

Sujata Massey's *The City of Palaces*: A Critical Analysis of the Literary and the Thematic Features

Dr. TK Pius

Associate Professor of English, St. Aloysius College, Elthuruth PO, Thrissur, Kerala, India- 680611

Abstract: The paper on the thematic and literary features of Sujata Massey's latest novel "The City of Palaces" (2013) attempts to grasp the semantics of the narrative dwelling at length on the structure of the plot, its context, characterisation, narrative techniques and thematic intricacies. The novel depicts story of a young woman making her way in Bengal during the end of the British Raj period. While author takes the reader into a village hut, an elite Lockwood School, a swanky brothel, an Englishman's library and into the heart of a young woman who comes to age in a manner that is heartbreaking, the plot's journey becomes entwined with India's own struggle for independence and becomes, in equal parts, a social commentary, a historical thriller and a romantic love story. Sujata Massey's book shows a unique advancement in the direction of experimentation in narrative methodology blending history and fiction to imply both a historical fiction and fictional history. There are a number of brief reviews on the book revealing readers' appreciation and spontaneous reaction to the socio-historic thriller in the novel. However, I believe this is the first serious paper of its kind on the novel, which attempts to feature its strengths through textual evidences and analysis.

Key words: Characterization -plot structure - narrative technique - treatment of history in fiction

I. Introduction

Images of conflict- injured children, mutilated bodies, starved multitudes, rubble, weeping people, vehicles blown apart and graphic photographs from war zones- dominate digital and print media. A culture of violence encircles our day-to-day lives. What is more intriguing is our daily engagement with this violence: we strive to make it a backdrop and a "normal" part of our lives and even ritualise it. The threshold of our receptiveness to it is diminishing; the "appetite" for violence seems to be augmenting. While discussing his latest novel, *Noontide Toll* (Gunasekera 2014), Romesh Gunasekera said, "All over the world, including in India, people are trying to grapple with the memory of conflicts, and trying to find a way in which language can help us understand history without being trapped in it" (Rose. *The Hindu*, 1 February 2014). The culture of violence has been inextricably linked to literature and media of our times.

Contemporary sub-continental literature comprises of novelists who probably grew up with stories of conflict in their regions. They strove to transform this tumultuous time in history by making its indelible mark in literature. This is obviously evident in the variety, vibrancy, and strength discernible in South Asian writing with distinct styles emerging from the nations. There is something peculiar in the flavour of writing which may be linked to the post-conflict, socio-political evolution of the countries. In India, there is the emergence of fiction and non-fiction writers who offer a sharp perspective, informed by their personal experiences of being witnesses or active participants, who are keen on recording a historical and painful moment. Recent examples are Rahul Pandita's *Our Moon has Blood Clots* (Pandita 2013), Amandeep Sandhu's *Roll of Honour* (Sandhu 2012), Chitrita Banerji's *Mirror City* (Banerji 2013), Sujata Massey's *The City of Palaces* (Massey 2013), Sudipto Das's *The Ekkos Clan* (Das 2013), Shahnaz Bashir's *The Half Mother* (Bashir 2014) and Samanth Subramanian's *The Divided Island* (Subramanian 2014) a travelogue about post-war Sri Lanka. Writing from personal experience makes the story more authentic, poignant, and realistic.

Sujata Massey, a British author having Bengali roots, started her working life as a features reporter for the *Baltimore Evening Sun*. After leaving the newspaper, she moved to Japan and began writing her first novel, *The Salaryman's Wife* (2000). This novel became the first of the eleven books in the Rei Shimura mystery series, which has won the Agatha and Macavity awards and been nominated for the Edgar, Anthony, and Mary Higgins Clark awards. The eleventh book in the series, *The Kizuna Coast* was published in November 2014. Her novels are catalogued under various heads like Historical Fiction, Literature and Fiction, Mystery and Thrillers and so on. Readers have discerned her influences as Agatha Christie, Rabindranath Tagore, Rumer Godden, Santha Rama Rao, SJ Rozan, Lisa See, Amitav Ghosh and a few other western and Indian authors. The author in her "Acknowledgement" to *The City of Palaces* enumerates the names of many historians, librarians and her own relatives who have specifically influenced the treatment of history in the novel. The Writers' Building in Dalhousie Square referred to in Book IV of the novel is still a part of modern day Kolkata that still boasts of Office Buildings that date back to Pre-Independence times.

Bengalis love to spin the tale of their old Calcutta during the British era to their grandsons and daughters, and Sujata exploits this inclination to write historical novels set in 19th and 20th century India. *The Sleeping Dictionary* is a riveting historical novel where the author turns to 1930s - 40s India, with the British in control of the colony as Gandhi and others fight for freedom, to narrate the story of Kamala, a young woman making her way in Calcutta during the end of the British Raj period. Born poor in a coastal village, but rising to a position of influence in an elite British household in Calcutta, Kamala's personal journey becomes entwined with India's own struggle for independence, effectively combining personal narrative with grandeur of a sweeping historical epic. In India, the same book was published as *The City of Palaces* (2014). At the surface level it is another rags-to-riches story of an orphan girl struggling to make her way in a cruel world but between the lines, it is a celebration of the common ground between superficially disparate cultures and personalities. Pom's journey starts from a village in Bengal where she is born to poor yet loving parents, passes through a British boarding school where she works as a servant while still a young girl herself, catches its breath in a small town where Pom gets the most precious possession of her life and ultimately reaches Calcutta where she finally grows into the person she really is. Filled with romance, danger, intrigue, and betrayal, *The City of Palaces* is a lush, sprawling saga about a feisty young heroine and her struggle for survival. This is also a journey of a young girl to her womanhood, which is so profound, and striking that it will make every reader fall badly for the city as well as for this young woman.

II. Setting

The novel is set in pre-independent India, more precisely in Calcutta of the 1930s and the 1940s. The Indian freedom struggle is a thread, which runs through the tapestry of this tale, rising to the fore at times and remaining submerged at others. Although the name 'Kalikata' had been mentioned in the rent-roll of the Great Mughal emperor Akbar and also in Manasa-Mangal, to explore the history of Calcutta, we have to go back to the 17th century. It was in 1690 Job Charnock came on the bank of the river Hooghly and took the lease of three large villages along the east bank of the river - Sutanuti, Govindapur and Kolikata (Calcutta)- as a trading post of British East India Company. The site was carefully selected, being protected by the Hooghly River on the west, a creek to the north, and by salt lakes about two and a half miles on the east. These three villages were bought by the British from local landlords. The Mughal emperor granted East India Company freedom of trade in return for a yearly payment of three-thousand rupees.

Before the British came Calcutta was just a village for the capital city of Bengal was Murshidabad, about 60 miles north of Calcutta. In 1756, Siraj-ud-daullah, nawab of Bengal, attacked the city and captured the fort. Robert Clive defeated Siraj-ud-daullah on the battlefield of Plassey and recaptured the city Calcutta in 1757. Warren Hastings, the first Governor-General of India, made it the seat of the supreme courts of justice and the supreme revenue administration, and Calcutta became the capital of British India in 1772. All important offices were subsequently moved from Murshidabad to Calcutta. By 1800 Calcutta had become a busy and flourishing town, the centre of the cultural as well as the political and economic life of Bengal.

Soon Calcutta became the centre of all cultural and political movements in the entire India. The 19th century Renaissance and Reformation in India was pioneered in this city. Raja Rammohan Roy, Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar, Sri Ramakrishna Paramhansa, Swami Vivekananda, Rabindra Nath Tagore, Jagadish Chandra Bose, Satyendra Nath Bose and many more eminent personalities enhanced the cultural heritage of the city of Calcutta. In 1912, the British moved the capital city to Delhi. In 1947, when India gained freedom and the country got partitioned between India and Pakistan, Calcutta was included in the Indian part of Bengal, West Bengal. Calcutta became the capital city of the state of West Bengal. The narrative time moves from 1930 to 1947 through four significant places namely, Jolapur, Midanpore, Kharagpur and Calcutta. More than half of the narrative space is allotted to Calcutta, the city of palaces.

There is still another reason why Calcutta is the backdrop of the novel. It is the city that reeks of elegant history acquired by India but as it strives hard to keep pace with the surrounding economics and development, the architectural treasures stamping the city's elegant character are being gradually lost. Massey said in an interview, "I wrote this book to help preserve my own memories of a landscape I love. If I'd waited any longer to write, I fear that I might not have had any of these charming old streets to walk through and would have struggled to paint any sort of picture of the late colonial period". By choosing this title, the author wishes to commemorate Calcutta, the one-time "City of Palaces" which was the centre of glamour and power in India.

III. Title

Sometimes called "the city of joy" and on other occasions "the city of palaces", Kolkata has had several names. During the final days before the British left India, it also altered into "the city of the dead". The Nawabs and the British coined Calcutta as "The City of Palaces". However, this proverb changed during the reign of Queen Victoria, and thus Calcutta changed to the sprawling, bustling capital of India. Dennison Berwick has quoted in his book, *A Walk along the Ganges*: (Berwick 1986) "There is poverty; there is squalor in so many

places in our country (India). It is our disgrace. At least in Calcutta we have ... culture and poetry." Moreover, as Dominique Lapierre, the author of the book *City of Joy* (Lapierre 1992) has quoted: "Calcutta produced more writers than Paris and Rome combined, more literary reviews than London and New York, more cinemas than New Delhi, and more publishers than the rest of the country." Calcutta "... is undoubtedly the Indian City which not only attracts greater attention than any other in every way, but is regarded as the first British city of the East" (195)

As mentioned above the book was initially published under the title *The Sleeping Dictionary*. The term "sleeping dictionary" was coined for young Indian women who slept with British men and educated them in the ways of India. In *The City of Palaces* Rose Barker explains to Pam the meaning of the term: "A long time ago, the Englishmen had quite a funny name for us: sleeping dictionaries... When the first Englishmen sailed over with the East India Company, they didn't know a word of any Indian Language. How could they progress?... What served them were women: local girls who became their mistresses, all the while teaching language and good manners, so the fellows could speak to the Nawabs and get what they wanted. My granny always said that pretty girls built British India through many sleepless nights of hard work!" (123-4). This title has relevance in as much as the heroine in the last three sections of the novel functioned as a translator. In Book two, Sarah helped her friend Bidushi by explaining to her in Bengali the lessons taught in English. Richmond the teacher appreciated the Sarah's translations of Tagore's Bengali poems into English, which won her the teacher's favours. In Book Three, Pamela at Rose Villa entertained English customers in bed. In Book Four, Kamala functioned as translator who helped Simon Lewes, an officer of Indian Political Service, with local news from Bengali newspapers. Towards the end of the same book, Kamala in a sense tests Simon's attitude towards her even when he openly declared that he wanted to marry her. She told him that "for centuries these liaisons between English men and Indian women" had gone on. "The fact that I lived under your roof for so long, working for you, will make society regard me as your sleeping dictionary" (374). Simon retorted that he did not need another dictionary in the library, or anywhere. The expression, "sleeping dictionary" would not fit the plot of the novel in any case. Most probably the author may have understood the inappropriateness of the title and altered it to "The City of Palaces".

Since novel had beautifully interspersed the history of the final phase of the freedom struggle, with a love story, and made Calcutta the centre where these two lines of the plot have their final ending, "The City of Palaces" can be seen as the most befitting title. The various events of the plot are seen to be heading towards this city. At the end of Book Two, Sarah takes a train to Calcutta because it was a huge city where anyone can just vanish but unfortunately for Sarah her journey ends up in Midnapore, quite by mistake. Next she finally survives to her dream city- Calcutta, known as 'The City of Palaces' hoping she would be able to find a teaching job like that of Miss Richmond's. However, time when she managed to reach, Calcutta was quite vulnerable. The city was quivering under the pressure of the Independence Movement, and she was swept in. Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose had already formed his army; Mahatma Gandhi had already begun his movement to liberate India from the clutches of India. Yet, she finds a new life, love and hard earned happiness which she manages to hold on to, owing to her sheer sense of perseverance. It was a long and hard journey to the road to freedom, through the riots, the famine due to rice-shortage, the war between England and Germany and finally the night of 15th August. At one point in the novel, describing the violence of the Direct Action Day at Wellesley Street with corpses lying in gutters and hanging from lamp posts, Kamala commented, "Once this place had been called the City of Palaces; now it was Hades" (436-7). The day Calcutta was liberated was the day when Kamala's soul finally found peace and freedom that it longed for.

IV. Plot Structure

The novel comprises four Books each titled under a place name and specified in linear time period: "Jholpur : Spring and Summer 1930", "Midnapore: Summer 1930-Summer 1935", "Kharagpur: 1935-1938" and "Calcutta: 1938-1947". The narrator is known by various names over the years as she is moved by circumstances or inevitable fate, and she admits it frankly in the very first sentence of the novel: "You ask for my name, the real one, and I cannot tell" (3).

Pom was born in a small village near the sea beach town, "Jholpur, the Town of Water" (3) where she grew up with her younger sisters, Rumi and Jhumi, "twins who looked as similar as grains of rice" (3-4). Her grandmother Thakurma called them "double curses" (4). But to their father, who they called Baba, they were considered a blessing. He would sometimes tell them, "a daughter's birth lengthened a father's life and ... for having three strong girls he might live to one hundred" (4). Of all the girl's in the family, Pom looked the most like Ma. "Your face is our jewel, Ma would say sometimes"(6). Pom would laugh and crinkle her nose in embarrassment because she felt awkward compared to the rosebud prettiness of the twins. Yet their mother longed for a son and promised Goddess Lakshmi a goat or five rupees if she blesses her with one. Soon in the spring of 1930, she was carrying. Their grandparents, Thakurma and Dadu, were suddenly happy with everything she did and Baba sang songs every evening.

Her father worked for Jamidar Pratap Mukherjee, the landed aristocrat who owned all the rice fields. Pom's acquaintance with Jamidar's household was formed when she was seven, old enough to walk distances carrying a bundle of homemade brooms that she and her mother sold throughout the villages. Jamidar's daughter had long been Pom's fascination because of her lacy pastel frocks and the white-skinned doll she carried and also because of her amazement that another girl could be so different. She wanted to ask her name but thought it indecorous to ask such a thing of her superiors. In her mind, she called her the Princess. She learned later that two Ingrej women came to the house to teach the Princess reading, writing and numbers. The Jamidarni asked her mother why Pom was not sent to school. Some village boys were learning to read and write under the banyan tree at Mitra-babu's yard. For a girl like her there would be no time to sit under a tree and besides, she did not want to be the only girl studying with those boys. Pom felt she was doing something more important than they were: "I was with Ma, earning money for the family" (5). Pom was an intelligent girl for she learnt to count coins by the age of ten and could not be cheated.

The family was going through hard financial crunch. Dadu was forced to sell the one rice paddy he owned to meet the debts of the family and Baba farmed for others, receiving as payment a portion of rice. Still they were not like the ragged ones living in the alleys of the village that her mother called "lost souls" (6). They had enough potatoes, eggplants, tomatoes, and greens from their own vegetable garden. Ma raised some money selling brooms in summer and fish during rainy season.

When her mother's labour pains began, Pom was told to bring Chitra-massi, the dai who lived in Jholpur village. When Ma's cries grew wilder and out of control, Chitra-massi told Baba to fetch Dr. Dasgupta from the next village. The doctor arrived in time to save the life of the babe and the mother. It was a boy-child and Thakurma said, "Double curses wiped out by a gift from Krishna himself" (8). Sisters in Jholpur called their brothers Bhai and Pom felt he was so beautiful that calling him Bhai seemed too ordinary. Pom wondered how the family would be able to pay karmic debt of a goat promised to Lakshmi by Ma. The karmic debts may be seen as old-fashioned Hindu superstitions and yet, Pom felt looking back to those happy childhood days after years of life's bitter struggle, paying them would have kept them to the beautiful shores of Jholpur with a singular identity of her own.

In Jholpur the coming of the monsoons was celebrated with great cheer. That year the second monsoon wind was sweeping the Indian Ocean to break at Bengal. The day the storm and the rains came, the spectacle of sightseers and holidaymakers in a slow parade of tongas, cycles, rishaws and cars that sneaked along the coastal road was as exciting as the pending monsoon coming like the most magical blackness in the world. Pom recalled that in the previous year, a white man sitting in the back of a big Rover had come past whom the children called the Collector. Pom at that time asked Baba if the word 'Collector' was an English word for devil. She loved to see well-dressed ladies who shrieked and clutched their saris that the wind tried to take from them: "I loved to see the rich people in fine clothing; to me they were as amusing as monkeys playing games in trees." (10) The twin sisters were desperate to see the monsoon arrive but Thakurma would allow them to go only when Baba comes for Ma stayed with Bhai, and Dadu and she were too old for the comings and the goings. "What if he is late, Jhumi asked. What if he is so late that we miss the cloud?" (11) At this Pom volunteered to go and ask Baba what he thinks about it. She was allowed to go and find Baba provided she didn't not take the shorter route through the jungle path. In her eagerness to be with Baba when the rains struck, she slipped off the main road to take the shortcut through the jungle path that led to the rice fields. She managed to reach the rice fields where her father's group worked. The men who were already dancing in the rain told her that Baba had gone home on a longer route. She felt frustrated for disobeying Ma. She was afraid to join the cart full of men returning home because they were strangers.

The trip home was downhill and her feet moved faster hardly feeling the thorns that were tearing her feet. From a slight rise on the path, she could see a great wave was rolling in: "a wave so tall, so long and thick that it resembled a wall" (13). Everyone on the shore was running as the wave was closing in fast. Presently it rushed right over them, sweeping away the land beneath. All what Pom could see was endless water with small black specks floating. The rains continued to pour in great cold sheets. The flood had even entered the jungle. She pushed her way through the water that had by then risen to her waist. She managed to climb a tall, sturdy date palm with enough branches to get a foothold and stayed there the whole night. The next morning when the sun appeared she could see all that stretched ahead was blackish water that moved slowly floating things along with the dead people. She hoped that her family was safe and that her Baba would find her if only she is patient enough. When the second night came she fell into a strange sort of waking dream. The next morning she sighted a fishing dingy loaded with living people. She called down to them as they approached, but the men paddled on without a glance. Twice more boats passed slowly, all of them overloaded with people and animals. She called to them each time, "Look! I'm here! Save me, please" (15). Then late in the day, her cry was heard and she was rescued by a single family of two grandparents, a man and a woman of middle age and two young boys in a small fishing boat coming from Komba. A terribly big wave had swallowed both Komba and Jholpur. They promised to drop her on land. Pom was beginning to understand that her old life might be over.

When they finally landed the seaside town called Digha, Pom was told to find her own way to survive. They would not even allow her to drink from the same jug for they considered her a low caste. The grandfather said jabbing his chin towards Pom, "She cannot drink from our jug... We have not come so far only to ruin ourselves" (18). On the walk that ran near the sea, she could see all manner of people: wild-haired beggars, labourers, constables in crisp uniforms and gaunt holy men in saffron robes. There was a long line at the well comprising of town's regular residents and refugees. She was looking for a used cup of the chai-wallah's customers to use it to drink water. She turned to a tea drinker who was finishing his cup of tea. Excitedly she darted forth and caught cup in mid air. Watching the scene some people laughed, but the boy's father shouted so loudly that her fingers slipped and the earthen cup was smashed to the ground.

