an animal but rather the object of what might be termed violation, in the name of the categorical imperative" ("Three Women's Texts and a Critique of Imperialism," 122–23).
9. Sangari, "Mirabai and the Spiritual Economy of *Bhakti*," 1472.
10. Asad states that we should not assume "that a proper understanding of agency requires us to place it within the framework of a secular history of freedom from all coercive control" since expressions of agency that stem from the sacred do not map onto this framework (*Formations of the Secular*, 72–73). See also Saba Mahmood, *The Politics of Piety*, 11–14.
11. See Dimock, "Doctrine and Practice among Vaisnavas of Bengal," 47–49.
12. While upper-caste Hindu male Brahmins acted as the intermediaries between mankind and god in fifteenth-century Rajput society, Mirabai's *bhajans* (devotional songs) suggested that union with god did not need elaborate

sacrifices or rituals because it could be attained simply by a willing and complete subjugation to the will of god. Thomas Hopkins explains that the purpose of *bhakti* among the *Vaishnavas* of Bengal was “to destroy men’s attachment to the world by shifting their affection and desire from the world to the Lord. As attachment and devotion to Bhagavan increase, attachment to the world decreases, and release from *samsara* [the world] is possible” (“The Social Teaching of the *Bhagavata Purana*,” 8).

13. In *Sister Outsider*, Audre Lorde speaks powerfully about the necessity for recognizing the erotic and the spiritual as loci of power: “The dichotomy between the spiritual and the political is also false, resulting from an incomplete attention to our erotic knowledge. For the bridge which connects them is formed by the erotic—the sensual—those physical, emotional and psychic expressions of what is deepest and strongest and richest within each of us, being shared: the passions of love, in its deepest meanings” (56).

14. Quoted in Chow, *The Age of the World Target*, 82.

15. Shivarama Padikkal suggests that instead of assuming the Indian novel as derivative of Western traditions or merely an extension of precolonial forms of narrative, “we must . . . be able to explain why and how the novel emerged as a *new* literary genre in a particular historical context” (“Inventing Modernity,” 222).

16. Spivak, “Rethinking Comparativism,” 615.

17. The Urdu social reform novel has been studied in the context of the British eighteenth-century didactic novel and the Bengali in the context of the Victorian domestic novel. See especially Frances Pritchett’s afterword to Ahmad, *The Bride’s Mirror*; Mukherjee, *Realism and Reality*.

18. “The largest truth of literary influence is that it is an irresistible anxiety: Shakespeare will not allow you to bury him, or escape him, or replace him” (Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence*, xvii).

19. Mukherjee, *Translation as Discovery*, 45.

20. Devy, *Indian Literary Criticism*, 187.

21. Tagore, “Literary Creation,” 152.

22. See Sean Pue’s “The Desert of Continuity” and M. A. R. Habib’s “T. S. Eliot and Modernism in Urdu Poetry.”

23. “As we have seen, the author [Nazir Ahmad] proclaimed his hostility to artifice and embellishment—a slap at traditional Persianized Urdu poetry and prose—and his allegiance to colloquial language and ‘pure thoughts.’ (Whether he was writing for his daughters or for Matthew Kempson, the same stylistic choices proved equally pleasing to both)” (Pritchett, *Nets of Awareness*, 221).

24. See the introduction by Krupa Shandilya and Taimoor Shahid to Ruswa, *The Madness of Waiting*.

25. Gail Minault draws attention to Hali’s novel’s resemblance to the literary form of the Sufi *majalis* (gathering), which is “a religious narrative detailing the advice given by sufis to their disciples in their gatherings or assemblies” (in Hali, *Voices of Silence*, 42).

26. Joshi, *Saratchandra* (trans. Krupa Shandilya), 130.

27. See Shandilya, “The Widow, the Wife and the Courtesan.”

28. Spivak, *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason*, 114.
29. See Ania Loomba's discussion of Roop Kanwar's decision to become a *sati* in "Dead Women Tell No Tales."
30. Ghosh, *Chokher Bali* (trans. Krupa Shandilya).

GLOSSARY

1. For more on this see Lelyveld, "Colonial Knowledge and the Fate of Hindustani"; King, *One Language, Two Scripts*; Rahman, *From Hindi to Urdu*.

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