

# Exploring Silenced Voices and Nationalism: Reimagining in South Asian Fictions

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## Declaration

It is hereby declared that

1. The thesis submitted is my own original work while completing degree at BRAC University.
2. The thesis does not contain material previously published or written by a third party, except where this is appropriately cited through full and accurate referencing.
3. The thesis does not contain material which has been accepted, or submitted, for any other degree or diploma at a university or other institution.
4. I have acknowledged all main sources of help.

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## Approval

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## Abstract

This paper is an attempt to highlight the silent voice (marginalized contribution) of women in the national movement context. In general, history has often glorified the heroic roles of the men who created a nation, but the irreplaceable participation and sacrifices of that nation's women have often been untold. Whereas it should be more concerned with the stories of ordinary people. Therefore, the focal concept of this paper is "Gender and Nationalism." Hence, this paper will endeavor to mirror the significant shift in women's position from perceived passivity to active participation in the context of South Asian nationalistic movements. Women surmounted several obstacles and limitations to become proactive change agents who shaped national identities and enhanced the nationalist movements. This evolution is not only about being more apparent; it is also about how gender roles are being intricately reconfigured in the social and political arenas.

## Keywords

National conflict, marginalized, unrecognized contribution, sacrifice, decision-makers, micro-public approach.

## Chapter 1

### **1.1. Introduction**

Wars are often remembered through the names of famous men, but they are lived, sustained, and later remembered through the daily work of women. Parades, maps, and leader-centric textbooks fix our memory on spectacle; meanwhile, the tasks that keep people alive—cooking, hiding, nursing, passing messages, bargaining at doors—are treated as “private” and slip out of view. In South Asia, across the 1947 Partition and the 1971 Bangladesh Liberation War, women were not only casualties or witnesses. They were decision-makers, organizers, and risk-takers whose choices held families, neighborhoods, and movements together. This thesis reads Geetanjali Shree’s *Tomb of Sand* and Tahmima Anam’s *A Golden Age* as literary interventions that correct the record. Both novels show how the

nation is also made in kitchens and courtyards, at doors and border gates, and within the fragile yet enduring architecture of memory.

The project is anchored in well-known theories, but it uses them in a practical way. If the nation is Benedict Anderson's "imagined community," these novels ask who does the imagining and whose routines keep everyone else going. Partha Chatterjee's *ghar/bahir* split helps us see how nationalist thought confined women to an "inner" sphere; the novels push back by showing how the home becomes a public interface under crisis. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak warns that subaltern women are often spoken for rather than heard; I therefore read for moments when women are at decision points and their speech clearly changes outcomes. Chandra Talpade Mohanty's insistence on locality keeps the analysis grounded in addresses, routes, offices, and reputations in Dhaka and Delhi rather than in abstract categories.

Three recent feminist strands sharpen the focus on acknowledgment. First, Mrinalini Sinha's maternal nationalism shows how reverence for "Mother India" both includes and controls women, turning respectability into a political credential while shifting costs and risks onto mothers and widows. Read alongside Anam and Shree, Sinha aids us to resist easy praise of "sacrifice" and count the work—time, exposure, and official performance—through which maternal scripts are bent into political action. Second, Yasmin Saikia's "Beyond the Archive of Silence" reframes voice and ethics:



silence can be a practiced form of protection and dissent; “voice-giving” can become extraction. Applied here, Saikia teaches us to read selective disclosure and the unsaid (to neighbors, relatives, even officers) as life-preserving tactics that archives seldom credit but events in these novels record. Third, scholarship on “resilient women” and the “transnational home” in *A Golden Age* clarifies how Rehana’s bungalow (“Shona”) relays care, shelter, and news across Dhaka, Calcutta, Karachi, and fighter camp spaces; at the same time, the resilience lens can romanticize endurance and overlook how mobility in 1971 depended on language, papers, address, and reputation. This study keeps what clarifies and returns costs and constraints to the center (“Resilient women: transnational homes and identities in *A Golden Age*”).

Methodologically, I use a simple approach to treat the home as a micro-public; I read thresholds (doors, gates, offices) as authority. In practice, that means asking: (1) what work is done (care, logistics, money, messages) and what risks attach to it; (2) where the “private” act becomes public in effect (a gate, a checkpoint, a desk for papers); and (3) whose words count (who is quoted vs. paraphrased, and which documents confer or strip authority). This turns acknowledgment from tribute into evidence by tying claims to things we can point to on the rooms, routes, offices, and decisions.

*Tomb of Sand* centers on an elderly widow who reopens a door that “sees all,” forms new bonds, and asks for a passport, turning private mourning into cross-border repair. Whereas *A Golden Age* centers on a widowed mother who converts her house into a safe-house, clinic, storeroom, and relay, using language switches, name-dropping, and carefully held silences to deflect searches. Together, Sinha’s critique of maternalism, and Saikia’s ethics of silence, and the resilience/transnational-home debate, these novels show that women’s caregiving, sheltering, and memory are not beside the nation. They are the framework that remains uncredited until the narrative brings them into view.

## 1.2. Background

The notion of “nation” in the South Asian context was molded through division and displacement. The 1947 Partition redrew borders along religious lines, unleashing mass migration, communal violence, and sexual assault on a horrific scale. In addition, in 1971, The Bangladesh Liberation War saw systematic rape used as an instrument of terror and control. When Partition is remembered, the big national moments dominate, and women’s stories are pushed to the margins. Women’s lived realities remain in the shadows, like they are invisible. Here, that

invisibility is structural, that is, structured by the patriarchal society. Partha Chatterjee argues that nationalist thinking split life into two zones: an inner world surrounded by notions like home, religion, and culture, where women were told to guard “tradition,” and an outer world of politics reserved for men. Even when women acted, they were often required to act as symbols rather than citizens.

This setup did not just push women’s voices aside; it also warped how the nation remembers itself. If, as Anderson argues, nations are built from shared stories, rituals, and media, then leaving out women’s accounts weakens that imagined community at its core. Because when women’s stories are left out, the nation’s shared story becomes incomplete, questionable, and less truthful, which weakens the sense that “we” are together as a community. However, many postcolonial feminist critics, through their writings, ask us to look in two directions at once. First, they ask where women were in national movements; second, they ask how the stories we keep telling make women’s work difficult to see or say. It is not only about absence in the past but also about the way history has been written. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak explains this problem by noting that a subaltern woman often is not heard on her terms; even when she speaks, her words get filtered or spoken for or by others. Likewise, Chandra Talpade Mohanty warns that some Western feminist writing treats the concept of “Third World women” as all the same, erasing their



different histories, limits, and strengths. Together, these ideas point toward questions like who tells the story, whose memories are valued, and whether “private” places, such as homes, kitchens, borders, and shelters, can be considered as political spaces. In short, these critiques don’t just add women to the plot; they change how we used to read history, so we notice the day-to-day work, the local realities, and the actual choices women have. In this way, *A Golden Age* and *Tomb of Sand* are not just stories of national trauma; they also ask who is allowed to tell the ordinary story of everyday life during extraordinary violence.