At that time a man in a clean, finely woven kurta and dhoti in a deep warm voice spoke, "The child can have this" (19). This gentleman who behaved like a priest put a cup full of water into Pom's hands but something in her head seemed to explode. Drinking water was pure pleasure mixed with agony for her throat had become sore with dryness as she had not drunk water for three days. The stranger was saying he could bring her to a temple in the next province, Orissa. The girls were given food and clothing, and grew up to dance and offer prayers to Jagannath, a reincarnation of Lord Shiva. Owing to the floods the priests were generously opening doors to the poor. The sahib had been ordered by the priests to bring orphan girls coming into Digha to their temple. Sahib offered a few coins to the father and led her away. Pom was a little frightened as things happened too quickly. He brought her to a food stall where the vendor served rice and dal and greens on a banana leaf. This made Pom allay her uneasiness about the man's shifting gaze because "he had been the kindest stranger I'd ever met" (21) He also gave her sweet jalebis as he led her into the next street where he had left his cart.

As he discussed something with the driver, she moved to the back of the cart to relieve herself and what she happened to see there, sent real shock waves into her mind." As I passed the back of the cart, I noticed the cloth cover moving as if something were alive beneath it. I heard a strange, strangled sort of noise, and peering into the gap between the cart's side and the cloth, I saw an eye. I moved the cloth very slightly and saw the face of a girl about my age, and near her, another girl's face smeared with vomit. A rough rope tied the two girls together; and as I lifted the cloth farther, I saw more girls and a few boys lying together, connected by ropes and with cloths tied over their mouths." (21) Pom walked away from the cart pretending she had not noticed anything and when Sahib saw her she begged him to allow her to relieve herself behind tall trees bordering the road. He agreed easily though his eyes followed her until she reached the thickly forested section. She moved into the dense grove and climbed a large tree with a good covering of leaves. After a few minutes, the sahib ran with the driver through the trees shouting threats of what he would do if she did not come forth. He passed under the tree many times without ever looking up and spent a long time angrily pulling apart branches. Eventually the driver told him that time was short, so he left. Pom breathed a sigh of relief only when she saw through a gap in the tree's leaves, the driver whip the horses to move the living cargo forward.

Walking down through one of the alleys, she noticed a large pack of mangy dogs surrounding a stamping, wild-eyed water buffalo that had been left tied to a hook. She decided to beat away the dogs and take water buffalo for her own. With much difficulty, she unhitched the water buffalo and chased away the dogs with a branch. She decided to call her Mala, a name that meant garland, because she intended to weave a garland of flowers for her neck when they would reach the countryside. She passed two days with Mala. Each morning she milked Mala, squirting her milk into one coconut- shell half, drinking it and then filling it up with more of her milk. But this could not go on as Pom fell ill. But Mala was a good friend and carried her until she slept with terrible dreams. "I had no strength to run away. All I could do was roll back and forth in agony, knowing that my brief fantasy of free life was over" (25)

Massey begins the Book Two connecting the free adventurous life Pom had until then with a caged life she is destined to lead ever after symbolically represented in the two images in her dream, "the alluring, cool pond" and "the hard, hot cart" with a quote from Tagore's poem "Dui Pakhi":

There was a bird in a cage of gold.
another free in the woods
One knoweth not what whim of God
Brought the two together of a day.
'O my friend in the cage', said the bird in the woods,
'Let's fly away to the woods'.
'Let us live quietly in the cage',
rejoined the bird in the cage.

Pom was rescued by Abbas-chacha when he found her hanging upside down on a wandering bull near the river ten miles away, sick with cholera. He brought her to the school where he worked. She was treated by Dr. Andrews and his sympathetic nurses Das and Gopal at the Keshiari Mission Hospital. During the five days

she was there recuperating from Cholera she talked with other patients who were interested in conversation. She wanted to distract herself from ruminating on the recent losses: "I was intent on not thinking about what had happened to me and what I'd lost." (31) Dr. Andrews felt it would be quite unkind to send her back to a family and village that have not reappeared anywhere after the cyclone. He told her, "It was suggested by Nurse Das that you be placed in a family seeking a bride. I don't like child marriage. However, you have no skills to earn a living" (32).

Pom thought how ignorant the doctor was concerning the life of the rural poor children. Children younger than her pulled weeds and herded cows. She thought a tin pail and a water buffalo are all what is needed to survive. With a tremble in her voice she asked him if she could work there. She was afraid of leaving the place that had brought her back to life. It was hardly possible as it required education to be a nurse or a nurse assistant. She was given an English frock to wear, a garment that came from one of the boxes of donated clothes before she left for Miss Jamison's Lockwood School to work as a servant on the recommendation of Dr. Andrews.

She was awfully frightened of seeing Miss Jamison, the Headmistress: "I saw her long pale face wrinkled like old fruit. She was the being from my nightmare" (33). She was told to call her Burra-memsahib. Her rescuer Mr. Abbas, she learned, was the driver of the school. He indicated she should join him on the front of the driver's bench of the tonga. The burra-memsahib was already seated comfortably behind them on her own seat. During the course of the journey Abbas instructed her how to go about at the school: "Quiet is the rule. Don't ask about your pay; for young ones like you, Miss Rachael keeps it safe. It is only a few rupees each month, anyway" (35). Abbas was trying to give her the cue of the type of behaviour expected of her at school by explaining the metaphorical significance of the word 'brick': "The school is built of bricks... They are strong enough to resist wind and rain and everything else. The Ingreg sometimes call a person a brick; he is one with a determined, hard-working manner who does not complain"(36). She understood it was the way she should behave.

Miss Jamison did not quite like the name Pom and so she told Abbas that she should be called Sarah, a name from Christian holy book. She pronounced the strange new name for several the next several miles the way Abbas had done. She realised a change of name meant a change of identity but she was soon reconciled to it: "I should have minded losing my name, but the thought of getting a fresh name to go with my new clothing seemed fitting"(36). She did not like the new name but understood that it was one of the many changes she has "to make to live under the protection of Lockwood school" (43).

On reaching the school, Abbas introduced her to other workers as the new house-girl, Sarah. Abbas told her that Christians are favoured there and Miss Jamison wanted her converted to Christianity. Besides, Miss Rachael, the house-keeper is a Christian and Abbas hoped she would treat her better if Sarah was a fellow-Christian. The poor are always called to make compromises even with their basic personal freedom. She expressed her natural shock to Abbas: "But I cannot be Christian. I don't know their gods... And what of my beloved Goddess Lakshmi or Thakurma's favourite, Lord Krishna? Goddess Durga, Lord Shiva... I resolved never to forget these holy friends, no matter what the Burra-memsahib or Miss Rachael wanted. I would not speak their names aloud, but I would keep them in my heart"(38). In order to make her feel at ease, Abbas took her to see her old friend Mala. However, Mala seemed to have forgotten how Pom altogether and the least, how she had rescued her. This gave her a hint of nature of future years ahead of her at Lockwood: "And this lonely bit of knowledge gathered so quickly upon my arrival turned out to be an accurate prediction of how the next three years at Lockwood School would pass" (38).

Sarah soon learned her chores. She spent the early mornings bringing bed tea to sleepy teachers housed in their private rooms. It rattled her nerves to be the first each morning to enter these bedchambers with their exotic furniture. After delivering the bed tea, she was to set up the dining hall. She did this for each meal, and afterwards washed the room clean. The time in between were spent dusting, polishing and cleaning other parts of the school, depending on Miss Rachael's wishes. But Sarah enjoyed one job at Lockwood which was moving the punkah in Miss Claire Richmond's classroom. Miss Richmond was a graduate of Newnham College, Cambridge and a teacher of Lockwood School.

Miss Rachael, the Directress of housekeeping was a tall, strong Christian woman with skin like copper, who wore a sari in the same green as the school uniform. She looked older than Sarah's mother. From other servants she learned that she was married to a man who worked as a driver in Calcutta. Since she was not blessed with any child, Abbas thought Pom's Christian conversion would do good to get her favour. However, Abbas was quite mistaken. From the moment Sarah came under the charge of Rachael, there was only criticism. Rachael sang at Sunday services in a tuneless shout that reminded Sarah of the tone of the orders issued to her. It was Rachael who decided that Sarah shouldn't sleep with the other servant families in their huts but on a mat in the tiny room of Jyoti-ma. Jyoti-ma was an old widow in charge of collecting and washing all the students' and teachers' used sanitary-cloths. Though she snored, groaned and coughed much in her sleep, Sarah did not

mind that. Her company made Sarah feel safe on dark nights. She was the one who helped her and instructed her how to go about when she had the first bleeding.

Sarah functioned as a fan-puller at Miss Richmond's classroom whenever the electric generator at Lockwood broke down. Her room was part of the oldest section of the building, with wooden fan-blades attached all the way across the ceiling. These blades shifted back and forth, moved by the power of servant sitting in the back with a cord tied to her foot. Sarah enjoyed being in the back of the room, lazily moving her foot back and forth and observing Richmond who spoke in an accent as rich as her orange-gold hair. Sarah was utterly confused about the meaning of her speech in the first six months. Soon with her eagerness to grasp and imitate Richmond's speech, her vocabulary flowed into her brain without the need for translation. When Richmond wrote words on the blackboard, Sarah used to trace the same words with her fingers on her dress. It did not take much time to start reading books. Miss Richmond maintained a side shelf for borrowing what she termed pleasure reading. Almost every evening she sneaked one of these to the lean-to and brought it back in the morning before classes had begun. The spelling of any unknown word was always memorised and referred to later in Miss Richmond's Oxford English Dictionary. Sarah comments on her learning experience thus: "As I continued to study, I felt secretly rich: for each word I learned was something that could never be taken away" (41).

Sarah wanted to speak English, too. She observed that students of different nationalities like the Irish, the English, the Australians and the Anglo-Indians, spoke slightly different-sounding variations of English. She chose to pattern her English after Miss Richmond, the only English person she admired. So in the back of the classroom she whispered along with her. Whenever she visited Abbas, she repeated words and phrases more loudly. He encouraged her with praise and small gifts, such as pencils and papers. However, he cautioned her to practise where the other servants would not see or overhear. As a result, after three long years at Lockwood, she could speak and read English. Yet, very few knew she could.

Years in Lockwood school had also awakened her literary sensibilities. One day Miss Richmond was introducing Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own* to students in the class. She raised a discussion about whether young women living in a crowded school might like occasional solitude. She realised that any person can build a room of her own in her mind. She often had an imaginary cupboard where she kept Thakurma's and Ma's stories to comfort her. And while she was thinking about it, she heard someone calling her, "Aey, Broom Girl. Aye!" (42) like a voice from the cupboard of childhood dreams. The voice was that of the new Indian girl who had arrived the previous week, a plump girl with untidy black braids. Sarah recognised the little princess of the Jamidar in Jolhpur, who had watched her with her long-lashed eyes years ago as she went with her Ma to sell brooms to their house. She introduced herself as Bidushi Mukherjee and the old Pom regretfully introduced herself as Sarah. Bidushi's parents were killed in the same tidal wave that made Sarah an orphan. Her father's brother and his wife came to take over the estate. Ever since, Bidushi's aunt kept her inside the walls of her estate for she opined that well-bred girls should not be seen outside the family. They had also dismissed her governess. Bidushi was brought to Lockwood School a week ago and she was glad to get away from her aunt. Though Bidushi said, "We are the same two Jolhpur orphans alone in a strange place" (43), Sarah knew she was a servant and Bidushi, a student and this made all the distinctions in this world of Lockwood school. Bidushi also disclosed that her uncle and aunt did not want to send me to the school. It so happened according to an earlier plan, she was to be betrothed to Pankaj, who was studying for law at the Cambridge University. The family of Bandopadhyays lived in the quite area of Ballygange in Calcutta. Recently his parents enquired about her education because Pankaj had told his parents that he would never marry a girl who was uneducated. So that explained why Bidushi was brought to the school.

Bidushi was almost treated like an outcast with all the English girls pointing at her and calling her "wogoli" or "wiggly". A few girls who passed by them as they were talking called their conversation, "wog-to-wog gossip" (44). Bidushi could not bear their sniggering laughter. Sarah too was upset but she could not speak back to an English student for fear she would be thrown out of Miss Richmond's room for good.

Having come to know that Bidushi was conversing with Sarah in the native dialect, Miss Richmond came to remind Bidushi that she was there to learn English. But Bidushi did not have words to respond to Richmond and so Sarah came to her defence by responding in language she had practised privately listening to Richmond's own class. Richmond soon came to understand Sarah's gift for learning languages and encouraged her to read more. She appointed her as Bidushi's special helpmate in the classroom. However, this was only an additional responsibility and Rachel resented losing several hours of Sarah's work. So she set Sarah doing more work in her reduced hours. Yet this new assignment benefitted Bidushi and Sarah mutually. Sarah learned to write Bengali in the course of helping her to learn English. Sarah loved the name 'Bidushi' that meant knowledge: "I thought how lovely it would be to have a lofty name instead of Sarah, an old wife in the Ingeg Bible" (47) Bidushi did not call her Sarah but 'didi' meaning 'big sister'. They became so intimate that Bidushi shared the love letters of Pankaj. Sarah drafted a reply for every letter of Pankaj and engineered a strong romance. Even when Pankaj had written asking Bidushi's opinion on Gandhiji, Sarah collected information from

Abbas - Chacha before writing a proper reply on Gandhiji and Subhash Chandra Bose. But their growing relationship was very much resented by Miss Rachael who told her one day, "If you give a beggar a pitcher, he will never stop drinking... Your association with the Mukherjee girl is not good. And what would her Brahmin family think if they knew who was sitting so closely to her every day" (51). If Rachael had known the extent of what was going on, she would have been even angrier.

One day Bidushi received a ruby pendant that hung from a long delicate gold chain as a gift from Pankaj. Sarah was afraid Bidushi might be caught wearing the pendant. Lockwood girls could wear only religious medals. She knew that the gift was given because of the sweet words that she had written. She wasn't jealous but she "felt as much as foreboding, an indefinable anxiety that had settled in the bottom of my stomach like one of the bricks in the school wall" (53).

Miss Richmond became interested in Tagore's writings and she asked Sarah to buy the latest Bengali publication. Sarah was delighted in the prospect of her first trip to the town, to see the real bookstore. Besides, Miss Richmond would teach her how to use her handsome typewriter for translations. Miss Rachael did not quite like the plan. When she asked for a fraction of the stipend she had been keeping for her since she had started working, she bluntly refused. On the following day, Abbas-chacha brought the tonga and Bidushi joined Sarah in their purchase trip to town. It was easy to find the poetry book at the book stall. There were several annas as the balance amount, which Sarah tucked into the pocket of her work dress to bring back to Miss Richmond. Bidushi was elated to be walking through a real bazaar and brought for themselves snacks of crunchy phuchka. Bidushi also brought two saris - one for Sarah and the other for herself. On their way back to the tonga, quite unknowingly they walked into the group of Congress Party protesters who boycotted cloth made outside of India. One of the women grabbed the bag from Sarah insisting to examine if it contained foreign cloth. Bidushi managed to snatch back the saris and they were helped into the tonga by Abbas.

When she got her new blouse and petticoat stitched, she wore the sari the way Bidushi had taught her aided by pins Jyothi-ma gave her. When she came to the kitchen with her new dress, she was questioned on the source of the sari by Rachael. Pointing her finger at Sarah, she said, "You are impudent... Only I can decide what you wear" (60). She was asked to wear the old dress. But the old dress was already cut for rags. She explained that being a woman, she must wear longer lengths for modesty. Rachael's words worked their poison and Sarah felt quite awkward the whole day. In the class there were whisperings from the girls about "Sarah Going to a Party and Green Parrot Girl" (60). Miss Richmond was soon informed that the two girls had spent suspicious amount of money in their trip to the town. After the class Richmond asked in a serious sounding voice if she had used Richmond's money to buy new clothing. When she showed her the receipt, Miss Richmond was satisfied. However, Rachael was hot over the situation and she requested Richmond to discontinue Sarah from helping Bidushi. Richmond tried to tell her it would be only for few months. At this Sarah realised that it would Bidushi's last term at Lockwood. The next day she learned from Bidushi that it was Pankaj who wanted her to discontinue at Lockwood and begin their life together. Sarah knew that the letters she had written for her had hastened the future for Bidushi. Bidushi said, "Didi, I can't bear to leave you... There were tears in her eyes, too: real tears of love and sadness" (63) thinking about their uncertain futures. Bidushi promised Sarah that she would ask Pankaj to allow keeping Sarah in his house as lady's ayah. Sarah was so happy at this possible future arrangement that she told Bidushi, "Nothing on this earth could make me happier" (63)

Meanwhile Pankaj posted a letter to Bidushi before boarding the steamer Percival saying he hoped to arrive by mid-June 1935. Bidushi was anxious about her last exams. Her school record would be used for the application for the Calcutta school where they wanted her to finish her senior examinations. Sarah knew that Bidushi was clever but "her cleverness was about wearing clothes and jewellery and setting a table - not sums or literary quotations or politics" (66). So with renewed vigour, she helped Bidushi to review her academic subjects. They had reached such levels of intimate friendship that Sarah fancied achieving a union of mind and body: "Sometimes I thought, if only Lakshmi could work her magic to make the two of us one. This ideal young lady would be as fair and sophisticated and confident like Bidushi, yet also have my voice for English and head for numbers. Melded together we would have four slim arms like a goddess, all the better for embracing a man we both loved" (66)

Two things that Sarah noted about Ms. Richmond made her admire the teacher even more: sometimes it appeared that she was trying very hard to show the lives of poor people to her well-off students; she was also quite interested in Indian writing translated into English. Sarah was elated when Richmond declared that Tagore translations that she had done were "naturally poetic" (67). She would burn the midnight oil to study these poems, so that everything she had finished could be typed out the next day on Miss Richmond's Smith Corona. The typewriter was kept in her bedroom, which was rich with rows of books. Richmond perceived Sara's interest and explained the organisational system. Soon she was shelving and dusting her books.

Often her interest in books and her admiration for Miss Richmond made Rachael very angry. One day she was a little late to take tea for teachers, as Richmond wanted her to finish a few more lines of a poetry

translation. When she came to the scullery, Rachael almost barked at her wagging her head back and forth, "Miss Richmond wants! Mukherjee-memsahib needs! ... Their wanting you is like pouring Ghee on fire" (68). Rachael snatched the precious book from her where she had written pages of Bengali and English side by side. She tore out a page and held it out to her: "Good kindling for the kitchen fire"(68). When she tried to save the pages in the book, she hit her arms and then her face. Miss Jamison had come from her sleeping quarters to intervene. Stern-faced she looked at Rachael and said, "Tardiness is the situation for reprimand, not a beating. This is a Christian school" (69) Then Miss Jamison told Sarah that Bidushi fell ill the previous night and that she was asking for her. She said the nurse matron would speak with her. Sarah found her extremely ill and beyond the control of the nurse matron. On the suggestion of Sarah, a telegram was sent to her father-in-law-to-be, Mr. Bandopadhyay. Miss Jamison ordered that Sarah should temporarily halt her housekeeping duties and assist the nurse-matron.

Sarah's loving assistance the whole day did bring the fever down for two days but it returned the third day. In the meantime, the Bandopadhyays informed that they have arranged for a female physician, Dr. Sengupta . That night Bidushi asked Sarah to sleep with her in the same bed for "Only you can stop Ravana from taking me tonight" (72). Sarah felt that the school's Indian servants would be shocked, because for a Shudra to lie with a Brahmin girl would ruin her chances for a good afterlife. But when her friend moaned she did not hesitate to join her. "Under the sheet, we laced hands, and something jolted my heart. This girl, in spite of a few years, had replaced the sisters I'd lost... I clung her because of my own longing, not just hers." (73) Bidushi whispered to her, "You will take care of Pankaj ... Will you promise?" Sarah pulled her close and told her, "Everything will be right as the rain"(73).

