

**Belonging Nowhere: Othering and
Marginalisation of Partition Refugees in Krishna
Sobti's *A Gujarat Here, a Gujarat There***

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This paper focuses on refugees, who are some of the most underprivileged and ill-treated people in the history of the world, as they were compelled to leave their homelands due to the fear of persecution and seek haven in another host land. Refugees and asylum seekers are frequently identified and categorised as 'other' in the host country. As a whole, refugees become a hapless crowd who are systematically marginalised, excluded, and persecuted on various grounds. In this context, Krishna Sobti's novel, *A Gujarat Here, a Gujarat There*, documents the relentless struggle of the central female character, a refugee of Partition, against the unfair marginalisation and stigmatisation in the receiving country on the grounds of her sex and of her membership in the 'othered' group. Through the textual analysis of the novel, this paper explores how characterising refugees as 'others' in the host land impedes their integration and relegates them to the periphery of the society. It highlights the internal dynamics of exclusion that can result within a national setting, even amongst the people who legitimately belong to the same country, as with the refugees of the Partition of India and Pakistan in 1947. Ultimately, the paper reveals how multiple layers of othering work within the ambit

of othering, which in turn exacerbate the marginalisation and vulnerabilities of the stateless population and construct negative identity.

Keywords: exclusion, integration, negative identity, persecution, refugees

Introduction

‘Othering’ defines and secures one’s own identity by distancing and stigmatising an (other). The person or group being ‘othered’ experiences this as a process of marginalisation, disempowerment and social exclusion. This effectively creates a separation between ‘us’ and ‘them’. (Grove and Zwi, 2006, p. 1933)

The term ‘othering’ is frequently used interchangeably and in relation to different concepts and theories such as racism, stigmatisation, prejudice, marginalisation, and discrimination. The creation of otherness consists of making unpleasant assumptions that allow individuals to automatically divide themselves into two hierarchical groups: them and us. ‘Others’ amongst ‘us’ are used for those who are identifiable as belonging to a particular group and are not part of the mainstream. David Palfreyman (2005) claims, “Othering involves maintaining social distance and making value judgements based on stereotyped opinions about the group as a whole” (p. 214). Group differences, which are created through prejudice, are the foundation for the formation of in-group and out-group identities. The out-group is only coherent because of its lack of identity and resistance to the in-group. The in-group creates one or more others in order to distinguish itself and establish its identity. Oftentimes, this produces and forces unequal relations between social collectives or categories, accompanied by the attribution of the characteristics, real or imagined, which leads to legitimisations of disadvantageous institutional structures and social practices. A key component in group construction is the asymmetry in power relationships in social setups wherein only the dominant group is in a position to impose the value of its particularity (its identity) and to devalue the particularity of the others (their otherness).

As conceptualised in various theoretical frameworks, the interdisciplinary ideas of ‘Other’, ‘Otherness’, and ‘Othering’ can be dehumanising and, subsequently, have a negative impact on the

intended subject being. In many instances, othering has been used to isolate, degrade, and render possible the discrimination, abuse, and persecution of a group, and “as such, ‘othering’ contributes to shaping individuals’ ascribed racial/ethnic status and their access (or lack thereof) to resources associated with such a status” (Viruell-Fuentes, 2007, p. 1532). Additionally, it has also been based on the presumption, either conscious or unconscious, that a particular group poses a threat to the dominant group, which creates and implements new processes of exclusion and denigration of that particular group. In his book *Orientalism*, Edward W. Said expressed his thoughts on the ‘othering’ of the East by the West, which is another form of distinguishing one part of the globe from another. Said’s perception of ‘othering’ is with reference to literary and political domains, but ‘othering’ as a concept is an inclusive term that may “include, but are not limited to, religion, sex, race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status (class), disability, sexual orientation, and skin tone” (Powell & Menendian, 2016, p. 17).