This approach also echoes the genealogy of South Asian texts that problematize nationalism from within. Rabindranath Tagore’s *The Home and the World* stages the allure and danger of nationalist charisma through the character of Bimala and her divided loyalties, anticipating later critiques of how movements conscript women symbolically while doubting their autonomy. Amitav Ghosh’s *The Shadow Lines* shows that borders are often “imaginary lines,” drawn in our minds and family stories as much as on maps. In 1947, women’s bodies became battlegrounds. Building on this, Shree and Anam take a clear twenty-first-century path: they place elderly and widowed women at the center as protagonists, embrace linguistic and structural hybridity, and refuse neat closure precisely because the wounds they write about are still not healed.

### 1.3. Overview of “*A Golden Age* (Tahmina Anam)”

Tahmima Anam’s novel opens with a private wound that shapes everything that follows. In the novel, protagonist Rehana Haque, a young widow in Dhaka, has already lost her children once to a custody battle and fought to bring them back. This private loss shapes her fierce love and later courage. First, the novel places Rehana between past and present borders. She once lived in Calcutta, and later her family moved toward Karachi. This movement hints at the long shadow of the 1947 Partition, which split families and loyalties across India and Pakistan.

By early 1971, she had rebuilt a modest life around her son, Sohail, and her daughter, Maya. When the military crackdown begins and the Liberation War unfolds, the center of the book becomes Rehana’s house—its rooms, courtyard, and garden—and the new risks that enter that space. From here, the story depicts how ordinary people become part of a national struggle. Sohail joins the ‘Guerrillas’; Maya throws herself into student activism and underground work. Rehana’s house and hands become tools of resistance. She travels, carries messages and supplies, and later serves around refugee and medical spaces. These acts show women’s physical labor



(moving, nursing, organizing), their psychological stamina (quiet planning, constant fear), and their emotional leadership (holding families and communities together).

Hence, the novel shows how a home becomes a base of survival and resistance. Rehana shelters people, conveys messages, stores food and supplies, and learns to answer questions without revealing the truth. Much of this work looks ordinary—cooking, cleaning, arranging beds, keeping watch—but it is the hidden staging that lets more visible acts of resistance happen. At the same time, Rehana must manage the fear that her children will be taken from her again, this time by war rather than a judge. Maya and Sohail make different choices about how to fight, and Rehana bears the cost of those choices in silence, bargaining with her fate.

The story avoids grand speeches and focuses instead on the weight of small decisions: whom to trust, when to open the gate, and which lie will save a life. These events add up to a clear claim about women's unrecognized labor in wartime. The nation is not only made on battlefields; it is carried through kitchens and courtyards by people who keep others fed, hidden, and hopeful. The novel closes in December 1971 with Bangladesh's victory. Rehana survives to see independence, but celebration is braided with grief for those who did not return. On 16th December, the war ends, and crowds pour into the streets. Rehana stands with Maya, waving the new flag and waiting for Sohail. Her words—"this war that has taken so many sons

has spared mine... this age that has burned so many daughters has not burned mine” (Anam, p. 297)—capture relief mixed with grief. The end of the protagonist is not death but survival: Rehana remains alive, marked by loss yet anchored by love, as Bangladesh becomes free. At the end, a new flag rises, and its cost remains in the quiet rooms where women like Rehana did the work that history rarely names.

#### **1.4. Overview of “*Tomb of Sand* (Geetanjali Shree; trans. Daisy Rockwell)”**

The story follows the life of an elderly woman called Ma. The tale begins just after Ma’s husband dies. Ma shuts down her world. She lies in bed, turns her back to the room, and almost disappears into the wall. This grief shows how a woman’s body can carry the weight of family and nation. Ma’s “back” becomes a wall that keeps others out and is metaphorically used as a boundary. After a while, Ma returns to life. She befriends Rosie (who is a transgender woman), and slowly Ma starts to walk on an opposite path compared to a conventional widow character, the way society expects. However, the tale is about women and the lines that try to stop them, yet the women move anyway.

In the middle of the novel, it is shown that Ma has decided to confront her past by beginning a journey toward the India–Pakistan border. She heads to Wagah, Pakistan. Here, this visit reminds us that the Partition is not only history. It lives in people, places, and public rituals. It carries love, courage, separation, and “bloodshed.” The past also “boils forth into the present” (Shree, p. 15), so old wounds return and must be faced.

The overall story sheds light on the unspoken history and layered loss that people witnessed due to national conflicts. The novel also shows how partitions become gendered trauma for women. Therefore, there are two interconnected ways to illustrate women's contributions to nation-building. First, physically. Ma travels, waits, argues, and keeps moving. She even practices how to fall if violence comes: not face-down, but on her back, eyes open to the sky. She does this so she can meet force with some last dignity. Later, in the text, when a bullet actually comes, it passes through her body. She fell the way she had practiced—“face up” (Shree, p. 17).

Second, psychologically. From the initial pages of the text, the novel states that women and borders make stories. This means women decide to remember, not erase. Ma chooses to face the past, not hide from it. After so many years, Ma's visit to Pakistan was not just any ordinary sight visit; rather, it was a response to an old



call so that she could finish what was left undone. She refuses to let official lines or official stories control what she feels or where she goes. She says, “Anything worth doing transcends borders” (Shree, p. 16). This is a direct challenge to the narrow concept of nationalism.

Therefore, *Tomb of Sand* is not only about one family. It is about how nations are made and unmade in the daily lives of women. It also reflects how women hold families together while nations argue about lines. It shows how partition continues in bodies, memories, and relationships. It honors women who step forward during unrest and riots—by walking, waiting, speaking, remembering, and loving. At the end, when Ma is shot at the border and falls on her back, the book asks us as readers to see her not as defeated, but as someone who has crossed one last line on her own terms.