Bidushi was back at 105 degrees Fahrenheit when Dr. Sengupta arrived. The blood tests showed she had malaria. The Doctor started giving Bidushi the medication mepacrine. The next day Bidushi's aunt was summoned and Miss Jamison sent Sarah out of the sickroom to give the Mukherjees privacy with their Niece. Miss Rachael put Sarah on duty washing the baseboards along the hallways. She made sure to work slowly in the hallway outside the infirmary, so she could spy on the visitors. Bidushi had told her enough about her aunt so she could easily recognize her puffy face with eyes as small and hard as black dal. She was wearing a good bit of jewellery possibly of Bidushi's mother.

After a couple of days, the Bandopadhyays arrived to consult Dr. Sengupta and Sarah met them at the gate. Sarah felt that "Pankaj had come like a prince to awaken and save the sleeping princess" (76). After informing the concerned people, she moved to the infirmary to inform and prepare her for meeting Pankaj. Finding the door locked, she entered it through one of infirmary's open windows. When Matron opened the door, she was surprised to see Sarah inside the room. She told her that since the Bandopadhyays had arrived, it was urgent that she clean her and change her sheets. Sarah was convinced that the sick are cured not just by medical drugs but more by love: "At least now Bidushi knew Pankaj was there... After all, love was the most powerful medicine. Not just what Pankaj felt for Bidushi; but what I felt for both of them too" (77).

In the evening hoping to get some news concerning Bidushi, she slipped into the garden to get some roses. In the garden, she noticed Bidushi's fiancé walking with his head bowed down and tears streaming from beneath his spectacles. Sarah found it difficult to pull herself out of the embarrassing situation. She begged him to excuse her for reasons of work and left. As she neared the infirmary, she heard unusual amount of noise. With misgivings, she looked towards Bidushi's bed to notice that a sheet had been pulled from bottom to top, covering the small mound of her body. There was a discussion whether a Hindu priest in nearby Midnapore would do the cremation or if the Mukherjees would take her body home.

While this was going on Rachael was watching her with hard eyes and then pretending to be sympathetic, she said, Miss Jamison wanted her in the infirmary. In the infirmary, she found Miss Jamison standing among the Bandopadhyay parents and the Mukherjees. Miss Jamison spoke to her in clear, loud English as if she wanted all the others to understand: " Her fiancé wished for the return of a sentimental gift she made to her. Perhaps you know of it" (83). Sarah could easily be accused of stealing the ruby pendant and all the evidences were against her defence: Sarah was with her in the last days of Bidushi's life; she had entered the sick room through the open widow without informing the matron and so on. Bidushi's aunt was very particular that Sarah was accused as the culprit and she did add her own fuel to blaze the investigation in those lines: "To think this wretch was sleeping in the room with her so many nights, pawing through her ornaments!" (84). She was taken to the statue of Jesus and Miss Jamison gestured towards the statue and said, "This is your chance to tell the truth before God... You must say where you've hidden the necklace". Sarah was filled with embarrassment and anger. Woodenly she told her, "I do not know because I did not take it"(85). She was asked to go to her room and wait. She had the premonition that her days at Lockwood coming to an end. She decided to ask Rachael for the pay. Trying to remain polite, she said to her,

'I'll take my pay, now if you please.'

'Pay?' she laughed. 'The thief tries to take more? There is no pay. You never had it.'

Tightly I said, 'I'm not a thief. If you won't bring it now, I'll go to Miss Jamison and tell you've seized it'
I'll tell you've been getting it each week, just like the others. Why would she believe you? All she knows of you are lies.' Rachael's voice was triumphant... (87)

Their Arguments ended up in blows. Miss Richmond came to the scene and put an end to it. Sarah pleaded with Richmond that she was a victim of crime by the ruling class: "You know that I loved Bidushi. I would never take from her"(87). She came to warn her that the police have been called. She asked her to run away from the place. Sarah lost no time. She quickly moved from the place: "With each step I was moving farther from the place where I'd learned life's hardest lesson, towards the unknown. No, I realised, it was not unknown. It was the old, large world I had once known; India" (88). Abbas was following her and he came to her aid with a small horse drawn cart. He took her to his house, where she was treated kindly by his wife Hafeeza. She was dressed in a blue sari and salwar kameez with a pair of good chappals after the Muslim fashion so that she won't be recognised by anyone. Then she was taken to the railway station to board a train to Calcutta. Calcutta is a huge city where anyone can just vanish. Thus when the second book of the novel ends the readers realise that her fate has stored torture and pain for her, ending up in a false accusation of thievery.

It was Sarah's first train journey and she was much excited. When the train came, she managed to clamber aboard amid complaints and shoves, to make her way to the third class compartment. In the train, she hoped she would be able to find a teaching job like Miss Richmond in the city of palaces. As she disembarked at the station, which she thought was Calcutta, a one-armed wraith clutching a baby to her hip came right up to her face and called out Babiji. Sarah felt pity for her as she was someone worse off than her. Reaching to her bundle, she withdrew a paisa and gave it to her. Soon she learned from the beggar that the station she alighted to was not Calcutta but Kharagpur. People change here for another train to Calcutta. The Calcutta mail was just leaving on the other side. By the time she reached on the other side, the doors of the train were latched and it was already moving. There was nothing she could do to reach Calcutta and to seek a teaching job. With a scrap of ticket, the beggar woman had found on the platform, she was allowed admission to woman's lounge, where she spent the night. At dawn when she went out into the platform, the beggar woman appeared. She brought her a cup of tea at no cost and recited a list of names of Kharagpur's various schools that she had gathered from her rickshaw-pulling friends. Sarah tried her luck at various schools that day. However, no matter how many schools she visited, very few of their tall iron gate parted. Of the two schools that did, her lack of diploma and reference sent her straight out again. Her traverse took her to a large lovely garden dotted with plants and trees. Here she was acquainted with a woman named Bonnie who was attracted by her fine English accent. When the woman asked her name, she said, 'Pom'. She pronounced her name as 'Pam' and later called her Pamy and Pamela. Bonnie said she was staying with Mummy and sisters. She invited Pom for a cup of tea. Pom protested that she was bound for Calcutta and a teaching position. Bonnie said, "You can do that later. It's just a cup of tea and a bite" (103) and lovingly pulled her towards the waiting rickshaw.

Bonnie brought her to Rose Villa and she was introduced to Rose Barker who was the owner of the place and called by the girls as Mummy. She was also introduced to the other girls like Natty, Sakina, Doris, Lucky-Short-for-Lakshmi, and a number of other girls. Pam soon understood that the magnificent Rose Villa is not a family home but a boarding house. The first night Mummy came to put her to bed in Bonnie's room because she said Bonnie would stay up very late. After she left she lay between the soft sheets, "thinking how quickly my fate had changed. My best friend on earth had died; yet another girl had stepped forward to comfort me" (111). At the same time, she had a feeling that it was confusing to be taken by such rich strangers.

The next morning when she woke up, she found Bonnie beside her, sleeping as if wrapped in most overwhelming fatigue. Premlata the servant brought her the morning tea and said that breakfast would be served at ten. Rima the beautician comes every week to groom all girls. This time Mummy paid for the grooming expenses of Pam. After the grooming process was complete, Lucky introduced her to cosmetics. An intimate conversation followed when Lucky told her about her past. Her family was from a thatching caste. Her father sold her to a temple when she was seven to bring them the blessing of a son. It was very hard at temple with little food and terrible work. When she was fourteen, one of Mummy's friends came to watch their group perform. She was the one she liked the best, so he paid the priests and brought her to Rose Villa. Pam also revealed that she was from the coast and her family grew rice for a jamidar. While they were talking the Chief Howard, the head of the Kharagpur Police arrives at Rose Villa. Lucky assured Pam that he was a friend of Bonnie and that she need not at all fear him. That night she observed several men both English and Anglo-Indian arriving at night and the girls of the house going to meet them. The next day when she asked about these men, Bonnie said she would also come to know about them soon.

After breakfast, Bonnie had her dress in European clothes and glittery chappals to visit the bustling Gole Bazar. Bonnie deposited a hundred rupees in bank and Pam wondered what job she had that paid so much. Bonnie's explanations seemed very strange to her:" She told her that part of the money she was putting in the bank included a fifty-rupee fee Mummy had given her for bringing me to Rose Villa. If I decided to stay at Rose

Villa, that payment would be doubled. Why would someone pay a girl to bring a friend home? I wondered, but these rich people were the strangest I'd ever known"(116). She also said that Pam too would have her money in the bank soon. Then without the least comprehending the implication of her frank question, Pam asked Bonnie, "Tell me about the work you do. May be I could apply for a similar position?" (116). Hearing this, Bonnie's eyebrows arched high but she did not answer her, instead she took her for a movie.

When they were back in the house, she removed a short length of wooden flooring and asked Pam to look through a spying hole. Natty was engaging a customer in a large bed calling the man pet names. Pam realised that this was what all the girls did in the house and for which they were paid by Mummy. Lucky said that at Rose Villa, bad men are not allowed back, and that the girls had Dr DeCruz to keep them from getting sick, and Chief Howard to protect them from all other troubles. Pam finally confirmed she had landed up in a whorehouse. Pam said to herself: "I realised now that it was good that my family members were dead; they would never know the shame I'd brought to all of them by entering this house of sin. I remembered Miss Rachael mocking me, saying that an unknown girl could do only one job... she had predicted the weakness that would bring me, a poor, stupid monkey, into the tiger's cage" (121). Yet, she hoped this secretive, decadent world will shield her from the demons of her past.

Mummy took her on a tour to various facilities and amenities of Rose Villa. She told her, "You are a sweet girl, Pamela. And you have the potential to earn more than any of the other girls...(122) she had a good English accent and she was "pretty for a medium-complexioned Indian" (123). She pledged she would show her to everyone which would help raise her price. When enough suitable offers are placed, she would accept the highest bidder. She assured that the money she would earn the debut night would be more than most other girls earned in a month. In a casual manner she stated the terms and conditions of her service: half of what Pam would earn would go to Mummy; Room and board would be deducted from her portion and she could bank the remainder or have her keep it in her bedroom lockbox. In a flash back she rewound her past: "So many times I should have died already: first in the great tidal wave, next from cholera, and then in custody of the police" (125). She had managed to escape through all those horrors. She had to put away her dreams about Pankaj to earn money that could take her wherever she wanted. When Pam gave her consent, yearning still for her childhood self as Pom, things happened very quickly. She was advertised in the Kharagpur and Calcutta papers as the new exotic Indian Rosebud who has joined the bevy of beauties in Khargpur. Bonnie and Lucky taught her how to go about the French letters and initiated into the tricks of the trade. Another announcement about her in the papers said that bids on the exotic Indian Rosebud would close in five days time.

The week following Mummy accepted four hundred and one rupees from the Marwari merchant who had earlier bought Doris's virginity. After her first experience with a man the age of her grandfather that night, she was certain "the same horrible scene would replay each night, in an endless loop" (134). Thus by fifteen she was already a working lady and earned thirty rupees a day on par with the top earners like Bonnie, Lucky and Natty. But unlike them she felt she was treading the thorny path of hard trials of life. "Every time I lay down, my mind blacked out. I ran away to the cupboard of my childhood memories, burying myself in the fairy tales, songs, and stories once told by my mother. And I felt that through all of it, Ma was holding my hand. She comforted me from her faraway place and kept me alive". (135) Mummy sold her for five more times as a first-time debut. All those men thought they had won the auction that they were truly delighted. When she was playing the double with Bonnie for the Chief Howard, she had lost her nerves. Bonnie had fainted seeing the toy snake that he had brought. Pam assumed that Bonnie had died of fright and she screamed, possibly thinking of what had happened to her best friend in life, Bidushi, "Bonnie is dead! Chief Howard killed her" (140). There was a lot of commotion with all the customers running away scared. At the end of it all Bonnie told her like an efficient teacher, "...a lot of things will happen here that look like something fearful, but really are not. You'll manage it, if you're tough"(142).

During those days, she was following news concerning Pankaj and Bijoy Ganguly facing trial on charges of propaganda, libel and inciting civil unrest. Pankaj received a sentence of two years at Port Blair prison in the Andaman Islands. A public meeting was being called to discuss the situation of Andaman's prisoners in Kharagpur. Prisoners in jails throughout India began a hunger strike to express their solidarity. Pam thought Pankaj would welcome death to be with his Bidushi. She thought she could starve herself if that would bring Pankaj back to India. She felt a terrible contradiction with a life she was leading and the sort of life she longed for: "...but who would pay notice to the sympathy strike of a prostitute who continued to lie down for Englishmen and take their money? I wanted to leave Rose Villa badly, but I had nobody to turn to who would accept me. As the proverb went, I'd made my own bed and had to lie in it." (154)

Pam also had another sad experience with Mr. Abernathy, popularly known as the Taster. He felt she had not prepared herself to meet him and he gave her a hard blow. She was not able to bring out a French letter out of the box for her own protection before she was raped repeatedly. None came to her aid. The Taster was Natty's customer and she had nursed this resentment all the time, for his dropping her in favour of Pam.

In the mean time, the hunger strike had spread to prisons all over India. Gandhiji delivered a number of speeches on the subject. Rabindranath Tagore wrote letters about the Andamans, making the starving prisoners international news. Mummy was annoyed that Pam was mixing in Congress politics. She said, "The congress Party and their war for Independence will be the death of India"(158). But the more Pam thought about the words of freedom fighters, the less she could bear her life at Rose Villa for she was lying down for the enemy. She realised that "Prostitution was more than a physical humiliation; it was becoming mental torture" (159). This inner contradiction notwithstanding, she came to realise that she was carrying. This added more fire to the already seething tension within her. Dr. DeCruz examined her the first two months without noticing anything amiss and this spurred her to go on with the pretence. A baby would mean the end of everything.

When Mummy finally came to know of her pregnancy, she scolded her for breaking the house rule about French letters. Everyone at Rose Villa had their own opinions on the matter. Pam was told to stay out and arranged a place for her at a dancing girl's house, a filthy place managed by a sour-looking couple Tilak and Jayshree. Mummy showed herself to be a shrewd businessperson even when Pam was weak and needed proper assistance: "A girl is what we want. Jayshree will keep her while she's little, and if she is pretty enough, she can shift to Rose Villa and follow in your footsteps. When she's thirteen, you'll be thirty: the perfect age for her debut and your retirement" (169). Mummy got her bank account closed withdrawing the five hundred rupees that Pam had saved in the past months for the account was jointly held with Rose Barker. All her dreams on the money saved were shattered: her dream of securing a Cambridge certificate, of finding a teaching position in a school, and of seeing Pankaj Bandopadhyay. Only Lucky had come to her aid secretly by giving a hundred rupees.

The ordeal of childbirth was augmented by dai's assistance. A daughter was born to her as was predicted by Mrs. Barker. When Rose Barker was informed, she came along with Dr. DeCruz. The doctor's timely help saved the mother and the daughter from serious infection. It took a couple of days before she could really examine her own daughter. Everyone was calling her Hazel because of her golden-brown eyes. Looking at her she was overwhelmed by her own motherly affections for her daughter: "I had not wanted this child while she was in me, but now... I felt as if there was a magical silken cord knotting us together" (183). Allaying Pam's fear of the future of the child, Dr. DeCruz brought an official birth certificate issued by Railway hospital on which was typed, "Hazel Mary Smith, Date of Birth: 15 May 1938, Bengal Nagpur Railway Hospital, Kharagpur. Race: Anglo-Indian". In the certificate, John Smith was listed as the deceased father of the child, having an English nationality and the mother listed as Pamela Barker, an Anglo-Indian, born in 1920.

Pam had already decided that her child would be called "Kabita, which meant Poem". Dr. DeCruz wanted to make things easier for her by getting Hazel to one of the church homes for Anglo-Indian children in the hills so that she could go on at Rose Villa. She was to meet the Doctor to remove the stitches he had made after she developed dangerous infections. When she met him on the appointed day, he did not look too pleased as she had not brought her child to be handed over to a Nun from the church home. After swiftly removing those stitches, he said to her, "I did something for you... I stitched in a way that it appears your hymen is still intact. You can make your debut again before returning to your profession" (188). The Doctor was right in considering that prostitution was not to be the life for Kabita. But in the case of Pam, he preferred to recommend the same.

Pam decided to save the life of Kabita and herself in a way that neither Rose Barker and Dr. DeCruz could imagine. At the dawn of the day when she was expected to hand over the child, she secretly left disguised in the burka for the house of Abbas and Hafeeza at Midnapore. On reaching the house she tucked Kabita in a bundle with a letter and some money. She hung Kabita in her little sling over the top of the gateposts, where the right people would discover her. She left after ensuring that Hafeeza discovered her and convincing herself that Abbas' home was the safest place in the world for her with "a real father and a mother" (197). In any case, this was the most torturous and painful period of her life, yet Khargpur is the town, where, she became a woman, where she became mother for the first and the last time, and which changed the course of her life drastically.

The Book Four entitled "Calcutta" begins with a quotation from *Travel in India*, published in 1916 on the subject of how much Calcutta means to India and the European domination of the empire. Pamela finally survives to her dream city- Calcutta, known as The City of Palaces. And the time when she reached Calcutta, was quite vulnerable. Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose has already formed his army; Mahatma Gandhi has already started his movement to liberate India from the clutches of India. She decided to try her luck at passing for Anglo-Indian using her fluent English and knowledge of English habits. From Hawrah Station, she boarded a tram and headed for Chitpore Road an area known for reasonable but respectable hotels. Her experience of being in a crowded tram is also frankly recorded: "Unfortunately, I was the only woman dressed in European clothing on the packed tram: a regrettable decision. The entire trip was an exercise in trying to get men to stop nudging my bosom or rubbing against my legs: something I couldn't refuse at Rose Villa but was bent on never allowing to happen again" (198). She entered one of the hotels and registered as Camilla Smith, daughter of Jonathan Smith, Bombay. She chose the name Camilla for it sounded similar to Pamela and the second name Smith because she wanted to feel linked to Kabita. Reading the Statesman the next morning she noted

classifieds for clerical jobs at a street called Esplanade. After a daylong search for jobs near Chowringhee - Esplanade, she told herself, "Calcutta could not be conquered on the first day" (200).

The second day she sought for a position of a file clerk at Writer's Building where the sahibs made their administration. With much difficulty, she managed to trace the office of J. White. Of the two red-faced European men there she asked the one who appeared to be scrutinising her with interest, "Sir, I have come to apply for Mr. White's filing position". He replied, pointing to the other man who was looking at her more critically, "Sorry, I'm not your man. But he is". She tried to impress the other man, describing her abilities at filing, translations and her skills at caring for books and documents. In spite of her best efforts, she was shown the door. Her attempt to secure an interview was so humiliating that she decided not to apply for jobs with any English organisation again. The following day she began searching for work at Indian businesses but she was again rejected - "sometimes for my gender or lack of credentials or known family, but most often for no reason at all" (205).

Failing to find work would mean failing Kabita. She had planned to send as much money as possible to Abbas so that she could meet the expenses of her upbringing. The morning after her third night at Howrah, she looked at her suitcase with certain loathing: "Inside were three saris, two dresses and a dozen books. I also had some grooming necessities, a waning purse of rupees and Kabita's birth certificate. The heaviest weight in the suitcase was the books ... I knew it was time to leave them behind"(209). While she tried unsuccessfully to sell her precious books at Bilgrami's Classic Books of Asia and Europe, she was accidentally met by the English gentleman who she had met at Writer's Building. He introduced himself as Simon Lewes and offered her a position as Private Librarian of his house. Though she was initially suspicious of him, she introduced herself as Kamala Mukherjee. At this point, she explains the affective logic of the name to the reader: "The surname came from the girl I'd once wanted to be, and Kamala was a dignified Hindu name that sounded like Camilla, which he had heard. It had a good meaning too: lotus, reminding me of what Ma used to say about my eyes" (213). At his invitation she agreed to accompany him in the Buick to his residence at Middleton Mansions to have a look at the library.