The current study focuses on refugees, who are some of the most underprivileged and ill-treated people in the history of the world, as they were compelled to leave their homelands due to the fear of persecution and seek haven in another host land. Refugees and asylum seekers are frequently identified and categorised as ‘other’ in the host country. The host country becomes hostile for refugees, especially for those whose cultural geography is different from that of its own. The idea of the outsider, moreover, the cultural outsider, has multiplied the othering of refugees and has identified who is part of ‘us’ and ‘them/other’. As a whole, refugees become a hapless crowd who are systematically excluded and persecuted on various grounds and pushed to the margins. In countless ways, the process of othering starts to take shape. The most extreme mechanism of othering is outright marginalisation of one group of people based on their differences. According to Ina Rosing (2000), “The concept of marginalisation refers to persons or groups who live ‘at the margin’ of society or are situated ‘between’ social classes or ethnic or cultural groups, without being fully integrated in either of them” (p. 89). In concurrence with Rosing’s claim, marginalisation denies opportunities and outcomes to the refugees who have lost everything in their homeland. It combines

discrimination and social exclusion, which leads to refugees' segregation from the existing system of protection and integration. Within the limited range of opportunities and means for survival, the marginalised refugees face systematic disadvantage in their interactions with dominant social, cultural, political, and economic institutions.

In an attempt to show the mechanisms of the othering of the refugees and its implications, this paper focuses on how the refugees, having migrated in the wake of increasing discrimination and religious persecution, face even more struggles and sufferings in the host country. Refugees have to confront othering twofold, both in their motherland and in the host land. Firstly, they are othered in their country of origin for being a minority and, as a result, are forced to flee out of fear of being persecuted or actual persecution by the dominant group. Secondly, in the receiving country, they are again othered as foreigners, leading to marginalisation and exclusion as they struggle to adapt to the new place, establish their identity, and integrate within the society that frequently views them with suspicion and distrust. In this context, Krishna Sobti's novel, *A Gujarat Here, a Gujarat There*, is basically concerned with the huge cultural and social barriers refugees face in the host country where they are perceived as the 'other'. Through the textual analysis of the novel, this paper explores how characterising refugees as 'others' directly affects their integration and relegates them to the periphery of the society. It highlights the internal dynamics of exclusion that can result within a national setting, even amongst the people who legitimately belong to the same country, as with the refugees of the Partition of India and Pakistan in 1947. The multiple layers of othering work within the ambit of othering, exacerbate the marginalisation and vulnerabilities of the stateless population and construct negative identity. Although considerable scholarship has examined Partition refugees from historical, political, sociological and trauma-oriented perspectives, comparatively less attention has been given to how literary texts represent the continuing experience of othering and marginalisation after displacement, particularly the ways in which refugee identity negatively affects an individual's attempts to establish belonging in a new social and geographical environment. In this regard, this study investigates post-Partition othering and

marginalisation of refugees and examines the impact of these factors on group and individual identity.

Construction of the ‘Other’: Identity and Refugee Label

A Gujarat Here, a Gujarat There is a self-proclaimed autobiographical novel that narrates Krishna Sobti’s experience as a private tutor to the Maharaja Tejsingh of Sirohi in the period shortly following the Partition. Born in a village in Gujrat city, Punjab province, which later became a part of Pakistan after the Partition, the writer herself becomes a migrant. In this novel, Sobti reveals her own and her family’s experiences of Partition, interspersing it with observations about the hardships and struggles that refugees and migrants face in their new homeland. After Partition, her family settled in India, losing their connection with their ancient *haveli*, land, and people on the other side. The displacement depicted by Sobti also finds a parallel in Bhisham Sahni’s *Tamas*, where communal divisions fracture previously established social relationships and force individuals into unfamiliar spaces. While *Tamas* foregrounds the violence that precipitates displacement, Sobti’s narrative is particularly significant for examining what happens after displacement, when refugees must negotiate social structures that continue to perceive them as outsiders. Many critics and researchers interpret Sobti’s novel as a tale of Partition loss and dislocation. It is rarely seen through the diasporic lens which dissects refugee marginalisation and exclusion. As a result, the narration reflects a more complex exploration of identity, persecution, displacement, marginalisation and socio-political alienation within post-Partition India than a mere re-accounting of nostalgia or the history of Partition.