**Chapter****2****2.1. Literature Review**

This review takes a deliberately skeptical stance toward canons of nationalism, gender, and Partition. Instead of inserting “women” into inherited frameworks, it audits the frameworks that made women’s nation-making work vanish to begin with. I read foundational theory, nationalist fiction, and Partition testimony for what they cannot register—especially the domestic, documentary, and logistical labors by which women produce public outcomes under risk. Methodologically, I retain the project’s focus on micro-publics orientation, like home as a civic interface, thresholds as authorities, and its event-based themes about labor/threshold/voice. But instead of using these ideas to confirm what’s already claimed, I used them to test and challenge existing assumptions. In short, this is a corrective literature review, not an additive one, and it insists that “women’s contribution” be argued at the level of measurable acts and outcomes, not symbols or sentiments.

Benedict Anderson clarifies how a horizontal “we” coalesces through ritual time, print, and habit, but the scale of his account buries the very labors that keep that “we” alive under pressure: feeding, hiding, credentialing, and bargaining at doors. Kitchens, courtyards, and neighborhood economies appear as atmosphere, not

infrastructure. A gendered re-read must therefore supply instruments for detecting which “private” acts become public in effect and why archives rarely count them. Partha Chatterjee historicizes the nationalist inner/outer split (ghar/bahir) as a “new patriarchy” that installs women as custodians of authenticity; this names an ideology but offers few tools to measure the crossings that follow.

Bhabha also describes the nation as existing in “in-between” spaces, but their application of terms like “liminality” and “negotiation” often stays too abstract. Without connecting these ideas to real examples, documents, or outcomes—like who makes decisions under what limits, and with what results—liminality risks becoming a term that explains everything but measures nothing.

Mrinalini Sinha’s account of late-colonial “Mother India” exposes the contradictory politics of maternalist nationalism; it promoted national pride by honoring the mother figure but also controlled women by linking them to domestic roles and discipline. The maternal icon extends a qualified citizenship—they are valorized as mothers and moral guardians, but it still denied full political rights and independent political identity. In literary terms, that logic yields the character of heroines often shown as virtuous women whose labor is misclassified as “ordinary home chores.” Sinha’s critique matters for contemporary readings because “maternal agency” can refer to celebrating women’s roles as mothers can hide the real risks, efforts, and



sacrifices they make, also by converting women's bodies, time, and reputations to subsidize the nation's failures.

Sinha also complicates Chatterjee's concept of "new patriarchy." Where Chatterjee historicizes the interior as women's sacred place of authentic culture, Sinha shows how maternalist nationalism re-dresses that sanctum as a political credential: the "good mother" is admitted into the nation on condition that she naturalizes domestic discipline and respectability politics.

Moreover, in Rabindranath Tagore's *The Home and the World*, the character of Bimala mediates between charisma and ethics but remains pinned to representational work. Next, Amitav Ghosh's *The Shadow Lines* relocates borders into memory and rumor; women preserve that memory (the character of Thamma) with authority.

Spivak warns against speaking for others, like a dummy who is speaking through a subordinate's voice, and this is an important ethical guideline. However, if people misread this warning (like, she cannot speak), it can easily turn into empty or overly abstract analysis. The relevant question at a door or desk is narrower: which utterances—code-switches, credentialing, document requests—alter the distribution of risk? Then, Talpade Mohanty's critique of the "Third World woman" as a homogenized victim likewise redirected the field toward specificity of class, address,

and institutional texture; yet “difference” frequently appears as posture, not procedure. What remains underdeveloped are replicable protocols for (i) coding labor (care, storage, movement, money, messages), (ii) mapping locality (addresses, markets, offices, routes), and (iii) testing voice (who is quoted vs. reported, which documents confer or strip authority).

Next, Urvashi Butalia’s testimony-centered archive provincialized statist histories, but trauma-centrism can narrow attention to spectacular injury and leave the mundane mechanics of survival undertheorized. Yasmin Saikia’s “Beyond the Archive of Silence” is pivotal: she treats silence as a practiced mode of protection and dissent, shows how the state’s “Birangona” script both honors and appropriates, and exposes the violence of retrieval, whereby projects that “give voice” re-expose women to shame and surveillance. Placed at the center of a literature review, Saikia’s intervention forces critics to distinguish evidence from extraction; sometimes the ethically right reading is to mark what is not said—and why—not to compel confession.

In *A Golden Age*, Rehana’s bungalow (“Shona”) serves as a relay that ties Dhaka to Calcutta, Karachi, and fighter camp spaces; it captures how “home” becomes a switching station for care, shelter, and news. But as analytic rubrics, resilience and transnational home can also be obscure. Resilience romanticizes endurance,



privatizes risk, and mutates into a moral metric that excuses institutional failure.

“Transnational home” can erase the rationed character of mobility in 1971, importing an optics of seamless flow that underestimates checkpoints, searches, and the politics of address. To keep faith with the text and the moment, it must be shown how mobility is won—minute by minute—through language, papers, and reputation.

Read through this stricter lens, *A Golden Age and Tomb of Sand* supply the scenes the canons lack and invite a sharper critique of our habits. For Anam, “Shona” is not a metaphor for nation; it is a micro-infrastructure—storeroom, clinic, safe house; whose threshold functions as a local border. Outcomes turn on speech and paper: a switch into Urdu, a well-placed name, a feigned deference that sends soldiers away. The novel is most powerful when we read those moves as civic performance rather than as atmosphere. In doing so, the analysis reclassifies “care” from feminine virtue to risky logistics. That shift moves us away from consoling narratives and grounds the critique in measurable, risky labor—a caution your draft already raised.

*Tomb of Sand* sharpens the same lesson from another angle. The Delhi door that “sees all” functions as a micro-institution, a forum of greetings and requests where the private is already public. When the elderly widow asks for a passport and walks toward Wagah, she performs Bhabha’s threshold as an institutional encounter rather

than a metaphor, testing how age, respectability, and kinship travel across a state gate.

With Sinha as a brake on maternalist common sense, we stop applauding “sacrifice” in the abstract. It challenges the usual idea of mothers being praised mainly for sacrifice; rather, this approach moves us away from blindly celebrating sacrifice as a virtue. Instead, we begin to clearly identify and name what is really happening and who is affected.

Situating Rehana within this debate does sharpen a certain view. The “Transnational Home” shows Rehana’s movement before 1971—through Calcutta, Karachi, and Dhaka—and later the global networks of support that reached across the world during the war. It also aids in demonstrating why the bungalow (Shona) can briefly hold together friendships and kin that the border tries to sever. But even at its best, the idiom can flatten rationed mobility into style; in 1971, movement depends on language (Bengali/Urdu), papers, and classed respectability; routes are contingent and reputational. A “resilience” lens may celebrate coping yet ignore the price of each lie at the gate and the hours spent assembling food, medicine, and cover stories while under suspicion. In short, this scholarship clarifies the network of home but risks moralizing what should be politicized; the corrective is to return to scene—

level evidence and tally what is said versus what must be left unsaid to keep the house viable.