When they both reached the place, she was introduced to Shombu, a thick-bodied Bengali man of about thirty who was the chief of the household staff, Manik, a thin sharp-eyed cook from Orissa and Choton his assistant, and Jatin the houseboy. She was given complete freedom to organise the library. She began reading on the Dewey decimal system and organising her working hours to do justice to the pay of fifty rupees a month she was offered. She arrived each morning at six and after a simple Indian lunch prepared by Manik, she went to Bow Bazaar, a neighbourhood filled with jostling traders from all races speaking different languages for various needs of the library like meeting Mr. Chun, the carpenter to fix shelves or taking books to Sen Bookbindery and Publishing for repairs and so on. Her first visit to the Sens was particularly memorable. She came to know about them after her visit to both to the Asiatic Society and the Imperial library. She was warmly received by Supriya Sen who introduced her to her mother Mrs. Promilla Sen, to her baby brother, Nishan and her younger sister, Sonali. Mrs. Sen was impressed by Kamala and she asked her to call her Mahima, which means mother's sister. There was also another young woman named Ruksana Ali, whose father was a doctor who worked in Calcutta Medical College Hospital. From the various bits of references to Netaji and Gandhiji in their conversations, Kamala came to understand that the Sens were closely associated with Indian freedom movement.

Kamala's soft feelings for Lewes were aroused a little when she saw him at the dining room in one evening, when was clad in "a white Indian cotton one and tan cotton trousers. In these unconventional clothes, he looked rather appealing..." (231) but then she chided herself for the inappropriate thoughts. At another time she noticed "Mr. Lewes's angular face held an emotion" when he had invited her to stay over for the dinner so that they could review the Bengali newspapers together. She doubted for a moment if Mr. Lewes wanted her beyond professional interest. Soon she reasoned, "Perhaps his strange expression was solely because he was in love with the written word, something that was quite understandable... I had no intention of any kind of involvement with an Englishman beyond the professional, especially with the reality of Pankaj being alive and well in the city" (232). Soon her reviews of local newspapers after dinner together got her very late and Mr. Lewes asked her to stay in his place in the little room on the third floor. She was also given more of the household responsibilities.

During Christmas that year Mr. Lewes left for Bombay leaving the house at the care of Kamala. For the first time in her life she felt quite independent and secure. Life became pleasantly casual with Lewes so far away. Supriya asked her to join her for the young women's political meeting at a place called Albert Hall near Bankim Chatterjee Street and she was excited enough. In the meeting the discussion was on the differences of opinion held by Gandhiji and Netaji on the strategy to be adopted for immediate independence of the country. Everyone at the meeting was impressed that Kamala, a working-woman joined them and Kamala felt she was living a new and exciting life. She could also save money for future and contribute to Kabita's upbringing.

When Mr. Lewes returned, he looked quite pleased that Kamala had saved some money overseeing the household expenses. What impressed him more was the way she had worked on the flat's redecoration. She had

brought him a pocket-size Bengali-English Dictionary as a gift. She brought it because it had cross-translations of Bengali proverbs and English ones. Lewes looked strange and flustered and said, "Kamala, you mustn't spent money on me again, I can't pay what you're worth" (243). She regretted her choice of the gift and thought "he might be someone who cared more about dust jackets and copyrights than contents... he cared more for the look of things, not substance"(243). She felt a little stifled in the library after the incident.

A package from Bombay arrived with two new books, one a guidebook by Joseph summers called *Birds of the Nilgiri Hills* and the other, *Female India*, photographs by Bernard Mulkins. Kamala was quite uneasy with the latter. Mulkins was a lusty traveller who had arrived at Rose Vila while she was there to take pictures of the girls. Glancing through the book she saw Lucky with her face wreathed in cigarette smoke and a melancholic expression, a most flattering photograph of Bonnie stretched over two pages with a regimental army flag draped over her hips, pictures of poor Indian women working in the fields wearing saris without blouses and the dark tribal women whose faces were illuminated by the whites in their eyes and the sparkle of their nose rings. There was also the photograph of Pamela with her face hidden but revealing the slight widening of her body, the evidence of the growing child within her. Kamala realised that "all I might ever have of Kabita was this, a picture of my body with her hidden inside" (244). Though there was no danger of Lewes identifying her, she felt she could become obsessed with that physical reminder of her past. She had that page pulled out from the book though she knew that the book was at the window of the Oxford Bookstore and was well reviewed in the English language press. She wished she could monitor Lewes's movements in the library. Fortunately, the air-conditioning workers had accidentally made a crack in the course of their work between the floor of her room and the ceiling of the library. The break was big enough to offer a tiny glimpse into the library below.

Kamala was informed by Supriya about a political meeting in which Netaji would be addressing. She wanted to attend it thrilled by the desire to see the leader in person. In the meeting, she felt that she was in the presence of a tremendous leader whose words evoked thunderous applause. Netaji had resigned the presidency of the National Congress Party and formed a new party called the Forward Bloc. She also saw Pankaj Bandopadhyay, whom she had longed for since her Lockwood days, among them. Looking at his handsome appearance, she felt she knew his heart and mind so well, after having written to him hundreds of letters and receiving as many back. She was confident that with her posh Calcutta manners and her circle of intellectual friends, she would be able to make a fresh start with Pankaj. Besides, Pankaj was free and was unmarried and so he was too great of a temptation not to think about.

Kamala found Mr. Lewes very interested in the Bengali opinions of the Forward Bloc. The news on India in the local newspapers were different from those pro-British ones which published various soldiers' and missionaries' accounts of happy exotic India marked by tiger shoots and rajas' feasts. The former were filled with stories of anger, of people being arrested for civil disobedience and so on. Lewes' job would have been simpler a hundred years ago, when the Indians were too frightened of their rulers to speak up. Lewes gave her a book entitled *The Indian Struggle* written Bose, which was censored in India but published in England. Lewes had made thick underlining on many pages, particularly those relating to Bhagat Singh and every mention of the word 'terrorism' or 'revolution'. He had also drawn question marks and occasional exclamation points on the margins. Netaji had written the history of India from antiquity through the present. This included the details of the brutal tortures and killing done to people who had attempted to protest the British rule.

One evening when Lewes was away in Delhi, Supriya invited her to attend the meeting of the women's group Chhatri Sangh held at Albert Hall. When she reached for the meeting, she saw Pankaj and her heart raced with happiness. Pankaj conversed with her and she was relieved that she and Pankaj were on speaking terms. All the girls at the meeting were so friendly with Pankaj and this made her a little jealous. The subject of the meeting was how women can contribute positively for freedom struggle. Though Kamala was working in the white town, Pankaj suggested, she could still help by passing the information she might overhear concerning the government's plans on Independence movement. Pankaj gave her a white card which showed his name, his legal credentials, telephone number and the address which she knew very well. He told her not to call on telephone but to come in person. She thought over the risk in meeting him in person: "To meet him in person. The way he'd said it made me want to faint. To do so meant a terrible risk, not just for the sake of politics - but also my heart" (257). She also felt frustrated that she hardly had anything to say about her employer except that his office was on Lord Sinha Lane.

When Lewes was back from Delhi, he planned a cocktail party at his residence. He decided to hold an open house to show off his air-conditioned and fully furnished library. He gave her an envelope of fifty rupees to make her presentable to meet the occasion of the cocktail party. She was taken aback, both by the personal nature of the gift and by the obvious importance of her bearing a right appearance for the party. She bought a gossamer black silk embroidered with exquisite designs of moons and stars, a series of delicate filigreed gold chains with matching ear rings. Adorning those reminded her of preparing herself for the evenings at Rose Villa

and all that came afterwards. With the few rupees that remained after the shopping, she bought chappals for Kabita to grow into.

She had to use her imaginations to make the place most fit for the occasion. Much against her wish Lewes wanted her at the party and he wanted her to look pretty too. In the course of conversing with her, he said "our party" as if Kamala were his hostess. When gentlemen and ladies arrived decked for the party, Lewes said, "Kamala - please socialise" (261). Her encounter with Wilbur Weatherington was disgusting, though she managed to get him out of the wheedling tone in his voice as he was made to acknowledge he would get nowhere with her. She thought of escaping from the group around the buffet table to the library where she could be freer. Lewes was in the library with a woman named Nancy Graham, who he had once met in Bombay and dated before she was married. She was sitting on the desk where Kamala had laid fine books. Kamala was fuming at the woman's insolence and the closeness she felt for Lewes. The woman suddenly opened the front of her dress exposing her full breasts covered by a lace brassiere and then murmured huskily, holding her breasts towards him like a fruit seller offering fat mangoes: "Tell me you don't want this" (263). For Kamala it was an act befitting the red-streets and not Middleton Mansions. She was so shocked that she gasped aloud. Nancy was obviously annoyed by the intrusion and she swept out of the room jabbing her elbow hard against Kamala. Initially Lewes tried to defend her but he explained that she came with friends and her name was not on the list he had given her. In any case Lewes was emotionally aroused enough. He walked right up to Kamala, looked down into her face and was about to kiss her. She stepped back fast to avoid it. The visit of a short, plump Indian man named Pal-babu relieved the tension.

Kamala slipped upstairs to splash water on her face. She could hear the rubble of voices below her in the library. She was tempted to spy on the conversation between Mr Pal and Mr. Lewes through the narrow crack that opened through the library ceiling. Soon she knew that Pal was a secret reporter who handed him a report of the protesters. They planned to have a follow-up meeting in the upstairs bar at the Calcutta club at seven. Lewes opened the middle drawer, slid the envelope and locked the drawer. Kamala planned to get the list and communicate the names to Pankaj. Kamala felt she was being exploited by a terrible employer: "But now I felt rage at myself... for misreading the intentions of a man who'd stop at nothing to suppress freedom. With his polite requests for my companionship at dinner, Mr. Lewes had manipulated me to gather information. What I'd fed him was allowing his government to keep India under its heavy elephant feet forever" (267).

Lewes had to be away in Delhi on a temporary duty but before he went, Kamala got permission to order for suitable tables and chairs to enable dining in the garden. After Lewes left for Delhi, Kamala hurried to Bow Bazaar and visited Mr. Chun's furniture shop. She told Chun that Lewes has misplaced the key to the central drawer and wants a new one made keeping the original lock plate. She lured him into this work by placing an order for new tables and chairs for outdoor dining. The old drawer was pulled out with the help of a skilled metal smith. Kamala felt guilty doing this to a man who trusted her implicitly. However, Netaji's words that every Indian citizen should work bravely for freedom had greater impact. She sifted through all the papers in the drawer to find Pal's list of names. Not finding the list, she made a thorough search of Lewes' bedroom where she found a leather-bound photograph album. She noticed that some of the photographs of the streets and train stations of India were paired with a companion picture taken of the same scene when political gatherings were held. On the back of these, Lewes had written certain dates and locations with names and often question marks. Kamala wondered if men pictured in these were arrested. Kamala felt that her action was a breach of trust yet "India mattered more than anything" (274) to her and "to take risks in the name of India's freedom" (279) was her privilege. Taking advantage of Lewes' absence, she got the album reviewed by Pankaj. In the meantime, there was news that England had declared war on Germany and India's Viceroy Lord Linlithgow announced without consulting any of the Indian leaders that India was at war with Germany too. In England, Neville Chamberlain was relieved of his duties as Prime Minister and replaced by the tougher Winston Churchill. When Lewes returned, his face was drawn making him look much older owing to the strain of charged political situation with the declaration of war.

The next meeting with Pankaj was planned at a cabin near Metro Cinema. Pankaj opined that the British have finally met a fierce enemy in Germany and an overseas war will divert the government from being able to harass freedom fighters. As the saying goes, "The enemy of my enemy is my friend" (282), it was thought to be the right time to push the Independence movement. In the course of the conversation, she noticed that he wore a heavy gold ring with a ruby in the centre, similar to the one Bidushi had. She wondered if it was the same ruby that had disappeared long ago at Lockwood. She made him recall the story behind the pendant for the loss of which she was accused as a thief. When Pankaj and his family were about to leave Lockwood after Bidushi's death, Pankaj noticed the pendant slipping out from the purse of Bidushi's aunt. The discovery embarrassed the lady and she quickly returned it as a token of goodwill between their families. He also admitted that she had written some two hundred "beautiful, intelligent letters" (282). Kamala was surprised that he did not remember those letters. Kamala listened to the whole story with both great relief and shock. While she was being interrogated on the lost pendant, Bidushi's aunt displayed cool demeanour after having taken it herself.

Her dishonesty had made Sarah flee. Had she stayed in Lockwood, her innocence would have been established. Though she would have remained a servant, she would have been spared of the tragedies she had to undergo at Kharagpur. But had things not have happened the way it did, she would never have been in Calcutta talking to Pankaj on the same footing. Everything that happened to her had contributed to the making of Kamala Mukherjee. She could build a life rich with ideas, family and friends just like the Sens and Bandopadhyays. Pankaj told her that he had become accustomed himself as a perpetual bachelor working ceaselessly for the Movement: "My mother complains that I am married to India, and I suppose it's true" (283). Bidushi had asked her to take care of Pankaj and she was resolved that she would.

Kabita had turned two and Kamala hoped that Abbas and Hafeeza would plan her education with the money she had been sending them since her arrival in Calcutta. That year she sent paper and pens, and the small dictionary she had gifted to Lewes. She was sure Abbas would do his best to help her with English. Longing to be informed about Kabita's well-being, she had written down the Middle Street address on the cover.

Lewes was going back and forth between Calcutta, New Delhi and Bombay involved in the campaign to ferret out German spies and sympathizers in India. He had set up wire recorder in the library, which played back programmes the government had given him to study. It had recordings of German propaganda in which, "ladies with silky voices coaxed the British troops to lay down their arms" (286). There was also counter propaganda with the English ladies speaking German telling German soldiers that Hitler, the immoral leader would jeopardise their country's freedom forever. Lewes wrote similar scripts for Indian population encouraging Indian men to join armed forces. Lewes was in constant contact with Weatherington. The latter opined that Indian soldiers could not be trusted to fight for the British cause. Instead, he advised him to trace the Fifth Column and lock them up. Lewes responded bluntly to this: "You can't lock up innocent people just because they feel differently about politics"(287). This conversation gave Kamala the impression that Lewes was not wholly against Indian Independence. She soon updated Pankaj on the recent political developments garnered from the conversation secretly meeting him the following day at the Minerva Theatre. Every meeting she had with Pankaj made her feel closer to him.

Kamala received the news from Lewes that Subhas Bose was arrested with his friends while they were on the way to tear down the Holwell Monument in Dalhousie square arming themselves with irons and lathis. Though they had not touched the monument, Lewes thought the city is safer with Bose unable to raise public sentiment against the war. Besides, the Monument commemorated the Black Hole incident of 1756, "a visible reminder to Indians that sedition was unforgivable"(290). It was feared that if Japan and Germany were aligned, war will certainly come to India. Lewes said that "if we don't stand up to fight, there will be nothing left for our children" (291). The expression "our children" in his speech distracted Kamala a little. In any case, she thought, "I could never have any more children. And he could not fight fairly. These were only things to keep in mind" (291).

In the mean time, Netaji started a hunger strike in prison. Kamala tried to gather news about government intentions on Netaji, by listening to the conversation between Weatherington and Lewes from the spy hole. The provincial government feared that if Netaji died in police custody, riots would sweep Calcutta. Kamala shared these with Pankaj and later with Supriya. She came to know from Supriya that Pankaj was making some inquiries about her family and where she came from. Kamala was eager to know whether Pankaj was making such investigations for reasons of politics or because he shared her yearning. Though Supriya invited her for the Chhatri Sangha Meeting to be held in the following day, she said it would be too risky as she could be watched.

The Christmas that year was different from the previous year. Lewes did not go to Bombay possibly to save some money. He asked Kamala to arrange for a Christmas meal. Kamala was given a Christmas gift - a plum silk sari with gold border. The New Year brought the news that Netaji had vanished outfoxing the police. Every one - the Sens, the Chhatri Sangha, and even Mr. Lewes and Mr. Weatherington - was imagining "Netaji's travel itinerary" (296). Kamala felt calmer knowing that Netaji was safely out of India. She had an opportunity to discuss the same subject with Pankaj. In the course of it, she tried to enquire why Pankaj had been asking about her to the Sens. He knew she had trapped him at his own words. He apparently dismissed the subject by saying: "...I am not looking for a wife. I am only committed to the dream of free India" (297). But Kamala did not entirely believe in his idealistic words.

In the mean time, the tides of war were engulfing many places. The Japanese attacked the American Navy base called Pearl Harbour, Hong Kong, Singapore, Malaya and Burma. In the broadcast from the propaganda ministry of Japan, Kamala recognised the deep, strong voice of Netaji. Japan's Indian prisoners of war had been freed to serve under Netaji's command in the Indian National Army. During the conversation she had with Lewes on the subject, Lewes tried to sound that Indians are part of the larger British System that gave them many rights. Then reaching out and putting his hand over Kamala's shoulder, he asked her if she could make a "radio hour" every evening. But she tore away from his touch by making certain excuses. This encounter had made her quite nervous about the prospect of spending more time with Lewes alone in the library. This was

the place too where he had almost attempted to kiss her. She cannot afford to lose the job which was the only way she could support her daughter. At the same time she could not stop the important spying work she was doing for Pankaj's organisation. "I had to keep everything the way that it was; but this would be as difficult as my own feelings for both men"(303).

The government had begun reassigning houses and larger flats to incoming refugees from other Asian Colonies. The bachelor ICS officers with good houses were asked to bunk with other men. The spare room in Lewes' house was allotted to Rev. John McRae, a Scottish clergyman who had escaped Burma and was recuperating at Presidency Hospital. Kamala knew that it would be unacceptable for her to dine at table with Lewes when he would arrive. Besides she was scared of stern religious men. A few weeks later, she saw a wizened old man in a black suit hobble to the front door with a bamboo cane. She took a quick glance at the old man's face: "Reverend McRae was not white. He might have been once, but his skin had been so darkened by years in Burma that he did not look like any type of European. In the end, only the brightness of his blue eyes and his strong Scots accent gave away his origin". (306). He was exceptionally courteous and thanked her for the hospitality. He had spent forty-two years in Burma working for the people. It was the Japanese army officers who forced him to leave the place. He told Kamala in the course of a conversation that "It is never an entire people who are cruel; it is merely individuals who exert their will on others."(306). The Reverend had offered her true friendship and new ways of looking at the world.

In the mean time the expression "Quit India" became a national slogan after Gandhiji had addressed a group of Congress supporters in Bombay. Gandhiji, his wife Kasturba, along with many Congress Party activists were arrested after the protesters screamed the slogan directly at the ruling class. Kamala wanted to join the protesters but Pankaj, in one of their covert meetings told her, "Kamala, you are too valuable to risk being arrested" (311) as she was carrying information from Lewes' desk. A week later, Lata Menon was arrested for gathering money to be used in anti-government protests. Pankaj signed on as her lawyer and in his initial court appearance, shouted furiously at the judge. The judge ordered him to be arrested for contempt of court. Consequently, Lata and Pankaj were incarcerated in the Fort William prison.