Accordingly, this study treats the home as a micro-public, the gate as authority, and speech/documents as instruments. Three consequences follow. First, code labor not as virtue but as logistics (care, storage, movement, money, messages) with their attached risks. Second, map locality (addresses, markets, offices, routes, and ceremonies) because mobility is rationed and reputations are foundational. Third, audit voice as effectiveness: who is quoted directly, who speaks only through reported speech, and which names and papers convert suspicion into passage? These choices keep the analysis aligned with ethics (Saikia) and politics (Sinha) and build a replicable toolkit for reading texts set in 1947 or 1971. Finally, these method choices build on your draft's design scaffold (coding labor/threshold/voice and mapping routes and offices) but lean the balance from celebration to verification, a commitment to make women's foundational work legible, comparable, and testable across scenes and texts.

The upshot of this critical pass is to unsettle durable habits. Against Anderson's macro view, keep a record of micro-infrastructures or risk erasing the very labor that sustains the imagined community. Against Chatterjee's inner/outer, read for the moment the interior becomes an openly policed interface. Against Bhabha's



abstraction, it insists on operationalization. Against the resilience/transnational turn, retain what clarifies (home as network) while refusing the conversion of threat into halo. Against feminist devotion to “voice-giving,” retain Saikia’s insistence that silence can be strategic and ethical. And against maternalist romanticism, retain Sinha’s demonstration that the maternal script disciplines as it includes. In this configuration, women do not ornament the nation; they infrastructure it. The analysis that follows is designed to make that nation-making labor be seen, counted, and argued, not merely admired.

## 2.2. Research Gap

Despite a rich theoretical compilation on nationalism and partition, women’s nation-making labor remains improperly acknowledged because dominant societal frameworks lack the means to see it, let alone measure it. Together, these theories (Anderson, Chatterjee, Bhabha) clarify how nations are imagined, domesticated, and staged at thresholds, but they do not supply operational tools to identify which “domestic” acts—feeding fighters, sheltering, managing papers and rumors—become public in effect under risk. Postcolonial feminist critiques (Spivak, Mohanty) diagnose homogenization, yet in practice, scholarship often stops at naming difference rather

than instrumenting it. As a result, women's contributions are acknowledged sentimentally—"sacrifice," "resilience," "memory"—while their infrastructural work remains uncoun­ted.

Two additional blind spots deepen this acknowledgment deficit. First, trauma-centrism in Partition studies has recovered spectacular violence but often sidelines the mundane logistics that sustain communities during crisis. Saikia's intervention on silence as strategic protection exposes the ethical problem: archival "voice-giving" can become extractive, and in the absence of a method to track what must remain unsaid for survival, women's agency is misread as absence. Second, maternal-list nationalism (Sinha) folds women into the nation through reverence that simultaneously disciplines them; contemporary "resilience" and "transnational home" rubrics risk re-romanticizing care and privatizing risk, especially where mobility and safety are classed.

Even where recent fictions (*A Golden Age*, *Tomb of Sand*) relocate agency to doors, gates, and kitchens, criticism lacks a shared, replicable toolkit to register that agency. We still do not: (1) surface hidden labor and map it to rooms, routes, and offices; (2) code thresholds where domestic choices attract surveillance and sanction; (3) audit voice (who is quoted vs. paraphrased; which documents confer or strip authority); and (4) situate how class, widowhood, and language recalibrate risk

in 1947 and 1971. Consequently, women appear as symbols and witnesses, while the very acts that author outcomes remain methodologically invisible.

This thesis addresses that gap by operationalizing a micro-publics method—treating the home as a civic interface, thresholds as jurisdictions, and applying a labor-threshold-voice coding scheme—to convert women’s “private” work into countable, comparable, and historical evidence of nation-making. Only with such instrumentation can acknowledgment move from tribute to proof.

## 2.3. Research Questions

My research has not one but two research questions that I intend to answer in the discussion section of my research paper. Guided by the introduction and literature review, this study pursues two interlocking, operational questions that directly address the identified research gap:

(1) To what extent—and through which mechanisms—do male-centered, official narratives of the 1947 Partition and the 1971 Bangladesh Liberation War erase women’s historic contributions?

(2) How do Tahmima Anam’s *A Golden Age* and Geetanjali Shree’s *Tomb of Sand* recast caregiving, sheltering, and memory as nation-making labor?



Together, these questions convert the review's theoretical gap—Anderson's macro “we,” Chatterjee's ghar/bahir split, Bhabha's liminality, Spivak's problem of voice, and Mohanty's insistence on locality—into a replicable method that measures erasure and demonstrates repair. They directly answer the Introduction's claim that nations are also made in kitchens, courtyards, and the architectures of memory by producing textual, local, and institutional evidence for that claim

## 2.4. Research Purpose and Thesis Statement

This study's purpose is to measure how official, male-centered Partition narratives erase women's work and to show, with clear textual evidence, how *A Golden Age* and *Tomb of Sand* restore that work as nation-making labor. I will answer the two research questions by turning familiar theories into simple tools: Anderson helps frame the shared “we,” Chatterjee the home/outside line, Bhabha the threshold, Ghosh memory and border, Spivak voice and agency, and Mohanty locality and difference. I will define them through three steps— (1) code women's domestic work into care, logistics, money, and messages, noting the risks and decisions attached to each act; (2) track locality by mapping named routes, addresses, markets, offices,

### 3.1. Maternal Agency and Nation Making in “A *Golden Age*”



This section addresses the core research question: why, within South Asian nationalist movements, women's nation-making has been overshadowed by an idolized, masculine heroism; and how Tahmima Anam's historical novel *A Golden Age* anatomizes women's contributions in ways that correct that record. Reading Anam alongside the above-mentioned theories and recent feminist criticism, I show how the novel relocates political agency to domestic infrastructures and maternal decisions under risk, converting "home" into a civic interface whose thresholds are openly policed. The analytic stakes are twofold: first, to clarify how women author outcomes at scenes of decision (gates, kitchens, clinics, and camps); and second, to historicize why such authorship has remained uncredited in both state archives and scholarly criticism.