As Christmas approached, McRae went to deliver services at churches. For Christmas Eve, Lewes went to Saint Paul's Cathedral for the services and Kamala stayed at home reading Agatha Christie. That night there was the Japanese bombing attack and it was supposed the bomb fell on Chowringhee. Lewes, Kamala and the three servants took shelter along a windowless, narrow section of the building. Lewes had offered Kamala a space near the wall's edge, putting himself between servants and her. She was pressed against him in a decidedly improper closeness. As she tried to put down the two suitcases she was carrying, her lips brushed against him in a very personal manner. She could smell the Pall Mall cigarette that he smoked each evening, overlaid with gin-and-tonic. There was the scent of him: his core and desire was back inside her body though not in her head. The desire she had felt had also touched him for she was familiar with a man's physical signs. She realised that he did desire her for more than information. Suddenly, Lewes shifted out from behind her and taking his suitcases, he spoke breathlessly that he ought to leave for the Control Room. While she felt bereft at his shifting away, she was also thinking how amoral he was, spying to block the freedom movement.

The Japanese bombings of 1942 and 1943, created such a scare that many Calcuttans fled the city for their old family villages in the countryside. Choton, Manik's kitchen assistant and Faruk, Lewes's chauffeur defected. Sarjit Singh joined as the new driver and Jatin who was eager to learn cooking was made the kitchen assistant. With the household down one person, Lewes seemed all the more present. McRae was concerned about the serious shortage of rice that year. Each village in the countryside had a man who controlled the price and the prices were rising out of reach of many peasants. The landowners began to demand more rice from the poor because for the British, India was the only source of rice for all the soldiers in the Asiatic region, after the Japanese took over Burma. The shortage had turned into a gruesome calamity: "Bodies are rotting in the fields and ditches'. Reverend McRae's voice was sober as he narrated the story about his recent foray into East Bengal. 'When I asked my driver if there was a disease running through the place, he said, 'it is called hunger' " (320). The strong ones walked to the city hospital where they provided phan while the others fainted in the streets.

The narrator pathetically depicts the scene of the starved city: "I cast a look at them and went off along Gorachand Road, passing more lying in misery, and some obviously dead bodies covered with flies. A cart piled with bodies rolled past me and stopped next to one of these corpses. A pair of men came down and slid a cloth underneath the body to lift it up into the cart. They were as fast as if they were hauling sacks of grain. A rush of sorrow came up from my belly, choking me. The City of Palaces was turning into the City of the Dead". (321) These unfortunate situations made Kamala doubt if Kabita was also starving with her foster parents. Though they had known her address, she received no replies to the money and gifts that she sent regularly. She longed to hear a word of their health and well-being. She asked Lewes for a few days leave to visit Midnapore without revealing the real reason of her visit. On reaching the house of Abbas and Hafeeza, she was shocked to learn from a weary-looking young woman, the new occupants of the house, that it was four years since they had left the place. Though letters still arrive for them, she had sent them back to the post office. She told her further that

Abbas was dead after he was mortally wounded at the mill where he worked. Abbas had lost the driving job after some trouble with the school. His wife went to live with the relatives in the village. She was told by the neighbours that "She'd sold the hut and almost everything she owned for too little money, as she was deeply distracted over the loss of her husband. But she still had a daughter, called Zeenat, who was both fair and intelligent". She also learnt that she was not the first one who had come looking for her. She left the place too distraught. All the old feelings of losing my family in Jhlpur came back to her. She felt that she was no longer the confident, competent Kamala Mukherjee but poor broken Pom.

On reaching home, she found that Lewes had stayed up late waiting for her. She knew she would be unable to fabricate anything if she tried to describe her trip to Midnapore. So she just shook her head, went to her room and wept though she had learned long ago that a servant had no time to grieve. Nevertheless Lewes, who had learned to care for her, soon noticed that there was something quite wrong since the time she went on leave and asked her to speak. In her reply she hid her sorrows under the general woes of the time: "Throughout the city, scores of thousands are dying of famine... Rice is being loaded on ships to soldiers. And the Bengalis in the countryside who grow it can't take a handful home for themselves or their families" (327). With all the freedom she enjoyed with Lewes, she took him around the city where refugees had planted themselves. He had to admit finally, "It's a wretched vision". He decided to serve phan to anyone who came into his garden with the store of rice he had in the house. Rice kitchen was opened and with the assistance of McRae, it served thousands of meals. The store of rice was diminishing and they were worried if the feeding kitchen would end soon.

It was then that Weatherington strode into the house with a piece of official communication from the government. He complained about an Indian woman luring refugees into the white town. Kamala hoped he would not ruin the last days of the rice kitchen. Lewes was staring hard at his colleague "as if the polite English veneer was gone and something tougher had emerged" (333). Kamala realised that she despised Weatherington as much as the worst individuals she had known: "Miss Rachael, who'd told lies about me; Mummy, who sold me; and the Railway hospital nurses, who had almost killed Kabita with their kicks. I hated him..." (334). Yet, the communication that he brought was a piece of good news. It said that the Relief Control office would send a dozen maunds of rice per week for unspecified period of time. Obviously, Weatherington's gesture showed, he had a hundred objections to raise and he stormed out of the room. Lewes and McRae obtained their ration cards easily, but Kamala had to visit the ration office several times in order to get the cards for Shombhu, Jatin, Manik and herself. As Lewes had pledged, he gave up his car. His driver, Sarjit, was quickly hired by an American colonel who had come to town.

Kamala kept her busy schedule of running the household of Lewes and the feeding kitchen. Since she had forgotten to take back the books given for repairs from the Sens, Supriya made a visit with the books. She informed her that Sonali was getting married to Arvind Israni. Supriya had decided to follow Subhas Chandra Bose without informing either her parents or Sonali. Bose had taken charge of the Indian National Army in Singapore and was forming a women's regiment. Supriya had planned to travel by train to Assam and from there via Burma would reach the place. "The best thing is for me to run off and leave a letter behind explaining. I'll say that serving him is my Dharma; that is an idea Hindus understand" (341). Kamala who knew the risk involved in leaving home could not tell her not to go. Nevertheless she warned her: "Think carefully if you really want to do it. If you change your mind, it may be impossible to return" (342). She hoped she would return to India with INA and free everyone from British rule. She loved Kamala and could not leave without telling her. Her final departure was touchingly described by the author: "Supriya's eyes were wet. 'All I want dearest Kamala, is your embrace.' And we did, holding each other tightly enough to meld into one" (342).

The famine deaths were declining but Kamala was still busy feeding peasants. Lewes suggested that Kamala take a break in the weekend. Lewes promised to serve phan himself with McRae on hand to help. Kamala was pleased by his offer because she wanted to visit the Sens to find out whether they had news on Supriya's journey. On reaching there, she found the door to the Sen's building locked. Ali, the durwan, told her that they were attending the wedding ceremonies of Sonali. She wondered how they could have forgotten her. Turning back the way she had come, she thought it was yet another loss of people she cared about. Back home in the evening, Lewes was full of lovely stories about various people he had served. Phan serving had brought Lewes and Kamala very close to the point of being romantic: "Desire. Affection. Reassurance. all in the space of his holding her wrist" (348) At the end of it both were a little embarrassed. This was something both had fought against so hard and so long: "the fruition of every cliché and stereotype about British men and Indian women..." (349). Lewes left home without meeting Kamala, leaving a note that he was going to be away for a while on business. In the meanwhile, McRae was invited to Dacca to help with famine relief there and Kamala felt terribly alone.

The government's policies changed with the change in leadership. Lord Ruthford who authorised the kitchen was replaced by Mr. Casey. Casey ordered that the rice kitchens in the city be closed. Instead, the feeding camps were shifted to outside of Calcutta. This finally put an end to Kamala's phan kitchen. One afternoon while the phan serving was on, a long army lorry stopped right in front of the mansion block. The

peasants were forcefully taken away to be dumped possibly in some remote village spot. Though Kamala protested, she could do nothing about it as they had their orders. Casey maintained that the peasants were not Calcuttans and that they had created a massive instability. For Kamala the army lorry was a symbol: "... it was loaded with all those who had vanished out of my life: my beloved family; sweet, laughing Bidushi; and brave Supriya. And curled up in a basket was one I'd been stupid enough to give away: Kabita" (355). But this time she was not left alone. Lewes had come to the house in the middle of the night and he was there to assure her, "I left because I was confused... I will not leave you again" (356). It was a night when Simon Lewes finally conquered her heart. Lewes recalled how it had been in the past: "Twenty-one steps is the distance between my bedroom door across the drawing room and into the hall and up the stairs to your room. Several times over the last years, I have found myself standing upstairs. And then I counted how long I could bear to stand outside your closed door ... what I loved about you was your intelligence, your keen sense of organisation, your sensitivity to all who live in the world. Nothing else" (358). Kamala realised how blind she had been to the way how they had been with each other over the last five years. Her desire to be the perfect nationalist had kept her from understanding the great connection between them. Her old dreams of Pankaj were too much one-sided and immature. She never imagined that five years of her life there would culminate in this metamorphosis of making them lovers. Shombhu and Jatin came to know of this change in the morning.

After Simon went to his office, Kamala felt she could not spy on him anymore. Simon had changed so much as he began seeing the abject failings of his government. When she watched him ladling phan and speaking warmly with peasants, she sensed he had undergone a personal transformation. However she was not sans fear. She soon realised Simon's good name would be ruined. Besides, she could not allow herself to think of what would happen if her Indian friends found out: "Our love affair was impossible - but how much I wanted him! The war between my heart and head felt almost as violent as what was happening in the outside world" (363). It was the question of loyalties.

The same day she took a tram to North Calcutta to hunt for a fine first-edition of Michael Madhusudan-Dutt's poems to add to the collection. The Sen's house was just around the corner from the bookstalls. She thought it would be foolish to remain hurt about not receiving a wedding invitation. When she reached her house, to her surprise, the door was opened by Sonali. On seeing Kamala, Sonali welcomed her with a warm embrace. She could hear a cheerful masculine voice from the parlour and she knew it was Pankaj's. When she met him she apologised to him for all the trouble her letters caused him in prison. He smiled easily and began chatting about Sonali's wedding. Mashima did not look very pleased with Kamala for not letting the Sen's know about the secret departure of Supriya. That was the reason why they did not send her the invitation. At this point Pankaj admitted that it was he who told her the safe route to get out of India. Mrs Sen seemed to approve what he did: "If you told her the way to go, this meant you saved her life" (366). Pankaj could do no ill, it seemed but Kamala could. Kamala was not even invited for a cup of tea for Mrs. Sen said that her husband will be very angry to see her. When Kamala got up to go, Pankaj offered to walk with her to the tram.

On the way Pankaj quite business-like wanted some recent information concerning Lewes. She told him in the course of conversation that she was unable to report on him any longer as he was not hunting freedom fighters and he has been through such a change. Pankaj was almost shocked when Kamala told him quite bluntly that he has fallen in love with her. Kamala hinted at the callousness with which Pankaj responded to her feelings for him. Pankaj admitted that she was beautiful and intelligent. Yet he regretted that she had no known relatives in the city or anywhere else. Then he said, "...when I marry, my bride must be approved by my mother" (369). She was quite irritated by his words and wanted to pay him back for all the callousness he has shown all through the past ten years. Then feigning warmth, she said, "Pankaj-da, I have an idea. I might know just who you should marry! Your mother might approve... India... She's not available yet, but any day now her parents will set her free" (369). She gave him a long look and said, "This will be our last meeting. Goodbye, old friend" (370).

While she was in the tram getting back home she thought how silly of her to have admired a man too weak to make a choice for himself. Now from the vantage point of her turning point in life, she was finally able to make a very objective analysis of her past relationship with Pankaj: "Pankaj had never been in love with me, nor I with him. Instead, we'd been a relationship of words - written or spoken, but naught else. Love, on the other hand, was a language that operated without words. No dictionary could explain it any better than the heart" (370).

On reaching home, she noticed it was all too quite. Simon had given everyone a leave for he desired some intimate moments with Kamala. He wanted to take Kamala to one of his favourite Chinese restaurants. He did not want this relationship to be like those liaisons between English men and Indian women. He did heave his heart into his mouth when he said: "You are the most incredible woman I've ever known, in any country. But you must tell me the truth. I don't want to trap you if marriage is something you don't want. Perhaps you truly abhor my English soul" (374). Right from her childhood days, she had taken the decision to follow the jungle path instead of the main road and it had saved her life. Kamala knew very well that accepting Simon's proposal would be as twisted as all her other life passages, leading to an outcome she could not assume would be

permanent, or even happy. Yet she took a blind leap to assert how much she wanted him: "No, I don't abhor your soul, because souls don't have caste, colour or creed. I want to marry you. I love you so very much. So much that it ... Hurts" (375).

Now that Kamala had given her word, it was the question who would conduct the marriage ceremony. Kamala suggested they marry in a court, but Simon was against it. The temples were out of the question for the likes of them. The official church would demand documentation concerning Kamala's conversion, her parentage and all sorts of nonsense. Finally they decided to ask Reverend McRae though Simon did not belong to Church of Scotland. When Simon brought the subject up over dinner the Reverend laughingly accepted. He did not care a whit what their faiths were. Without even consulting a Church calendar, he offered them a date a few days hence. So they were at Saint Andrew's Kirk at midday on 1 December before Reverend McRae along with ten others in attendance to solemnly declare their marriage vows. In less than an hour Kamala's transformation was completed from the fictional Kamala Mukherjee into the genuine Mrs. Simon Alston Lewes. The Reverend said, "In these difficult times... the greatest hope for the world is the bonding of people who are unafraid to love each other, regardless of culture, creed or origin..." (378).

After a week's honeymoon in Bombay they got back to Calcutta. They were slowly meeting people who were tolerant of mixed unions in restaurants and clubs. On the surface, Mrs. Simon Lewes was charming, the opposite of the stereotyped shy Indian maiden. Though she was happy with her husband, everything else was unsettled. Simon hoped for a child. She could not tell him that she had lost her fertility in a terrible childbirth and that she would never want another child. Simon would be devastated when he would learn that she could not conceive. The pain of giving up Kabita still weighed heavily on her. She yearned to know what had become of Hafeeza and Kabita. In the months that followed the marriage, she managed the household as always and looked for other things to do, like volunteering for McRae's orphanage, speaking Bengali with the children and teaching them letters.

On 6 August, the Americans dropped their secret atomic bombs on Hiroshima, and three days later, Nagasaki. The war ended with this mass murder of millions. Emperor Hirohito ordered his government to surrender. A couple of days later, Netaji bade goodbye to his Indian National Army and escaped to Saigon aboard a Japanese military airplane bound for Tokyo. The plane stopped overnight in Taiwan to refuel and add more passengers. But this load of people and luggage was too much. As the plane struggled to rise, it crashed and the plane was caught up in the fireball. Netaji died from burns in hospital, according to surviving INA officer who had been his companion for the fight. There were other rumours on Netaji that he escaped to another Asian country and was gathering strength to come back to India. Though Gandhiji and Nehru never sanctioned physical aggression, during the war and after, there were a number of violent encounters between Indians and Europeans. McRae was knocked down near the orphanage where he volunteered to work. Violence had turned into retaliation against any European. Nehru, Sarat Bose along with some INA veterans were coming to speak at Deshapriya park the following week. Kamala decided to go in spite of Simon's warning of possible unrest in the city.

Kamala's decision to attend the meeting at the park was amply rewarded when she heard it announced that one of the INA veterans speaking would be a Bengali female, Captain Supriya Sen. Kamala was elated that her friend was back and hoped her friends would forgive her. When Supriya finally took the stage, dressed hat to trousers in her old INA uniform, the crowd went wild. After her speech, ironically enough, Pankaj escorted her offstage. He did not seem as attractive as she recalled and his speech was not as compelling as Supriya's. Then, all of a sudden, from the crush, Sonali and her husband Arvind came to meet her. Sonali invited her to the party at her parents' house. She told her that her parents had entirely changed their opinion on Supriya's disappearance. Mr. Sen was so proud of Supriya that he told everyone that he sent her off with his blessings. Kamala also came to know through her that Lewes had sent a very long letter to the Viceroy and the government about the famine. This letter was published in the Manchester Guardian. This letter was quoted at a Parliament hearing in which some Labour politicians argued that Britain had not governed India effectively. Kamala was touched that Lewes had never boasted to her about the letter. She thought to herself: "May be my husband was like a jasmine flower: tightly closed all day, but blossoming at night" (388) A visit to Sen's house had settled all that was quite unpleasant in the previous visit.

There was something very complicated awaiting her as she reached home. Rose Barker with Kabita and Hari had entered the compound of Middleton Mansions a few minutes before Kamala. On seeing Kamala, they advanced towards her and Kamala quickly identified them. Fortunately for Kamala, Simon and McRae were still out at the film and, Shomu, Jatin and Malik had taken a day off. Kabita looked about nine. Her hair had been rolled into big curls. Heavy mascara and kohl rimmed her lotus-shaped, unusually green brown eyes. She was regarding her with such curiosity, the way the old Pom used to gaze at Bidushi's elegant mother. She wanted to cry out, "My lost child. My little girl. My love" (392). It was really embarrassing to see Rose Barker as she was a troublingly suppressed memory in Kamala's mind. Feigning enthusiasm, Kamala suggested for a treat at Flury & Trinca's.

At the hotel, Rose Barker briefed her how she managed to own Kabita. After Pam ran away from Kharagpur, Rose Barker had asked Chief Howard to interview the Rose Villa girls on any possible thing they might remember about her. They had gone to the school at Midnapore and learned about the school driver Abbas who had been like an uncle to Pam. He had lost job on suspicion of aiding and abetting. When Rose Barker reached the house of the driver, they found only the driver's wife Hafeeza with Zeenat. Abbas had already died at his next job. Since the mother and the child were very poor Rose Barker used to gift them with some money each year. It may not have seemed obvious to Hafeeza that Kamala was her birth mother. With the money coming from two donors, she must have thought Rose Barker to be more generous. So Hafeeza sent a word to her when she decided to move to her brother-in-law's home. Unfortunately Hafeeza soon died from dysentery.

When Rose Barker offered to house and to school her, her uncle was glad to send her to Rose Villa. Kabita had been there at the Rose villa for two years under the care of Lucky. Kabita was being trained to join the Roses, just as Rose Barker always wanted: "Hazel is our little bud waiting to blossom. I wanted you to see her while she is still innocent. She will be too busy to travel later" (395). Lucky had become the business partner of Rose villa and she was learning the tricks of the trade. In the mean time, Rose Barker had managed to get a visa permitting emigration to Britain and she hoped to leave soon. At this point she was desperate to find money for the same. Rose Barker's objective of her visit was being made too plain to Kamala. She had come to make a real bargain through a game of blackmail. Finally Kamala was told she could keep her daughter provided she paid her seven hundred and fifty rupees. Kamala agreed to the terms because two "precious things in my life was my new husband and my long-lost daughter" (398).

Getting back home, she was in a fix as to how she would ask Simon for the money. Simon did not pay her anymore after she got married. So she hooked up a story of her cousin's daughter who was forced out of school because they did not have money for schooling. It was hardly convincing to Simon. He was wondering why they need to pay the relatives who had been cruel to Kamala. So when Simon left for Jamshedpur the next morning, she went to the market and sold her favourite moonstone necklace and the wedding ring and got acceptable-looking replicas to replace things. She gathered the money required to get Kabita out of the clutch of Rose Barker. But she will have a long way to go before Kabita would accept her as her mother.