Anam's narrative centers on the 1971 Bangladesh Liberation War and situates its protagonist, Rehana Haque, within East Pakistan's urban neighborhoods (present-day Dhaka). The novel offers a direct form of female participation: a widowed mother who becomes an active coordinator of insurgent logistics. Rehana's drastic shift from cautious protector to strategic actor projects the evolving possibilities of women's agency in South Asian nationalist discourse. The plot tracks her earlier loss of custody and, later, her children's commitments to the war, but the analytic emphasis falls on the consequential labor of caregiving, sheltering,

provisioning, and speech acts that are misclassified as “private” yet produce public effects under surveillance.

At the novel’s beginning, Rehana is sketched as constrained and bereaved, fighting for dignity in a system that has already separated her from her children. The custody judgment stating that “Your children are not your children” (Anam, p. 12) marks the juridical precarity against which her later choices will be read. As the war sharpens, Anam stages a radical transition: Rehana refuses the role of victim and refashions herself as a decisive participant in neighborhood-level resistance. She articulates that shift plainly—“I am a widow... I am alone, and I can make my own choices”—not as rhetoric, but as a preface to operational acts of care, concealment, and negotiation that will keep others alive.

Rehana’s new independence does not end at the doorstep; it moves outward and is accompanied by others. Here, Benedict Anderson’s claim that nations are imagined through the regularities of everyday life illuminates the novel’s method. The Ramna racecourse rally fuses public oratory with domestic feeling; Rehana hears “Make every home a fortress” (Anam, p. 60), and the crowd’s “Joy Bangla” threads the leader’s speech to a mother’s beating heart and a daughter’s hand (7 March 1971). Crucially, Anam then interprets the dictum. When Sohail details what resistance requires—storage, food, safe rooms—Rehana turns routines into logistics. Ordinary

acts (cooking, hosting, cleaning, purchasing) are readjusted as strategic labor in a city under curfew. The event rejects the trope of maternal inspiration and replaces it with a ledger of dangerous tasks.

Next, Partha Chatterjee's classic account of the ghar/bahir split clarifies the ideology that assigns women to a protected "inner." *A Golden Age* writes against that split by making Rehana's "Inside" work is public in effect and perilous in practice. The safe house decision is not symbolic; it is a material crossing that makes the domestic space a military target. During the crackdown, an officer at the gate needles, "Suppose we were to find guns under your rosebushes?" (Anam, p. 283). The exchange displays the cost of converting 'ghar' into a strategy. Rehana answers by switching languages and social codes—she speaks Urdu, she drops a name ("Jabeen") to signal reach, and she performs deference to deflect a search (25 March 1971). The threshold becomes a jurisdiction where identity is renegotiated.

Mrinalini Sinha's analysis of maternal nationalism deepens this critique. She shows how the idiom of "Mother India" incorporates women through admiration while disciplining them through domesticity, offering qualified inclusion that often forecloses autonomous political subjectivity (Sinha 2000). Read through Sinha; Rehana's maternal agency is double-edged: the nation demands her labor and respectability but offers no institutional protection in return. The novel refuses to



romanticize this bargain. It tallies costs in time, exposure, and fear, and it shows how maternal scripts can be strategically bent to produce public outcomes without collapsing into celebratory “sacrifice.” Maternal agency, therefore, appears not as a blessing but as a burden.

A second lens comes from the article “Resilient women: transnational homes and identities in Tahmima Anam’s *A Golden Age*,” which reads the novel through resilience and transnational home. This scholarship clarifies how Rehana’s bungalow (“Shona”) functions as a relay linking Dhaka to Karachi, Calcutta, and camp spaces, making home a switching station for care, shelter, and news. It rightly tracks how Rehana’s pre-1971 migrations and kin networks become resources during crisis. Yet, as many critics note, resilience is a dangerously elastic category: it can moralize endurance, privatize risk, and convert institutional failure into a virtue of mothers. “Transnational home,” similarly, can smuggle classed assumptions about effortless mobility that 1971’s papers, checkpoints, and language politics decisively contradict. The method adopted here recognizes what this lens clarifies without sentimentalizing the hazard.

Yasmin Saikia’s “Beyond the Archive of Silence” recasts how we read testimony and representation in wartime. She argues that silence is not absence but a practiced mode of protection and dissent; that honorific scripts of ‘Birangona’ can both

recognize and appropriate; and that “voice giving” projects risk reenacting the violence of retrieval (Saikia 2004). Applied to *Anam*, Saikia’s ethic reframes Rehana’s evasions at the gate and within her neighborhood: selective disclosure and euphemism are not narrative gaps but operational necessities. The novel’s most charged speech acts, therefore, include what is not said—what is withheld from neighbors, from soldiers, and sometimes from kin—because the unsaid preserves the safe house. This reading anchors acknowledgment in ethics as well as in evidence.

Homi K. Bhabha’s vocabulary of thresholds and “in-between” spaces suits *Anam*’s choreography of gates, gardens, and doorways, but the novel pushes beyond metaphor to materiality. When the patrol hints about the rosebushes, the garden becomes a civic border where identities are renegotiated: Bengali widow, Urdu-speaking woman, suspected collaborator. Rehana re-narrates herself on that line through language choice, social address, and careful humor: “She indulged him by laughing” (*Anam*, p. 93); here, she alters the outcome. Official narratives center on state borders; *Anam* shows the house gate to be just as charged, and it is women who guard and negotiate it by learning the rules of that micro-jurisdiction.

Amitav Ghosh widens the frame in *The Shadow Lines*, showing how borders also live in routes, stories, and family archives. *A Golden Age* adapts that insight when the

war pushes Rehana across to the Salt Lake refugee camp in Calcutta; camp life is not a pause but a rerouting. Rehana carries food, care, and news across lines; returns are plotted through kin and friends rather than official channels (Anam, p. 235). This answers a second analytic question: caregiving and sheltering redraw the map from within, substituting remembered paths and reputational credit for cartographic lines and formal permissions.

Thus, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's provocation—"Can the Subaltern Speak?"—remains a crucial ethical check: distinguish depiction from ventriloquy; do not mistake being shown for speaking for. A Golden Age supplies applied tests of voice. Who is quoted versus paraphrased? Which utterances alter outcomes? At decisive junctures—the rally, the searches, the instruction of her children—Rehana is quoted directly; her speech acts (naming, pleading, bargaining, code switching) produce safety (the army leaves; the safe house remains viable). The effect is to displace the familiar trope of "mother as symbol" with "mother as decision maker," documented at the level of scene and consequence.