Kamala took Kabita to the Sens and with their aid managed to secure admission to St. Joseph's School in Chandernagore. She received a fifty-rupee scholarship and so the Kamala just needed to spend twenty-five rupees. This meant Kamala could afford tuition and the uniforms and other supplies she needed. She took her to many places like European restaurants, the Metro Cinema and so on so that Kabita was relaxed. Yet, to her Kamala was just the mysterious auntie who would listen to every tale she told, but who would offer no stories of her own.

At home, Kamala maintained her normal, pleasant demeanour. She told Simon that she would be travelling with a group of volunteers working on an education programme for orphans. Simon offered some financial contribution which she gladly accepted. Kamala spent a day with Kabita before putting her at the boarding school. She registered her as Hazel Smith because that was the name on the birth certificate. Kamala promised to visit her as much as she could and left. Back home as the days passed, she mourned Kabita's absence. Kamala began visiting her each Friday afternoon. Kabita used to chatter about her new friends, drama class and chorus. Kamala used to bring a tiffin box packed with a vegetable curry, dal, chapatti and a sweet that she had made with her own hands.

It was almost a year of marriage and Simon was concerned that Kamala had not conceived. He advised her to visit the French Gynaecologist. However, she would not go because any examination would reveal that she had given birth before and was too damaged to succeed again. Simon was keen for a child. He even spoke to her about adopting one of the unwanted babies. Yet Kamala could not fathom the idea of any child other than Kabita. She was full of resentment of having to live separate from Kabita: "I may have been barren, but something was growing inside me like a small, hard seed. It was resentment. I felt that Simon had separated Kabita from me; although I knew the lies I'd told had led to his decision" (413).

Kabita used to wait for Kamala every Friday afternoon and they used to have a fine time together. Unfortunately, there was a break to this routine as the regular train was cancelled owing to some political protesters. When she made it the Friday following with dishes of Puja and Christmas, she was surprised by Kabita's refusal to everything. Kabita told her bluntly, "We shouldn't be apart. Why did you buy me if you don't want to be with me?" (413) Kamala then began to unfold the story of her life very briefly, at the end of which she revealed that she was her daughter. Kamala's words were hardly convincing for though she was just eight years old she could read her like a book. She said, "No, you're lying. You have told too many lies. I don't want you to be my mother" (415). She wept all the way home on the train.

When she reached home she realised that she had forgotten about the first wedding anniversary. Simon had been waiting for her the whole day. He had bought a diary from Sen Bookbindery and Publishing and handing over it to her, he said, "I thought an empty book to write in is what you need... There's so much that you hold within: it's my hope that this diary may help you find your voice" (416). Kamala was quite overwhelmed and could not tell him that she was afraid to put down a single honest word in the diary without crying. She received it with an apology for not having his gift ready. She knew that the gift that Simon longed for was the gift of a newborn baby.

She decided to go regularly to Chandernagore in the hope that Kabita would soften. In the meantime Weatherinton's spy operation had garnered the information that Kamala was seen boarding a train to Chandernagore, a French territory outside the reach of the government with a tiffin box probably carrying some secret information. Simon associated this with his earlier finding that she carried key to his second desk to spy on his papers. Simon was terribly upset. He said, "I don't care about India anymore, except to get away from it - and from you" (421). She pleaded not to let Wilber Weatherington kill their marriage and that she visited that town for a reason entirely unrelated to politics. Nevertheless, Simon was hardly convinced.

Simon moved into the second bedroom, the one where he had once hoped his offspring would sleep. He was off at his clubs again, morning and night. He did not want to be near Kamala at any time of the day. What hurt Kamala all the more was that by losing his caring presence, she realised how terribly she had loved him. She was lingering in Middleton not because she had no choice; she hoped to win him back. She had lost hope for Kabita who had never loved her. When Reverend McRae returned from his travels, she told him that Simon's feelings were not the same as when they had married. She also confided that she had noticed a sea ticket order left in the library - one way passage in Simon's name. At the brief conversation, he said, "... I have just one thing to say. If you are going to be on your own, you must prepare to work. It's a good antidote to sorrow as well" (423).

Using references from her volunteer work during the famine, she was hired as a Health Assistant by the Calcutta Red Cross. She had a modest salary of fifty rupees a month. However she had a full time position travelling daily with a doctor or nurse to slums throughout the city. Soon other people's problems took precedence over her own. She worked five long days a week. She did not try to see Kabita in the weekend fearing the risk of a possible confrontation at the school by Weatherington. In the evening she returned home to wash and eat dinner with the Reverend, if he was free. Simon stayed out until late, and upon returning, always sat on the veranda with a drink and his cigarettes. They no longer shared anything together. When McRae went on a relief trip to Burma, she felt very lonely at home. Simon received his Buick back from the army. He hired a new driver, Ahmed, by himself, although Kamala had managed all the staff hiring in the past.

The planning for Independence was in full swing, with a projected handover early in 1947. The Direct Action Day was a hot topic of the time. There was a lot of contention about the role of Muslim League in the civil unrest. It was speculated that Direct Action Day would certainly mean violence. Rumours about what might happen spread through the public. Many were rushing to metal smiths to order long knives. On the afternoon of 15 August, a line of military lorries carrying soldiers left town. Kamala sat inside the Red Cross van next to Dr. Haq, one of her favourite doctors in the organisation. The government was sending the soldiers away for their own protection. Dr. Haq, who lived through the Hindu-Muslim riots in 1919 and 1925, knew how terrible they were. An army is supposed to keep the people safe. However, Haq's experience had taught him something different: "That is a kind of story we've been told all our lives, but this is clearly the government wanting to keep out of an Indian matter" (426).

The following day was the Direct Action holiday. Simon walked to Lord Sinha Lane. He told Ahmed that he did not need his services that day. Kamala stayed at home waiting for the Red Cross van to pick her up. Ahmed sought Kamala's permission to leave at noon taking Lewes's car to hear the minister Suhrawardy speak. He was permitted to go provided he returned by five. Ahmed did not return even by six. Jatin came running to the library dripping sweat and breathing hard. He reported that Muslim thugs had come into the city from the countryside to destroy Hindu property and life and they were encouraging others in Calcutta to join them. Since Simon did not have the car, Kamala imagined Simon being accosted on the street. The telephone was dead possibly because the operators were staying out. All India Radio was working and the news broadcasts reported riots and looting in Bow Bazar and Sealdah station. While she was thinking about all these, Simon quite exhausted stepped into the room. She exclaimed, "Thank God you're home!" before recalling that they were not speaking for a long time. Simon told her quietly when the troops were out patrolling after the violence at night, they did see corpses in many places. The Calcutta police though headed by the British could do little as the constables were largely Indians consisting of Hindus and Muslims. Simon left after a quick breakfast warning them not to leave the premises.

While she paced up and down in the library, the radio announcer described burning and looting in College Street. She thought of the Sen's home which was in a row of mostly Muslim homes. Sonali was away living with her in-laws, but Mashima, Masho, Supriya and Nishan were probably home. Kamala's fears turned

into dread feeling that they might not survive. Then when she peered down the stairway, she found a vehicle stop before the gate. She thought Ahmed was back with the Buick. She soon recognised Ishan, the young driver from the Red Cross coming in a dreadful state, with a wet face with smudges of dirt and a wild look in his eyes. He informed her sorrowfully that the thugs ran a knife through Dr Haq. He was a dedicated doctor who chose to work for the Red Cross instead of having a private practice. He had known the danger of Direct Action Day, but had gone out because he felt an obligation to save life.

She wanted to let the Sens know it is safe being in White town. She asked Ishan to drive her to the Control Room, where they can know the safest streets to travel. She wanted to get to the College Street and give first aid to those who needed it. Ishan was utterly distraught and shuddered like a leaf in the monsoon wind. So she decided to take the vehicle herself to bring back the Sens to the White town until the turmoil was over. Not to go to College Street would mean leaving the Sens to die. She remembered what Simon had said about Christians not being at risk. So she put on a freshly starched sari bearing the Red Cross patch and washed her face, making sure that kumkum mark on the forehead disappeared. She also hung around her neck the silver crucifix necklace which was a gift from the orphanage staff. Then leaving a note to Simon that she was leaving to bring the Sens home, she stealthily slipped down the stairs and out into the drive way to start the Red Cross van.

Her lone drive made her witness terrible sights. Before a few turns to get right into Chowringhee, she saw a street filled with Muslims and Hindus battling each other with knives and tire irons and Sticks. At the sight of Red Cross van, a shouting erupted among them to appropriate the van. If she stopped the van, she would be lost. So in real terror, she stepped hard on the gas and shot forward. The rest was a real nightmare: "There was nowhere clear to pass, so I drove straight towards the mob, rather than let them surround me... The strategy worked; the men scattered except for a vicious-looking fellow who ran straight towards the driver's side door. I turned sharply, and the impact of the car pushing him made him fly in the air and across the bonnet. Then he fell to the side as I roared down the next street, burned out already and now empty" (437). Kamala was shaking as she could not forget the man's shocked eyes as he faced her through the windshield. Wherever she looked she saw the deceased. Finally when she entered the College Street, she found the bookstalls in flames. "All the stories and histories and poems inside their wooden walls were gone; the words carefully set down for posterity meant nothing against mass violence" (438). She parked in front of Khan Typewriters, which was neither looted nor burned. The metal grille was locked across the Sen's front door and window. This must have protected them from the fate suffered by their Hindu neighbours. She walked around to the small window where she had once called for admittance and saw a wooden board was nailed over it. So she decided to reach the Sen's roof through Datta Publishing. Wary that looters might still be inside, she tiptoed into the building. When she reached the first floor, she saw the sight of two eviscerated bodies of men sprawled across the floor. She had to step on their bodies to continue up. On reaching the roof she broke open the lock of the trap door to Sen's house. The trap door fell open but in the next instant, she faced the long slim barrel of a rifle. Supriya shouted, "Don't move" and clicked the trigger into position. When she recognised it was Kamala, the gun was appropriately lowered. Finding the Sens safe, she told them she could take them to safety of her home. Mrs. Sen had asked the Nazis to hide them but they would not. All the past years of friendship mattered little. Everyone was trying to save one's own skin.

While they were exchanging their views, Supriya noticed that a group of ten men had surrounded the van and wasting no time set fire to it. Kamala cried leaning on Supriya's shoulder that she was thoughtless to leave the van in front of the house. Supriya suggested that they should shift to the Duttas immediately. Since the killing and looting is complete there, nobody would think of burning the place again. They began carrying the most important family documents and the treasured volumes of the library to the roof. While they were thus engaged, the men came back from the street down with torches led by Ali their durwan who must have told them that the Sens were hiding inside. The men bashed through the front door's grille. When Kamala and the Sens reached the roof top, they decided to lie flat on the roof's centre behind the washing line. While Supriya fiddled with her rifle, she whispered to Kamala that Pankaj before leaving for INA trials had asked her to marry him. A shiver ran through Kamala at her words. She thought how ironic it was that a man who had almost married Bidushi had decided on Supriya. Supriya knows that he wants her for the wrong reason - the political advantage. He plans to run for Parliament after Independence. Yet, she felt there was no other man in Calcutta like him.

Then Supriya decided to let the crowd know what awaited them for their mad rush. Sliding forward like a lizard towards the roof's edge, she sighted the long rifle and pulled the trigger. Then she shot again at the retreating group. They decided to go on to the roof of the Dutta's. There was about three feet gap between the roofs. Supriya, Nishan and Kamala leaped with volumes and folios on to the roof of the other building. However Mrs and Mr. Sen were on the other side unable to leap forward teetering at the divide between the buildings. Suddenly there was a roar of motors below. An army lorry had arrived. The firemen jumped out, aiming the hose at the Sen's doorway, while others doused the burning Red Cross van with buckets of water. Kamala

identified Simon who had come looking for Kamala. Simon was dejectedly standing up and turning away. He wiped his hands across his eyes thinking probably that Kamala was killed. They shouted at the top of their voices and Simon finally looked their way. They all descended rapidly after a fireman gave approval.

Kamala felt such a spring in her step that it was like flying. However, when she emerged in the street, her knees buckled. Simon picked her up and pressed his wet face against her face. "He held me as if my past had never happened; as if he loved me like a newly wedded husband" (447). Simon put his warm, dry jacket around her shoulders. He was thankful for the note she left. It was read by Shombu who came straight to the Control Room to inform him. Simon had even made arrangements for her friends' stay in the house. She was overwhelmed by tears of gratitude and love.

The slaughter of people did end that day but got prolonged as the week of Long Knives with sporadic killings and burnings. However, they remained safely nestled in Middleton Mansions. They heard about Chhatri Sangha girls who had lost family members. Ruksana's family had survived because they had been hidden by Hindu friends. "For every story of murder, it seemed there was a story somewhere else about good people who had hidden friends and neighbours within their homes" (450). There were also some canny individuals like Pankaj's Mother. She dressed herself like an old Muslim sweeper lady and sent away rioters with a few glittering pieces which she told them were the Bandopadhyay family's greatest treasures. Kamala was certain that Supriya would get on with Pankaj's mother as she had the same cleverness. Since there were many people in their flat, her experience of reunion with Simon was much muted. However, they made swift, quiet love with more tenderness than ever.

When the killings ended, the Sens decided to move their residence to Salt Lake for Mr. Sen said, "Not one of the neighbours we knew for more than thirty years helped us when we needed it. With friends like that who would stay" (451) at the College Street. Supriya planned to stay with them until her December wedding. After the Sens left for their new home, Kamala looked forward to having time alone with Simon. Everything had quite changed for both Kamala and Simon. Even the teak chair she sat in was felt to be firm under her back, as strong as Simon's arm around her at night. Simon was home a little later every evening, but happier. He had been transferred from Lord Sinha Lane to Government House, where he had become the Bengal governor's confidential assistant for the transfer of power. Simon's role in securing the army's return on a night when Calcutta's government was paralysed had been appreciated. He was no longer under the influence of Weatherington.

Simon brought her a letter, the one she had eagerly been waiting for so many years: a letter from Kabita. She had not received any letters from her earlier. Kabita apologised for what she said the last time they met. The ending of the letter, "Your loving daughter, Kabita Zeenat Hazel Smith" (453) gave Kamala the clue that her daughter understood who she was and was not ashamed to hide it. Kamala considered this more of a gift than anything she had ever received. She was so proud of Kabita, so wracked with love for her, that she would no longer hide her away. She gave the letter to Simon to read. Though initially a little shocked to know she was a mother at the age of eighteen, he accepted the fact saying, "We've wanted a child, and it seems we've had one all along" (453). Simon assured her that nothing will cause him to leave her. With tears in her eyes she said, "I've feared telling you because the story is filled with so many sad parts and is quite long". Simon took her hands in his and said, "Oh, long stories are my favourites. Especially when I know the ending will come out happily" (454).

Simon decided to formally adopt Kabita as his legal daughter through Calcutta High Court. When Kamala made a phone call to her, Kabita asked if they would come on the Friday following to take her to stay with them for a weekend in Calcutta. Simon, who was listening intently, gave Kamala a thumbs up. Kamala had told her life story over the course of three nights. At the end of it Simon said that while many parts of her story broke his heart, all he felt was gratitude that she had come to his life and stayed. When they reached the school, Kamala spotted Kabita in a cluster of energetic young Indian and European girls who were batting for the puck on the grass with field hockey sticks. Kabita did not see them but her merry laugh carried. An English girl looking over Kabita's shoulder at them told her that her parents had come. Everyone at school knows Kabita as an Anglo-Indian. Simon was white and Kamala was Indian; the three of them looked as if they belonged together.

As Kabita loped towards them her eyes moved from Kamala to Simon. She put her arms about her mother and Kamala hugged her. She asked her what she should call Simon. Simon immediately said, "You choose my name. I can never replace Hafeeza and Abbas, but I will treat you like my own" (457). She pulled away from her a few inches and looked at them with her beautiful, wary eyes. Kamala, who knew what went on in those eyes, depicted it painfully: "In her gaze, I saw all the people who'd died or vanished from her world. Why would she believe that this home we wanted to give her could be a permanent one where she'd be happy?" (457) However, the fact was that everything was awaiting her at their place which she could call home finally.

Kamala planned to serve the independence dinner by candlelight in the dining room. Simon played field hockey with Kabita and Pallavi, her new friend from Loreto house. They could listen on the wireless to

Nehru addressing the Indian Constituent Assembly, "A moment comes, which comes rarely in history, when we step out of the old to the new, when an age ends, and when the soul of a nation, long suppressed, finds utterance" (459). While the political outcome Kamala had always longed for had come, it also meant the end of Simon's livelihood. Simon had packed up his office two weeks earlier. They talked about taking an administrative job with the British Civil Service in London, like so many of his colleagues or stay put in Calcutta, selling books out of the library, as needed, to stay afloat. Simon considered applying for a position as a Lecturer on India's politics and modern history, at the University of Toronto in Canada. They decided on the latter and as always, a wave had come to sweep away the life she had known. She would have preferred to linger in the new free India. Nevertheless, she was sure she could still witness India's growth from wherever she moved, and feel proud. Then, running her hand along the edge of Simon's jaw, Kamala said, "My heart is healed... And you know that India will always be inside it, along with you and Kabita" (463). Simon kissed her hand. They looked at each other for a long moment, full of everything that had happened. They could hear Kabita's high-pitched, merry laugh at the freedom celebration. Nothing more was required to be spoken. They linked their hands as they did their hearts and headed towards the celebration.

V. Narrative Strategy

Structurally *The City of Palaces* follows a steeply linear narrative. Events are strictly sequential, neatly compartmentalised, nothing creeping up on the other or dovetailing in. The first person narrative provides an immediacy and closeness to the reader. The narrative is brisk and the pace barely pauses over the floods that swallow a village, independence struggle or a botched up abortion. Because the author was writing in the voice of a person from another era, who speaks different languages from her, it was very important to slide into her skin. When writing first person, one of the challenges is not to use one's own modern voice. The author was familiar with a lot of classic Indian English and many British novels from the early 20th century. Hence the storytelling of that time really played into Pom's voice.

One of the unique things that readers come across in the novel is that the author has religiously incorporated epigraphs before beginning every chapter. These epigraphs were an attempt to bring the reader closer to Kamala — what she read and how she felt. These are not crucial to understanding the novel but they are a way of reading along with Kamala. One can zip past them or dwell on their connection to the emotions or action within the chapter. Perhaps a reader might be intrigued enough by the quotation to seek out the entire original source. While a lot of these epigraphs include meanings of words from the dictionary and lines from Tagore's works, one of the epigraphs which deserve a mention is the one that is present before the novel begins. Fragment of a letter found by the Arjun Cleaning Agency was created by the author to give an immediate indication of forthcoming suspense and also hint that the little girl whose voice narrates the first chapter, will grow into a woman of some controversy. The author is a great admirer of Rabindranath Tagore's writing. She says, "I have included some of his most memorable quotes as epigraphs for my chapters, setting the right mood for the reader" (Deccan Chronicle 8 January 2015)

The plot moves sequentially from the little Pom growing up as the elder sister to the twins, Rumi and Jhumi, under the care of Baba and Ma and her grandparents, Dadu and Thakurma in the pastoral setting of Johlpur. The flood throws a blot on her world of innocence and its songs, leading her to mature through the songs of experience of the hard times at Lockwood School, Rose Villa and to certain extent the Middleton Mansions, until she is a twenty-seven year old lady to establish a relationship of true love. Yet, the novel retains the simplicity of Pom's voice, irrespective of her many avatars as Sarah, Pamela or Kamala to the very end. Accordingly, Sujata's style is simple, elegant and utterly gripping. The narrative is clean without meandering all over the place. The sensuousness required in some parts has been portrayed so tastefully. For instance, we may mark Sujata's excellence in the art of padding: "All these exciting, glamorous ideas whirled through me as Bonnie showed off her very own bathroom, which had a tub set into a tiled floor and water that flowed right into it from a silver spout. The bath and sink water was heated by turning on a geyser mounted high on the wall. Bonnie showed me how to work them and also explained the correct seating for the white porcelain privy similar to ones I'd seen in the students' lavatory at Lockwood School" (105). There are also evocative descriptions of the clothes, food, customs etc, but nowhere does it obstruct the smooth narrative.

The past is retrieved only to facilitate a suitable impact on the future. The years of servitude at Lockwood school, though it had taken much of her sweat and blood, had taught her to appropriate a language and culture, which was exclusively meant for the elite and the English. The compromises she had to make with her life at Rose Villa, gave her a gift of a child for whom she would live for ever after. For fulfilment of her dreams of Pankaj, she would spy on the man who loved her passionately. However, when she was convinced about the truth of that love, Pankaj was no match to Simon Lewes. She was afraid to tell who she was to any one fearing they would not accept her as she was. However, when Simon knew who she was, he embraced her past and adopted Kabita as his own.

The divides are clear in the novel: English supremacy as evidenced in the English education, administration, the brute force of the British army; Indian nationalism evinced in the characters of Pankaj, S.C. Bose, Nehru, Gandhi, Supriya and others like them; Hindu versus Muslim conflicts represented in the Direct Action Day in Calcutta and the neutral Christians who played safe during these turbulent times. These forces play a predominant role in the final section of the novel. Thus compartmentalised, togetherness comes only to those straddling the middle: in an Anglo-Indian narrative of dualism, shades of Massey's own comfort zone of mixed parentage do come in. This is represented in the family union of Simon Lewes, Kamala and Kabita.

All the characters fall into either good or bad, and nothing in between- Pom and her family, Bidushi, Abbas, Hafeeza, Claire Richmond, Simon Lewes, Pankaj, Supriya and the Sens are characters that exhibit natures that are inclined to do good and risk their own life to achieve it. On the other hand, Bidushi's aunt, the gentleman of Diga, Jamison, Chief Howard, Weatherinton, Rachael, Rose Barker, the girls and customers of Rose Villa show malevolent and malicious natures. Kamala with her strength of mind and character makes the reader fall in love with her from her days at the Lockwood School. Choices are explained with a simplicity that will not allow room for ambiguities. Hence, while Pankaj might be the hero of the first part of our heroine's life, it is Simon Lewes, the dashing British ICS Officer who like a true Knight in shining armour, saves the damsel in distress. The love story between Kamala and Simon was therefore nothing short of a treat. Massey might have given more time to developing his character, because he remains absent for a major part of the novel.

Pom's journey is intensely emotional, but the author manages to keep a tight hold on the story without letting it slide into sheer sentimentality. From the very first chapter the author throws the reader neck-deep into the turbulent life of her protagonist- a feisty woman whose love for English books makes her ever so much attractive as a character. Adapting the form of the Bildungsroman, Massey takes us through her heroine's journey as she changes from Pom to Sarah to Pamela till finally settling on Kamala, each transformation brought about by fate that in turn brings about her rebirth - a technique reminiscent of Caryl Phillips's "Cambridge" (1993) where the novelist adopts two eerily convincing narrative voices and juxtaposes their stories to devastating effect in this mesmerizing portrait of slavery and where the hero too undergoes a similar change of names throughout his life.

Thus Massey has a gripping story to tell and though she falters a bit in the presentation at the beginning, the plot soon picks up speed as the novel develops and by the time Kamala arrives in Calcutta, the reader would be so engrossed in his/her pre-independence world that it seemed more real than reality. This reality in turn seemed to be fading far away into a more abstract space. Massey fits in ample twists and turns so that nowhere would the reader find the story taking a predictable turn. In fact, this is precisely how she keeps the story real and believable as she portrays the unfairness of life. If she finally gives her protagonist a fairy tale Jane Austen kind of ending, it is because she did not want to create another Tess of the D'Urbervilles. Simon Lewes mouths the author's own preference when he tells Kamala, "...long stories are my favourites. Especially when I know the ending will come out happily" (454).

VI. Characterisation

Massey's characterization is quite strong and striking. The characters are easily delineated, but deft storytelling prevents them from being predictable. There are many characters who accompany Pom, the heroine on her journey. Some leave her behind and from others she herself escapes. Bidushi, Ms Rachel, Abbas chacha, Pankaj, Lucky, and Simon Lewes are some of the characters who add to the richness of the story.

6.1. Pom

Massey has created a marvellous multi-named, warm-blooded heroine who is strong willed and loving; smart and cunning; charming and intelligent; naive yet worldly. The author masterfully weaves her heroine's life with India's struggle and fights for freedom and gives the reader an elegant piece of Indian history wrapped beautifully in Pom's story. Pom relates her journey from child to revolutionary and lover eloquently and at times painstakingly, artistically evoking emotions of tragedy, joy, love and triumph. She had donned so many names and identities: Pom, Sarah, Pamela, Camilla, Kamala and finally, Mrs. Simon Alston Lewes. Pom emerges at each stage and the plot dwells on the how of it all.

Pom was portrayed at various stages of her life: as an innocent girl, who was smart and brave even at the age of seven to run from the clutches of an evil man, who sweet-talked her into working as a dancer in the Jagannath Temple in Puri, Orissa; a brave girl fighting with Cholera and flood; an ambitious woman looking for a job in the posh and sophisticated offices of Calcutta; a protective mother, who fought like a warrior to save her daughter from prostitution and a woman, brilliant and competent even in love. In each stage of life Pom faces intense loss but she comes out fighting, getting stronger and more empowered each time. She reinvents herself after each trauma, becoming Sara first, then Pamela and eventually Kamala Mukherjee. It is in her final avatar as Kamala that she discovers love, patriotism and self-worth. She is able to feel comfortable in her skin finally,

to feel that she is a person who has the right to wish, dream and even fail. At this stage she becomes readers' favourite kind of heroine who is brave, strong, feisty and unapologetic.

All in all, Pom or Kamala, represent the face of modern women of our country who fights and thrives hard to make a name. Maybe she is emotionally weak, but she is a one true great fighter. The candidness with which the author presents the tale of Pom is both heartening as well as heart-wrenching at the same time. There is something about the author that makes her description of Pom poignant and leaves a lasting impact on the minds of the reader.

She was rechristened as the orphaned Sarah and becomes a maidservant in a British boarding school where she discovers her gift for languages. Amidst the drudgery of her duties, she finds unexpected friendship with her childhood 'princess' Bidushi and experiences the stirrings of first love when she wrote passionate love letters on behalf of her friend. However, her fate has stored torture and pain for her, ending up in a false accusation of thievery and she is forced into hiding. Her true devotion to her dear friend was read as 'dishonesty' and she had to flee. Had she stayed in Lockwood, her innocence would have been established. Though she would have remained a servant, she would have been spared of the tragedies she had to undergo at Kharagpur.

Alone and desperate, she is recruited into a brothel called Rose Villa for the English officers in Kharagpur, where her name gets changed to "Pam.Pamela.Pammy" (106) and where she is forced to sell her once the costliest virginity. She hopes this secretive, decadent world will shield her from the demons of her past. This was the most torturous and painful period of her life, yet, this is the town, where, she became a woman, where she became mother for the first and the last time and which changed the course of her life drastically. She had to flee again to prevent her daughter from becoming a prostitute.

Fate intervenes, and the heroine is on the run again—to Calcutta, "the city of palaces", where resurrecting herself as Camilla Smith, a job-seeking clerk in Calcutta to build her own life afresh in the metropolis. Haunted by a forbidden love, she is caught between the raging independence movement and the British colonial society she finds herself inhabiting. Here, she becomes part of the rising tide of Indian nationalism. The time when she reached Calcutta, was quite vulnerable. Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose has already formed his army; Mahatma Gandhi has already started his movement to liberate India from the clutches of the British. Eventually, she renames herself Kamala Mukherjee and spends the rest of her life as a high society Bengali companion to an Englishman, secretly favouring the Indian freedom struggle. Had things not have happened the way it did, she would never have been in Calcutta talking to Pankaj on the same footing. Ever after Bidushi's death, she was led by a lingering voice in her mind: "Pankaj. Find him for both of us" (205). When she initially worked with Lewes she was afraid of "any kind of involvement with an Englishman beyond the professional, especially with the reality of Pankaj being alive and well in the city" (232). Her old dreams of Pankaj were too much one-sided and immature. Everything that happened to her had contributed to the making of Kamala Mukherjee. She could build a life rich with ideas, family and friends just like the Sens and Bandopadyayas.

Thus, Camilla changes her name to Kamala finally once and for all and this is the city where she developed a crush on Pankaj, a man who hardly responded to her feelings. After all the devotion she showed him, she realised, "Pankaj had never been in love with me, nor I with him. Instead, we'd been a relationship of words - written and spoken, but naught else. Love, on the other hand, was a language that operated without words. No dictionary could explain it any better than the heart" (370). When she did fall in love with a man who would accept her unconditionally, she would surrender her heart to him. And the day Calcutta was liberated was the day when Kamala's soul finally found peace and freedom that it longed for. Although it was a long and arduous journey to the road to freedom, through riots, Hindu-Muslim conflicts, the famine due to rice-shortage, the war between England and Germany, love and freedom was finally at the end of the journey on the night of 15th August. The end of the novel is also a mental preparation for her to embark on another journey possibly to Toronto, Canada. She would love to stay on in India, where "no foreign power could seize their rice or keep them out of hospitals and train compartments" where "Women would vote freely, and the caste system would be officially abolished". However, the essence of freedom is not just being in a free space, it is in heart that can choose where you want to be. Thus comforting herself she would say finally, "India will always be inside it, along with you and Kabita" (463).

6.2. Bidushi Mukherjee

Bidushi is the daughter of Pratap Mukherjee. Pom called her the little princess in her mind when she first saw her in Jamidar's house. Two English women had been employed to teach her reading, writing and numbers in her childhood. Bidushi's parents were killed in the same tidal wave that made Pom an orphan. Her uncle and his wife came to take over the estate after the death of her parents. Ever since, Bidushi's aunt kept her inside the walls of her estate for she opined that well-bred girls should not be seen outside the family. They had also dismissed her governess.

Bidushi was admitted to Lockwood School. This was not because her aunt was interested in her education. According to an earlier plan, she was to be betrothed to Pankaj, who was studying for law at the Cambridge University. Pankaj's family of Bandopadhyays lived in the quite area of Ballygange in Calcutta. His parents enquired about her education because Pankaj had told them, he would never marry a girl who was uneducated. So they were forced to bring Bidushi to the school. Bidushi was almost treated like an outcast with all the English girls pointing at her and calling her "wogoli" or "wiggly". When she could not follow her lessons in English, Sarah was appointed as Bidushi's special helpmate in the classroom.

Bidushi and Sarah became so intimate that Bidushi shared the love letters of Pankaj. Sarah drafted a reply for every letter- two hundred of them- of Pankaj and engineered a strong romance. One day Bidushi received a ruby pendant that hung from a long delicate gold chain as a gift from Pankaj. However, before he could come to see her, Bidushi fell ill. Sarah was asked to assist her. The blood tests showed she had malaria. Dr. Sengupta started giving Bidushi the medication mepacrine. The following day Bidushi's aunt was summoned and Miss Jamison sent Sarah out of the sickroom to give the Mukherjees privacy with their niece. After a couple of days, the Bandopadhyays arrived to consult Dr. Sengupta. She was not responding positively to drugs and she succumbed to her illness.

6.3. Bidushi's Aunt.

After Bidushi's parents died, her puffy faced aunt with eyes as small and hard as black dal took charge of the house. She was very hostile to Bidushi. She wore a good bit of jewellery possibly of Bidushi's mother. Bidushi's aunt was very particular that Sarah was accused as the culprit in the investigation for the lost ruby pendant gifted to Bidushi by Pankaj. While Sarah was being interrogated on the lost pendant, Bidushi's aunt displayed cool demeanour after having taken it herself. When Pankaj and his family were about to leave Lockwood after Bidushi's death, Pankaj noticed the pendant slipping out from the purse of Bidushi's aunt. The discovery embarrassed the lady and she quickly returned it as a token of goodwill between their families.

6.4. Pankaj

Pankaj's characterisation is in line with the narrative technique of interlarding the two themes of history and love, for a palpable effect on the reader. Pankaj who was studying for law at the Cambridge University belonged to the family of Bandopadhyays who lived in the quite area of Ballygange in Calcutta. Bidushi's demise had prevented an earlier plan to get him engaged to her. Pankaj's mother used to say that he is married to India. Pankaj faced trial on charges of propaganda, libel and inciting civil unrest. He received a sentence of two years at Port Blair prison in the Andaman Islands. Though not consciously, he exploited the devotion of Kamala to spy on Simon Lewes. Though Kamala had made known her earlier acquaintance with him at Lockwood School, he was quite unconcerned about what went on in the mind of Kamala. Pankaj was almost shocked when Kamala told him quite bluntly that he has fallen in love with her. Kamala hinted at the callousness with which Pankaj responded to her feelings for him. Pankaj admitted that she was beautiful and intelligent. Yet, he regretted that she had no known relatives in the city or anywhere else. Then he said, "...when I marry, my bride must be approved by my mother" (369). She was quite irritated by his words and wanted to pay him back for all the callousness he had shown all through the past ten years. Feigning warmth, she said, "Pankaj-da, I have an idea. I might know just who you should marry! Your mother might approve... India... She's not available yet, but any day now her parents will set her free" (369). Kamala then considered him as a man terrified to follow his heart's desire and as someone fettered by his mother and social obligations and left him alone. Finally, when he did propose to get married to Supriya, he calculated the political advantage it would bring in the coming assembly elections.

6.5. The Gentleman in Diga:

A man in a clean, finely woven kurta and dhoti who had a deep warm voice and behaved like a priest, was in fact a criminal. He made out to the others that he was ordered by the priests of Jagannath temple to bring orphan girls coming into Digha to the temple. He pretended to be very kind and generous to little girls. Pom noticed certain uneasiness about the man's shifting gaze. She found out later that he was involved in illegal child-trafficking and fled from him.

6.6. Abbas

Abbas-chacha was a kind and sympathetic man who rescued Pom when he found her hanging upside down on a wandering bull Mala near the river, sick with cholera. He brought her to Lockwood school where he worked as a driver. He instructed her how to go about without getting into trouble in the school. When Sarah was falsely accused of theft, she was advised to flee from the place. Abbas came to her aid with a small horse drawn cart. He took her to his own house, where she was treated kindly by his wife Hafezza. Then she was taken to the railway station to board a train to Calcutta so that the police would be unable to trace her out. Abbas

lost his job as a driver when the school authorities found out he had aided Sarah to flee from the place. Then he was employed in a mill owned by an Englishman. The owner of the mill forced the employers to slog to the breaking point. Abbas worked at the mill because nobody would employ him. One day he was mortally injured at the mill and died.

6.7. Hafeeza

Hafeeza was the wife of Abbas-chacha who treated Sarah kindly after she was falsely accused of thievery. She was dressed in a blue sari and salwar kameez with a pair of good chappals after the Muslim fashion so that she could escape to Calcutta without anyone noticing her. Sarah would return a few years later as Pamela, to leave her first born at the doorstep of her house leaving a letter to prevent her daughter from Rose Barker's plans to groom her perfectly fit for Rose Villa. Hafeeza cared for her daughter as her own and named her Zeenat. When Rose Barker came to know about it, she sent Hafeeza money every year. Hafeeza also received money from Zeenat's birth mother regularly. With help coming from two donors, Hafeeza might have thought Rose Barker was more generous. After her husband died, she sold the house and sent a word to Mrs. Barker that she had decided to move to her brother-in-law's home. Barker continued to send money to her to keep connection to Zeenat/ Hazel in order to exploit her later. However, Hafeeza died from dysentery and her uncle was glad for Mrs. Barker's offer to house and school Zeenat.

6.8. Jamison

Miss Jamison was the Headmistress of Lockwood School, a grave character who established her authority over many teachers and taught religion at school. To Pom she was a "being from my nightmare" who had a "long pale face wrinkled like an old fruit" (33). Pom was told to call her Burra-mem sahib. Jamison decided to rename her as Sarah, a name from the Bible as Pom to her sounded a strange name. She showed no human considerations towards the sentiments of other people and hence her judgements were influenced by her own prejudices. She questioned Sarah on the lost ruby pendant of Bidushi and was convinced Sarah had stolen it and called for a police investigation. This incident made Sarah run away from the place.

6.9. Rachael

She was the Directress of housekeeping of Lockwood School. She was a tall, strong Christian woman with skin like copper, who wore a sari in the same green as the school uniform. She looked older than Sarah's mother did. She was married to a man who worked as a driver in Calcutta. Though she was not blessed with any child, her treatment of Sarah was very harsh. She resented that Richmond, Nurse-matron and Bidushi accepted Sarah's services. Often Sarah's interest in books and her admiration for Miss Richmond made Rachael very angry. She had a major role to play in getting Sarah accused of stealing Bidushi's ruby pendant.

6.10. Claire Richmond

Richmond was a graduate of Newnham College, Cambridge and was employed as a teacher of Lockwood School. Richmond spoke in an accent as rich as her orange-gold hair. Sarah functioned as a fan-puller at Miss Richmond's classroom whenever the electric generator at Lockwood broke down. Richmond came to understand Sarah's gift for learning languages and encouraged her to read more. Two things that Sarah noted about Richmond made her admire the teacher even more: sometimes it appeared that she was trying very hard to show the lives of poor people to her well-off students; she was also quite interested in Indian writing translated into English. Richmond commended on Sarah's translations of Tagore's poems as "naturally poetic". Richmond perceived Sarah's interest in books and explained the organisational system. Soon she was shelving and dusting her books. When Sarah was accused of stealing the ruby pendant, Richmond advised her to run away from the school.

6.11. Rose Barker

Rose Baker was the cunning owner of the Rose-Villa and a shrewd businessperson. She was running a whorehouse with the help of Chief Howard, the head of the Kharagpur Police, Dr DeCruz, the physician, Rima was the beautician, young women prostitutes like Bonie, Natty, Sakina, Doris, Lucky and others with their regular customers like Mr. Abernathy, popularly known as the Taster, the Chief Howard himself and many others. When the circumstances forced Pam to join Rose Villa, She was advertised in the Kharagpur and Calcutta papers as the new exotic Indian Rosebud who has joined the bevy of beauties in Khargpur. Rose Barker sold her six times as a first-time debut night. When Pam got pregnant accidentally, Ms. Barker had her bank account closed withdrawing the five hundred rupees that Pam had saved in the past months. The account was jointly held with Rose Barker. She was sent to the filthy place of Tilak and Jayshree. Ms. Barker hoped that Pam will give birth to a daughter so that when Pam is thirty, her daughter will be thirteen, the perfect age for her initiation into Rose Villa and Pam's retirement.

After Sarah secretly left her daughter at the care of Abbas and Hafeeza, Rose Barker managed to trace her. She pretended to be generous to them by yearly gift of some money in the hope of enticing Sarah's daughter to Rose Villa when the time comes. After Abbas and Hafeeza died, Mrs. Barker offered to house and to school her. She predicted the fall in income from Rose Villa owing to the coming Indian Independence and the departure of many English people to new pastures. She made Lucky her business partner to make her learn the tricks of the trade for Indian customers. After Lucky is made confident, Rose Barker would emigrate to London where she plans to buy a little boarding house by the sea and run her business. She would stoop to any extent to get the money she required. This she did by bringing Hazel to the Middleton Mansions and making a blackmail bargain with Kamala over her daughter for a thousand rupees: "Hazel is our little bud waiting to blossom. I wanted to see her while she is innocent. She will be too busy to travel later" ... The English are leaving, and everyone says Indians prefer their girls very young. Her debut will be next year, I think" (395-6). Mrs. Barker knew only too well that her mother would never allow this to happen and she will have her money.