Then, Chandra Talpade Mohanty's insistence on locality guards against homogenization. In the novel, Anam grounds Rehana's work in Dhaka's addresses and class textures. Early chapters mark Dhanmondi's quiet routines even as the city churns; sarees, jewelry boxes, and house-to-house visits stitch neighborhood



economies. Rehana's ability to shelter fighters depends on street reputation, kin networks, and the capacity to buy, cook, and conceal without drawing attention. These are not generic "women's tasks"; they are Dhaka-specific tasks filtered by language (Bengali/Urdu), widowhood, and class. What official histories treat as a single "home front" is a map: routes, vendors, courtyards, offices—each a risk calculus that women must solve.

Two final clarifications anchor the analytical payoff. First, maternal agency in *A Golden Age* is not a halo; rather, it is risky labor. Sinha's critique blocks the slide from reverence to romance by showing how maternal scripts economize the nation's costs onto women; Saikia blocks the slide from "voice" to extraction by naming the ethics of opacity. Taken together, they reweight Rehana's motherhood as strategic work under surveillance rather than as a timeless virtue (Sinha 2000; Saikia 2004). Second, the "resilient women / transnational home" reading is retained where it clarifies connections and mobility and curbed where it risks class-blind romanticism. Treated this way, it helps explain how "Shona" functions as a node without excusing the state for outsourcing protection to mothers.

In sum, *A Golden Age* recasts politics in a new way by focusing on small but risky everyday actions, where household work can end up having big public and political effects. Rehana's caregiving, sheltering, document handling, and strategic speech

are not “private”; they are the infrastructure of the collective. By naming addresses, staging thresholds, and quoting women at the moment of decision, Anam renders women’s voices noticeable and accountable, which male-centered historians often overlook. The novel thereby provides both evidence and a method for acknowledging women’s contributions as nation-making labor rather than as sentimental afterthoughts.

To keep the argument factual, I treat Anam’s events as operational tests. When Sohail outlines the resistance’s needs—“We need a place in the city... to store arms... a safe place” (Anam, p. 110)—Rehana answers with a domestic inventory turned strategic: “A hammer. A glass of water. Soap” (Anam, p. 111). The list is pointedly banal; its banality is the method. It shows how ordinary objects become strategic instruments and how domestic time is converted into the stopwatch time of raids, deliveries, and disappearances. An analyst who cannot register that conversion will allocate women’s work to atmosphere rather than structure. A method that registers can measure risk alongside care.

The “home as fortress (Anam, p. 60)” motif, then, is not merely metaphorical. It reorganizes household space into zones of secrecy and flow: courtyards as triage centers, kitchens as provisioning lines, bedrooms as storage, and the gate as a checkpoint. Each zone pulses with risks that are gendered. Rehana must maintain



respectability sufficient to deflect suspicion; she must speak the language that the uniform will hear; and she must calibrate who learns what, when. These are bureaucratic performances, not just moral ones; they are directed at specific offices (police, army, neighborhood committees) whose gaze the house must survive.

Chatterjee's inner/outer formulation helps track that reassessment. The ideology of a sacred inner space for women is not left behind; rather, it is turned into a weapon for power and control. The codes that confine women to the home, such as modesty, hospitality, and maternal care, are reused as a cover for secret resistance work. However, the price of that cover is exposure; once the house becomes an activity center, it becomes a target. When the officer teases out the possibility of guns under the rosebushes, he is not merely threatening violence; he is declaring the violation of the interior. The "inner" has become a controllable interface.

Placed in dialogue with Sinha, the stakes sharpen further. Maternalism structures who can credibly speak at the gate and what that speech can perform. "Good mother" is a credential that Rehana must perform to survive inspections, but it is also a contract that silently conscripts her labor. She is permitted to feed sons, not to feed a movement; she can shelter kin, not fighters. The novel shows her bending that contract until it yields public effects without breaking the social surface that

shields her from retaliation. That bending is the precise site where maternal agency becomes political authorship.

The “resilient women / transnational home” literature tracks similar bending at the scale of kin and diaspora. Rehana’s remembered migrations, language (Bengali/Urdu), and cross-border ties align with this scholarship’s argument that home is not a bounded interior but a trans-local relay. The reading clarifies how money, news, and care move through “Shona” along routes that predate 1971 and that the war intensifies. My use of it, however, is diagnostic rather than celebratory. If “resilience” explains endurance, it must also count costs: sleep traded for watch keeping, documents rehearsed to pass a gate, and lies told to preserve a life.

Saikia’s intervention supplies the ethical counterweight. The archive wants testimony; the state wants confession; neighbors want stories that stabilize rumor. Saikia names silence as a technique that frustrates those appetites and preserves life. In *A Golden Age*, Rehana’s “not telling” is patterned: she withholds details from inquisitive neighbors, shields her children from information that would endanger them, and refuses to name the precise contours of her assistance when faced with uniforms. Reading those choices as strategically and ethically valid prevents criticism from converting uncertainty into lack.

Bhabha's language of liminality becomes fully operational once we accept that the threshold is a jurisdiction with rules that can be learned and played with. Rehana learns quickly. She times answers; she edits kinship terms; she performs deference without surrender. These are not merely survival tactics; they are forms of political authorship. They convert the "private" into infrastructure for the collective while leaving little that the archive, as presently constituted, can easily domesticate. That gap between what women do and what records recognize is the research problem that this thesis resolves.

The novel also keeps the maternal visual plural rather than singular. Rehana's daughter, Maya, chooses open activism; her path is louder, riskier, and less disguised. Reading Rehana and Maya side by side keeps the analysis from collapsing into one model of feminine agency. The house is a hub, but it is not the only hub; the street, clinic, and camp are also coordinated by women. The narrative's comparative design refuses a single "female role" in the revolution. It instead documents a spectrum of women's nation-making practices that run from hiding to confrontation. This clarity keeps method and ethics aligned.

### **3.2. Border-Crossing and Feminist Rebirth in *Tomb of Sand***



Geetanjali Shree's *Tomb of Sand* dramatizes how a woman's everyday choices can remake the meaning of a nation. After personal loss, Ma reenters the world, opens her family's door to new ties, and finally chooses to cross a state border to face the past. These actions appear as private—visiting, talking, remembering—but the novel shows how they hold a community together and repair lines cut by Partition. This aligns with my objective to identify women's unrecognized contributions in nationalist movements and to show how caregiving, sheltering, and memory function as public labor. I analyzed the novel through the theorists used in my literature review to answer two questions: how male-centered official stories erase such work, and how *Tomb of Sand* makes it visible. Pairing key events with theory, I argue that Ma is not just a symbol but an actor who changes outcomes.

Hence, Benedict Anderson clarifies how the nation's understanding of the term “we” is felt and made inside ordinary spaces. Shree figures the family home as an open door that constantly connects people: “a door that sees all, hears all, records all... there's no privacy.” The door draws in neighbors, kin, tasks, and worries; it is a small social institution, not a sealed interior (Shree, pp. 25–26). In Anderson's terms, the daily flow through this door—greetings, gifts, visits, favors—creates shared rhythms through which people imagine themselves as one community. That work of keeping the door open, listening, organizing, and responding is done by women. Heroic

histories rarely count it, yet it is the social glue that makes a national “we” possible. The novel thus places home’s exchanges at the center of belonging, not its margin.

Partha Chatterjee’s *ghar/bahir* split tracks how the tale collapses the boundary between “inside” and “outside.” The “seeing” door exposes surveillance—“there’s no privacy” (Anam, p. 27)—but it also becomes the point of departure from which Ma chooses her route. After grief, she refuses to remain a symbol of interiority; she sets her own terms, first by rejecting the moral pressure to stay put, then by forming new ties. When she later asks for state papers, she enters the “world” of officials and borders. That crossing is not an abstraction: it entails rules, kin expectations, and risk. Crossing with Mrinalini Sinha’s critique of maternal nationalism, Ma’s late-life self-fashioning resists the conventional script of being a “good mother,” which incorporates women through admiration while disciplining them through domesticity; she relocates respectability to gain movement rather than to ratify a private confinement (Sinha 2000).

Because the crossing is practical, the key question becomes: who gets to decide? Here, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak’s question—can the subaltern woman speak?—is

tested as a method. Ma says plainly, “I want a passport... Will you take me to Pakistan?” (Shree, p. 81). Spivak cautions us to separate being portrayed from speaking-for. In this scene, Ma is not narrated into action; her words set the action. She converts a private wish into a state request and tests the agency against the border law. Later, official discourse tries to pull that agency back—gossip about “two women,” visa queries, the tease of refusal—but the point is that Ma’s voice anchors decision and consequence. This is how the novel answers the first question: official narratives background women, while *Tomb of Sand* documents speech acts through which a woman authorizes outcomes. Thus, Yasmin Saikia’s ethics of “silence” further refines this reading; selective disclosure and substitution—what Ma withholds from family or officials—register not as lack but as protective opacity, a practiced mode of survival that resists the archive’s appetite for confession (Saikia 2004).

If Spivak anchors who speaks, Homi K. Bhabha clarifies where identity is remade at thresholds and “in-between” spaces. The border chapter frames the gate as a stage where the nation is performed and unsettled: “At the border, two flags fly, two spectacular ceremonies... The routine continues: half there, half here, both ravaged. This is the Zero Line” (Shree, p. 389). The environment undercuts the performance of separation: “So what if a border stands there... winds don’t recognize such things as visas... Their manner of meeting is not subject to permission even by God” (Shree,



pp. 406, 408). In this threshold, Ma's cross-border care—for Rosie, for a shattered past—emerges as political work. She does not wave a flag; she rebuilds relations across a line that pretends to forbid relations. Nation-making is rendered as repair and return, not parade.

Amitav Ghosh helps track how memory redraws the map from within. *The Shadow Lines* shows borders living in routes and family stories no less than on paper. Tomb of Sand adapts that lesson: the return journey is less spectacle than remembering erased ties—names, turns, neighborhoods—that bureaucracies have never recorded. When Ma seeks the old trail, memory functions as a map back to a self-dislocated by Partition. Family stories and recollections perform national reimagination; they retrieve what files miss and what ceremonies cannot hold—the very erasure my first question targets.

Chandra Talpade Mohanty keeps reading local and concrete. Ma's choices are built from Delhi's textures: the watchful door, crowded lanes, and the desk where one asks for papers (Shree, pp. 25–26, 80–81). Rather than flattening “South Asian woman” into a type, the novel shows one older woman in one city, with one set of kin demands and one risky plan. Her nation-making labor—organizing, caring, remembering, and traveling—is situated: enabled by some routes, blocked by others, and negotiated through classed respectability and family conflict. This “on-the-

ground” frame keeps the argument close to the text’s evidence: place names, a passport request, and a crossing at an official gate.

For contrast, Rabindranath Tagore’s *The Home and the World* offers the early nationalist figure of woman-as-symbol. Tagore remains vital as a backdrop, but Shree’s fictional character Ma stands apart. Instead of being installed as a pure figure of home, she rearranges the home (the door that “records all”) and then walks through it to act in the world (Shree, pp. 25–26, 81). The movement from Bimala’s representational labor to Ma’s infrastructural labor sharpens the second question’s answer that *Tomb of Sand* recasts the maternal figure from icon to operator, someone who keeps social circuits alive and then extends them across the line.

Placing *Tomb of Sand* alongside the “resilient women / transnational home” scholarship clarifies both possibilities and risks. That strand developed around Anam’s *A Golden Age* shows how “home” functions as a trans-local relay for care, shelter, and news. Read diagnostically, it helps illuminate Shree’s door as a civic interface connecting Delhi to Wagah and beyond. But the resilience idiom can also romanticize endurance and privatize risk. Shree’s state border and watchful door refuse such consolation. Movement is strictly controlled by documents and social reputation; this is dangerous work, not an empty space (“Resilient women”). Retaining what clarifies while refusing to sentimentalize risk keeps the focus on



institutions—gates, offices, and ceremonies—where women negotiate with inspection.

Finally, the section's critical claim: *Tomb of Sand* shows how male-centered official narratives of Partition erase women's contributions by ignoring the infrastructures of care and memory that women manage at home and across borders. Those narratives prefer parades, speeches, and paperwork; the novel documents door-keeping, route-finding, and risk-taking done by women. It also recasts caregiving, sheltering, and memory as nation-making labor by making them decisive acts and keeping an open door that binds a community (Shree, pp. 25–26). In the novel, asking for a passport that reclaims movement (p. 81) and crossing a gate whose pomp cannot override human continuity (p. 389; pp. 406, 408). In dialogue with Sinha's critique of maternalist incorporation and discipline (Sinha 2000) and Saikia's ethics of strategic silence (Saikia 2004), and modified by the resilience/transnational-home debate, *Tomb of Sand* offers a measured view that women's everyday work is not beside the nation; it is how the nation is kept, repaired, and imagined—work remains uncredited until a narrative like this gives it voice and a record.