6.12. Kabita Zeenat Hazel Smith

Kabita, was a daughter born to Pamela during her days in Rose Villa. Initially, everyone called her Hazel because of her golden-brown eyes. Dr. DeCruz brought an official birth certificate issued by Railway hospital on which was typed, "Hazel Mary Smith". However, Pam had already decided that her child would be called "Kabita, which meant Poem". After a few weeks, Kabita was tucked in a bundle with a letter and some money left at the doorstep of Abbas and Hafeeza at Midnapore. Pam had planned to send as much money as possible to Abbas so that she could meet the expenses of her upbringing. However, her mother was not the only person interested in the child. Mrs. Rose Barker had also made yearly donations to Abbas in her name in the hope that when she would be big enough, she could be turned into one of those Rose Villa girls. While Mrs. Barker called her Hazel, she was called Zeenat by Hafeeza. After Zeenat's foster parents died, her uncle willingly allowed Rose Barker to bring her to Rose Villa where she lived in Lucky's room.

Hazel was brought to the Middleton Mansions for a blackmail bargain for a thousand rupees. Her birth mother had to buy her literally from Mrs. Barker and put her in St. Joseph's Convent School at Chandernagore. Kamala visited her every weekend but did not once take her home. Though a little girl, Kabita wondered why Kamala did not want her in her house. Kamala tried to convince her that it was because of Lewes that she did not bring her to her house. During the subsequent visits, Kabita refused to see her. Kamala used to return home sadly each time because she had often rehearsed her daughter's feeling ever since she left her at Hafeeza's home: "You left me... You are the worst kind of woman on this earth" (197). Then it was impossible to visit her during the time of Hindu-Muslim Conflict in Calcutta. Kabita learned from her Mother Superior in the convent on the troubles in Calcutta. This made her write a letter to Kamala. That was the turning point in her life as well as in the life of Kamala and Simon Lewes. Simon decided to adopt her legally and bring Kabita to live with them.

6.13. Simon Lewes

Probably the best character of the book could be Simon Lewes, a British employee working in the Indian Political Service at Lord Sinha Lanes. Though a British, he remains loyal to India and even utilizes his governmental power to protect the poor people during the time of famine and poverty. Even after learning all those cold hard truth about Kamala, he still embraces her with his full heart and mind.

Kamala first observed Simon Lewes as she was getting out of Bilgrami's Classic Books of Asia and Europe. She was impressed by "an unusual courtesy for a European to extend to an Indian"(211). She observed that he did not look very much like the white devils she had feared in her childhood. He was a bachelor who worked at the Writer's Building and stayed at a government rented space at Middleton Mansions in White Town. He occupied the first and second stories of the mansion block. He had two and a half bed rooms, the library, a dining room, a parlour and a kitchen, with a bathroom at each level. His staff consisted of four male servants, all of whom excepting Farouk lived in a garden cottage: Shombhu, a thick bodied Bengali man of about thirty was the chief of the household staff; Manik, was a thin sharp-eyed cook from Orisa with a teenaged assistant, Choton and Jatin, a younger houseboy. He employed Kamala as a Librarian for a good salary of fifty rupees. Kamala was also happy to have met someone who felt strongly about books as she herself did.

He had anticipated the coming independence in his initial introduction to Kamala. Speaking about the importance of the Gazetteers in his library he said that the government offices would throw away all the Gazetteers in a decade's time, "Because of the coming Independence. Who will want to keep books detailing the intricacies of British rule once we're out of the country? I may be one of the few people left in the world with such records" (221). Simon was realistic to voice the thought that the British would give up India.

He had long evening reading sessions with Kamala when she reviewed the local news papers. Later, he gave her more of those household responsibilities like paying for the groceries that come, the dhobi and so on. Lewes was impressed by the change her presence brought to the house and more especially to him: "Kamala,

you have made it a home"(242). Soon readers come to understand that Mr. Lewes wanted her beyond professional interest.

Simon had learned to care for Kamala. He would easily notice any change in her, be it physical or mental fatigue. When Simon found that Kamala had trouble reading minuscule print, he asked her to visit his eye doctor, Dr. Asdourian, on Park Street at his own expenses. For Kamala, the strain of caring for Kabita without his knowledge had drained much of her enthusiasm. In those times his warm presence was a great solace to her.

In the course of years, he had come to understand the havoc the English had done to India. The government had forced the farmers to surrender all the farm produce for the upkeep of its soldiers during the war times. Consequently, there was a terrible famine of which Lewes had a firsthand experience. He had to admit at the sight of starved people in the city, that it was a "wretched vision". He decided to serve phan to anyone who came into his garden with the store of rice he had in the house. Rice kitchen was opened and with the assistance of McRae, it served thousands of meals. His letters to Relief Control office helped him fetch a dozen maunds of rice per week for unspecified period of time to sustain his free rice kitchen. Lewes had sent a very long letter to the Viceroy and the government about the famine. This letter was published in the Manchester Guardian. This letter was quoted at a Parliament hearing in which some Labour politicians argued that Britain had not governed India effectively. Kamala was touched that Lewes had never boasted to her about the letter.

Phan serving had brought Lewes and Kamala very close to the point of being romantic: " Desire. Affection. Reassurance - all in the space of his holding her wrist" (348) At the end of it both were a little embarrassed. This was something both had fought against so hard and so long: "the fruition of every cliché and stereotype about British men and Indian women..." (349). . He did not want this relationship to be like those liaisons between English men and Indian women. So, both agreed to get married. The words of Reverend McRae who solemnised their wedding at Saint Andrew's Kirk was particularly significant: "In these difficult times... the greatest hope for the world is the bonding of people who are unafraid to love each other, regardless of culture, creed or origin..." (378).

Simon longed to have his offspring through Kamala but she could not think of any except her own Kabita. She was afraid to reveal her past to Simon. This had strained their relationship for months. What brought them together again was the Hindu-Muslim struggle in the days that followed the Direct Action Day. At the end of it Simon could take her hands in his and look steadily into her eyes and say, " Please understand that whatever happened with him, or with the spying, or with your daughter, will not cause me to leave you" (454). He had that large heart to accept and legally adopt Kabita as his daughter.

VII. Themes

7.1. Treatment of History and Fiction

The novel is a stunning portrait of late Raj India—a sweeping saga and a love story set against a background of huge political and cultural upheaval. Massey sets down the events that she had come across in history. To avoid being 'clippingly editorish', she has put together a set of building blocks of fiction, a luridly attractive one at that, like the dark beauty on the cover. Her heroine shows off her ornamented plait to advantage on a naked back.

Stepping out of the mystery world, Sujata went a step ahead and walked the historical fiction route this time. She says, "I did build a mystery career, but I read voraciously across the genres. I'd read about the freedom struggle and some really good historical novels about Indian women, but the idea of writing about the freedom movement from a poor woman's point of view excited me. I was also quite inspired by the city of Kolkata, with such magnificent old buildings where big events have happened for centuries." (Deccan Chronicle, 8 January 2015)

Massey's story of Pom is set in pre-independent India in a small village near the sea beach town, "Johlpur, the Town of Water" (3). Contemporary Indian politics contribute to an understanding of the novel. When Pom was growing up, India was governed as a conquered colony of Great Britain. British law transformed Indian Zamindars, the traditional land-revenue collectors, into landowners and absentee landlords. So Pom's father worked for Jamidar Pratap Mukherjee, the landed aristocrat who owned all the rice fields.

When she was seven, she was considered old enough to walk distances carrying a bundle of homemade brooms, which her mother sold throughout the villages. She would love to go to school to learn but it was not customary for a girl to learn to read and write under the banyan tree at Mitra-babu's yard with the boys. The British had introduced English education and ideals to India's students. So in the novel Bidushi, the landlord's daughter was taught in her own home by English teachers. Nevertheless, Pom felt she was doing something more important than those at school: "I was with Ma, earning money for the family" (5). Pom was an intelligent girl for she learnt to count coins by the age of ten and could not be cheated.

The family was going through hard financial crunch. Dadu was forced to sell the one rice paddy he owned to meet the debts of the family and Baba farmed for others, receiving as payment a portion of rice. Still they had enough potatoes, eggplants, tomatoes, and greens from their own vegetable garden. Ma raised some money selling brooms in summer and fish during rainy season. Yet their mother longed for a son and promised Goddess Lakshmi a goat or five rupees if she blesses her with one. Every year they welcomed the monsoon with great cheer but that year there was flood when families were washed away. A terribly big wave had swallowed both Komba and Jholpur. Pom understood that her old life ended. In her struggle through life, she passes through some significant events of the freedom struggle.

So the Indian social and economic milieu and freedom struggle is a thread which runs through the tapestry of this tale, rising to the fore at times and remaining submerged at others. Massey has woven this tale so vividly that the reader gets time-travelled to the Calcutta of the 1930s and 40s which makes each line of the book sound so real. She draws upon so many of those bitter facts of the times: the impact of World War II in India, famine of 1943 in Bengal that claimed over three million lives, civil disobedience, "Quit India" campaign against British rule, the role of Mahatma Gandhi, Nehru, S.C. Bose in the freedom Struggle, partition of the country into predominately Hindu India and predominately Muslim Pakistan, millions of refugees this partition created, the chaos and terror that followed, independence in 1947, India's conflicts between Hindus and Muslims which often erupted in violence during the years before independence and many more details. While she draws upon the political concepts and turmoil of her age, she also scrutinizes religious intolerance and gives detailed, realistic portrayal of human starvation that came from those desperate times.

It is quite evident that the author has drowned herself in the history of Independence in Calcutta to make the book thoroughly bewildering and compelling enough to goad the reader on to the very end. For Indian readers, it becomes a throwback into an era that could only be imagined from the countless tales of the freedom struggle. Elucidating details of the freedom struggle is unlike the monotonous writings that usually form a part of our History textbooks. This book instead becomes a great way of exactly getting a feel of life in India for a young girl as she embarked upon the journey of life with her instincts and the so-called kind looking people. The reader would be delighted to find how in spite of all her ordeals she somehow sails through the journey of life. What is worth noting is the way she carries herself in spite of all that was ready to pull her down and turn her into shreds by revealing a past she ran away from.

Historically, the book is steeped in nostalgia for a city easily recognisable from the retellings of those who have not left its history behind. Rabindranath Tagore's poetry fleck the opening of chapters, and the clichés of Calcutta's colonial past—from Flury's to nightclubs, cocktail parties, salons, Chowringhee and College Street to revolution, Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose and Partition—all hang heavy, like a framed sepia-toned image from some collective Bengali memory. Herself four-dimensional in lineage, Massey was born in the 1960s UK to a Bengali father and German mother and grew up in the US, where she now lives. Hence she is drawn towards exploring what is solved by mixed parentage, and what is lost by not acknowledging it. Massey relied on accounts by Anglo-Indian senior citizens, many dispersed post-Independence, their contributions to communities disbanded, other lost institutions and literature. The novel thus works its way from the pretty-faced fortune of a small family to the mark of its destitution, from caste to the casteless. Redemption in all manner of religion, all form of belonging, is rejected soundly. Independence, in more ways than one, comes and goes. Still, the buffeting never stops. "Once again, a wave had come and swept away the life I knew. This time, the wave was freedom" (463).

Sujata's style reminds one of the tumbrels that move towards the guillotine in *A Tale of Two Cities*. There is such yanking in the fiction's trajectory. There is a curious blending of history and fiction materialised through evoking reader's willing suspension of disbelief. At one moment Pom is eating snails and milking Mala to survive, and very soon she is heard reciting from Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own* and shivering in the letter-writing romance of Bidushi, Sarah and Pankaj. The reader is inclined to suspend all attempts at disbelief as the story progresses. One tends not to bother about the veracity or logic of a tale when it gets dropped on one's platter with a laugh.

As we whirl deeper into the novel, we feel more like the Red Queen of Lewis Carrol, "it takes all the running you can do, to keep in the same place". As we move forward, many scenes flash by: Pom washing the baseboards in the school, a missing ruby pendant, and then a breather: the heroine disguised as a Muslim girl takes a train to Calcutta but gets down at Kharagpur. Despite the bizarre beginning, Sara has smooth sailing as she goes on overcoming one hurdle after the other. Though a servant maid in that school, Pam had secretly learnt to read poems and stories in a "posher than posher accent" and that leads her to success. Nevertheless, a novel with an Indian locale cannot ignore caste. So there is a further stuffing about the Dom caste, the Shudra who came "from Lord Brahma's lower half", the hatching caste: but brothels cannot afford the luxury of caste. We get to know the sleazy details and how the police (Chief Howard) and medical practitioners (Dr. DeCruz) connive in making prostitution a perfectly valid commercial venture. Thus Pam is a "working lady" at 15 and sheer erotica takes over. This is where India's independence movement gives us a respite. The Mummy of the

brothel is worried. If India becomes independent, all her Railway-employed Anglo-Indian and Zamindari clients will go away. Her business would be ruined: "It will be a blacks-only railway, and all the trains will crash or be late!"(158) Gandhi, Tagore, hunger strikes and Andamans hold the fort for a while till we get back to Pam, who has now become a mother. Mummy has her business plans for the neonatal babe too.

In Calcutta, Kamala uses her wits and authorial compulsion does the rest to make her a librarian in a male-staffed Englishman's home. From there one is just a few steps away into the politically bristling and communally vulnerable Calcutta of 1938. It was a jerky and dangerous drive. The elongated journey of Kamala makes another sharp turn when her affiliations with Pankaj and the Sens make an excellent spy of her. England declares war on Germany and we slip into 1943 and the terrible Bengal famine, while Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose rises in person through the pages. The dreadful experience is drawn into Sujata's trajectory, but only for a moment as with other historical occurrences, including India's independence. Some pious words about Hindu-Muslim unity are sprinkled at the backdrop of the unfortunate incidents of Direct Action Day and Kamala's daughter comes to accept her Anglo-Indian identity with a secular name- Kabita Zeenat Hazel Smith. Not surprising for the heroine is a lover of Tagore's poetry. After all it is a fiction based on the real life events or it is real life based on fiction, so sometimes it become so hard to tell the difference. It is quite evident that the author must have drowned herself in the history of Independence in Calcutta as she must have experienced the struggles in love, and she did her research quite well.

7.2. Struggle for Survival

The novel pushes the reader towards asking the fundamental question we all ask ourselves at some point in life, 'What if we had done things differently,' often making us regret certain life choices we may have made. Kamala herself asserts at one point, "I wish I could rewind my life the way he could with the speeches on his wire-recorder". Nevertheless, as she well knows and Massey reminds the reader, there is no point lingering with the verbs "Would. Should. Didn't. Cannot." Ultimately Kamala comes to terms with her past when she realizes that she has become who she is because of all that had happened to her.

Women with no identity are to Sujata Massey, women of freedom and power. The book is a moving account of a young girl who loses her family in a devastating flood and then goes on to explain the way she surged forward through many life-changing tides in her life and finally found her rightful place in a world where she was made to believe she had nothing worthwhile. She embodies them in characters like Pom, a lower-caste girl with nothing on her horizon except marriage, who uses her intelligence to move out of servitude. "You ask for my name, the real one, and I cannot tell," (3) her protagonist begins her story, and she seems thus to speak for all women running from and to something. In the course of it Massey has tried to depict the pain of a woman, how she survives from it and how she fights hard with the world to help protect her own flesh and blood. This is a tale of freedom of a woman from her pain and misfortune. There is little to suggest helplessness in their chameleonic existences though, more a willingness, despite the limited choices life offers, to take on the path as it comes.

This urge for survival perches the novel on a love triangle between Pom and the two men on different sides of the cultural spectrum who represent idealised love and politically incorrect love. It is again the question of survival not losing both. Like Kamla her daughter Kabita also has learned lessons of survival. Like Ms. Sen, her daughter Supriya has learned to survive the hard way. Hence adding this trait to a story about misunderstanding and love between mothers and daughters makes the story more palatable. The 'family love' and the 'couple love' run parallel in the novel until both converge in Kamala- Lewes relationship when Kabita steps in. Sujatha is not only romantic, but also realistic to express through her story that there are hardships built into every kind of relationships. The secret of the successful narrative is in making Kamala persistent even when there are no guarantees for success.

Adding a little more gleam to the strong survival spirit and a pretty face, Pom's saving grace is her ability to seemingly make friends and find helpers in the unlikeliest of places-from embracing strategically placed trees to an upper-caste family in a boat, the doctors of the Keshiari Mission to Miss Richmond who teaches her English, Bidushi, Jyoti ma who saves her from mice and night frights; and he from whom she chooses to stop running, Simon Lewes. Characters, both real and benevolent, offset the dangers of the routes she must traverse to arrive at her destination. The homes she finds solace in are outlined to the last bottle of cream on the table, the books on the shelves, and the drawing rooms of friends crackling with warmth that is sincere. Massey's strength is her clarity of people and their intentions.

VIII. Conclusion

Many have commended that *The City of Palaces* is an utterly engrossing tale of love, identity, espionage, betrayal, and survival, rendered in lush captivating language. Others have claimed that it is a historical fiction at its best, accessible to all audiences. A few others have suggested it is an exciting journey through one woman's devastation, resilience, truth and triumph. Its reading experience can give birth to infinite

semiosis on its meaning and there is enough food for thought for every reader. With the first page we step into a fast-moving time machine that delivers us to places and events that have emotive historical and fictional significance. Yet, the facts and figures are not tweaked beyond any acceptable limits by the author to fit an incident into the realm of her literary work. Historical research is primarily to understand the whole picture and add details that build a rich picture without being overwhelming. She was unafraid to express the ambiguities within the freedom movement, women's lives, and the situation of elites caught between privilege and idealism. She has put forward almost four different kinds of chunks into one solid book and it should be admitted this kind of work requires numerous research, a lot of patience and an adroit hand.

Reference

- [1]. Banerji, Chitrita. *Mirror City*. Penguin India 2013 .
- [2]. Bashir,Shahnaz. *The Half Mother*. Noida: Hachette India, 2014.
- [3]. Berwick, Dennison. *A Walk along the Ganges*. London: Century Hutchinson, 1986.
- [4]. Das, Sudipto. *The Ekkos Clan*. New Delhi:Niyogi Books 2013.
- [5]. Deccan Chronicle "Love in Times of Struggle" Thursday 8 January 2015.
- [6]. Gunsekera, Romesh. *Noontide Toll*. Granta Books, 2014.
- [7]. Lapierre, Dominique. *City of Joy*. London: Arrow Books, 1992.
- [8]. Massey, Sujata. *The City of Palaces*. New Delhi: Penguin Books India, 2013.
- [9]. Pandita, Rahul. *Our Moon has Blood Clots*. Noida: Random House India, 2013.
- [10]. Phillips, Caryl. *Cambridge*. London: Vintage Books, 1993.
- [11]. Rose, Jayabhattacharji."Of War and Peace". *The Hindu*, 1February 2014.
- [12]. Sandhu, Amandeep. *Roll of Honour*. New Delhi: Roopa Publications, 2012.
- [13]. Subramanian, Samanth. *The Divided Island*. New Delhi: Penguin Books India, 2014.
- [14]. Tagore, Rabindranath. "Two Birds", *One Hundred and One Poems*. Bombay: Asia Publishing House, 1996.