### **3.3. Influence and contribution of women in the July Revolution in Bangladesh (2024 context)**

To build a connection with the present time, in 2025, Bangladesh still wrestles with the legacy of the revolution. The July Revolution Alliance (JRA) recorded around 1,400 people killed, including at least 18 women martyrs, and many more were injured or disappeared. While the uprising succeeded in felling an authoritarian government, women who had been its pioneers found themselves sidelined in the new political order.

Women were not outer supporters; they formed the main body of the July uprising. On 14 July, female students at Dhaka's Eden College and other women's halls broke through locked gates to protest the "Razakar" insult. They formed human shields, marched toward the Raju Memorial sculpture, and occupied major roads, chanting revolutionary songs. Witnesses recall there were no commanders or central leaders, only a collective anger and a thirst for justice. The Daily Star described how women "flooded the streets with sticks and stones," and their defiance inspired men, workers, and neighbors to join. Nasrin Akhter, a first-year student, remembered that breaking hall gates and chanting "Razakar" slogans was a turning point; women's halls became the epicenter of a nationwide revolt.

Women protesters bore the brunt of state violence. On 15th July, the ruling Awami League's student wing, Chatra League, and police attacked female students at Eden College. Shahinur Sumi, a student leader, recalled that attackers beat women with

sticks and mobile-phone chargers while teachers looked on. Sanjida Ahmed Tonni's viral image of being bloodied and defiant after being struck on her head became a symbol of resistance. When paramedics attempted to take her to safety, she said, "If I die, send my body to my family; I will not leave," and continued marching.

Despite their leadership, women were largely excluded from post-revolution decision-making. When the interim government was formed after August 5, only men were appointed to key student advisory committees and transitional bodies (Bangladeshi Women Turned). The July Revolution Alliance's list of 18 female martyrs and numerous injured women was largely ignored (Billah, The Business Standard). Many women withdrew from public activism due to fear of violence and online harassment. The Business Standard reported that female protestors faced misogyny from their male peers, and they were accused of wildness and labelled traitors on social media, discouraging them from joining public meetings. A March 2025 article titled "Where are the July uprising's women?" asked why women were no longer visible; interviewees described leaving due to safety concerns and because male leaders refused to include them.

Women continued to move within the new political context. In April 2025, the Women's Affairs Reform Commission released a 433-point report. The recommendations included creating an optional uniform family law guaranteeing



equal inheritance rights; criminalizing marital rape; banning misogynistic rhetoric; reserving 300 parliamentary seats for women and ensuring at least 33% women in party committees; ratifying ILO (International Labour Organization) conventions on domestic workers (Articles 189 and 190); decriminalizing sex work; providing paid parental leave and workplace childcare; and recognizing gender justice as fundamental to national progress. The commission linked women's economic autonomy with political empowerment and called for comprehensive legal reform. However, its proposals sparked backlash from conservative groups; some argued that an optional family law would weaken religious personal laws, while women's rights activists criticized the "optional" nature as compromising equality.

The July Revolution transformed Bangladesh's political landscape and exposed the power of women's collective action. Women's leadership turned a quota protest into a revolution and forced the fall of a well-established government. Their actions broadened the movement's agenda to include gender justice, class inequality, and democratic rights. However, the post-revolution period revealed the power of patriarchy and the fragility of women's gains. Despite a moment when women dominated public space, they were marginalized in political structures and targeted by misogynistic forces. Feminist activists responded by organizing solidarity

marches, advocating for institutional reforms, and using the anniversary to demand accountability.

The revolution also encouraged debates about legal reforms. The Women's Affairs Reform Commission's proposals signal an attempt to set gender equality in law, but political and religious opposition remains strong. Meanwhile, the memory of women like Sanjida Ahmed Tonni and other martyrs continues to inspire activism. As Bangladesh moves forward, the July Revolution stands as both a testament to women's capacity to reshape national politics and a reminder of the ongoing struggle for equality.

## Chapter

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### 4.1. Conclusion

This thesis reframes South Asian nation-making by shifting attention from masculine display to the framework of labor through which women keep communities alive under risk. Reading Tahmima Anam's *A Golden Age* and Geetanjali Shree's *Tomb of Sand* through a scene-based, micro-publics method, I show that caregiving, sheltering, document-handling, and calibrated speech are not private residues of history but public, outcome-shaping acts. In these novels, the home is a civic interface; doors, stoops, and checkpoints are jurisdictions; and women's utterances—code-switches, approvals, and refusals—allocate danger and produce safety. In short, women appear not as symbols of the nation but as its operators.

Three findings anchor this claim. First, from allegory to action. Rehana's bungalow in *A Golden Age* is a logistics hub: kitchens become provisioning lines, bedrooms storage, and the gate a checkpoint. Her linguistic tact and reputational performance at searches determine whether a safe house survives. *Tomb of Sand* extends the same logic from Dhaka to Delhi and Wagah: an "open door" functions as a



neighborhood institution; a passport request becomes a test of agency; the ceremonial border is treated as an interface Ma learns to navigate. These scenes translate abstract “liminality” into measurable decisions that change outcomes.

Second, theory with instruments. Theoretical frameworks remain crucial yet insufficient unless instrumented. Anderson’s imagined community clarifies the horizon of “we,” while Chatterjee’s ghar/bahir names the ideology that privatizes women’s work. Bhabha’s thresholds identify where identities blur. Postcolonial feminist critique sharpens the ethics and politics of this protocol: following Sinha, the thesis rejects the romance of “maternal agency,” corresponding to the costs that states externalize onto women; following Saikia, it reads strategic silence as protection, resisting archival extraction that mistakes opacity for absence. The review’s engagement with “resilience” and “transnational home” retains what clarifies but refuses to judge people’s risk or to presume that everyone has the same freedom to move.

Third, from tribute to proof. The method converts acknowledgment from praise to evidence. Coding care/logistics/money/messages, marking thresholds, and auditing voice yield claims that are comparable across 1947 and 1971 and testable across texts. This evidentiary turn also explains a recurring political pattern: movements draw on women’s frontline infrastructures and then displace them in the archive and

in post-crisis settlements—a cycle the novels diagnose and, at the level of narrative practice, repair by building a counter-archive.

The conclusion is therefore not merely that “women were present,” but that the nation endures because of their infrastructures—the kitchens turned supply lines, doors turned forums, words timed to disarm power, and silences held to protect lives. Recognizing this requires revising what counts as political, how we read, and how we keep the national record. This thesis paper provides the concepts, tests, and textual evidence to begin that rewrite.

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