The novel begins with Sobti as a young migrant trying to navigate through her new life in the partitioned India while still carrying with her the burden of the memories of displacement and dispossession. Sobti leaves her hostel in Lahore because it becomes part of the newly created Pakistan. As a Hindu, she becomes the ‘other’ in the Muslim-dominated Lahore. The otherness is used to create an out-group to which the protagonist is relegated. She is forced to flee Lahore, in the wake of increasing fear of persecution from the dominant in-group, and is unable to complete her degree course, which she started at Fatechand College in Lahore. She is also required to leave most of

her possessions behind because she is advised to travel light. In the same way, her maternal grandmother is forced to walk with the travelling convoy all the way to Amritsar. Her paternal grandmother and uncle are chased from their Eminabad farmhouse when the mob tries to attack their house in the middle of the night. Some of her relatives lost their possessions and lands. Some lost their lives to the violence. All these people are othered in their native land and chased out because they all belong to a different religion. The difference, thus, is transformed into otherness and later constructed as an out-group which becomes the target of violence and persecution. Such distinction of minority-majority is based on how the groups are identified within a given society by those in control of greater political power. Safely reaching Delhi, Sobti witnesses the same happening in India as her Muslim friends and neighbours leave the country since they became the 'other' in the newly independent Hindu-dominated India. As Edward Said (1978) notes, "The construction of identity... involves the construction of opposites and 'others' whose actuality is always subject to the continuous interpretation and reinterpretation of their differences from 'us'" (p. 332). In this regard, the Partition experience encourages and exacerbates the sense of otherness among people belonging to different religions in both India and Pakistan, which in turn intensifies the communal divisions and reinforces the boundaries between 'us' and 'them'. This 'otherness' based on religion gives the protagonist a deep insight into the complexities of religious identities and the dilemmas that it creates within the communities. It also reveals how markers of identity such as religion, sex, language, ethnicity, race, nationality and place are not fixed entities but are fluid and can suddenly shift under political and social upheaval.

As deliberated earlier, the concept of 'otherness' refers to a characteristic of being different or other. Othering in this sense has a negative connotation and is used here for the purpose of denoting the refugees as a class apart from the dominant group and ascribing them a negative identity. In the novel, the word 'refugee' is given as a label to those who are dislocated, looted, and impoverished in the aftermath of Partition. Refugees are classified as 'others' in the mainstream 'us'. People other refugees as "camp dwellers", "looted, impoverished

person”, and “a crowd of looted uprooted” (Sobti, 2019, p. 30). The refugees are depicted as poor, jobless, slum-dwellers and encroaching thieves and even as a threat to the social security of the host country. As Stuart Hall (1997) claims, “Stereotyping reduces people to a few, simple, essential characteristics, which are represented as fixed by Nature. Stereotyping is a key element in the exercise of symbolic violence” (p. 258). In concurrence with Hall’s claim, stereotyping reduces refugees to one-dimensional beings and creates power dynamics and subtle aggression that deepen the divide between the refugees and host communities. The dominant group does not want to accept these refugees in their midst because it would lead to the sharing of resources with them. As Kamenova (2014) observes, “Migrants are increasingly being perceived, represented and ‘constructed’ as threats to ‘our’ jobs, ‘our’ economy, ‘our’ culture and ‘our’ security system” (p. 172). Additionally, it has also been based on the presumption, either conscious or unconscious, that a particular group poses a threat to the dominant group, which creates and implements new processes of exclusion and denigration of that particular group. The general attitude is one of animosity, suspicion, and distrust and the feeling that the government is doing a lot for ‘those refugees’. They think their opportunities and tax money are taken away and wasted on and by the refugees. Their accusing gaze proclaims, “God protect us from the refugees. These looted wretches won’t find peace until they’ve robbed the government themselves” (Sobti, 2019, p. 70). This kind of perception fuels resentment and anger against the refugees, inciting the local population to practise discrimination and segregation. As a result, the refugees—a symbol of the ‘minority niche’ in the receiving country—are excluded from the social, economic, cultural, and political life of the community.

Refugees are systematically positioned as perpetual outsiders in both public perception and institutional frameworks, which construct a hostile environment and hinder the integration process. Sobti is only a half-refugee because her immediate family already lives in Delhi. However, she was born and spent most of her childhood on the other side of the border, which gives her an emotional and cultural affinity to that land. On her return from Lahore, she finds her home filled with

refugee relatives who are gathered, wounded, weary, and “defeated, all of them, with their bundles, their discoloured trunks, their filthy dupattas” (Sobti, 2019, p. 4). All they talk about is their hate for Muslims and the inefficient government. Amidst the chaos, Sobti begins to feel rootless, uncertain, anxious, and lonely in her own city. This drives and coaxes her to search for a sense of belongingness. As such, she applies on a whim for a position at a preschool in the princely state of Sirohi. However, the protagonist is identified and labelled as an outsider and a refugee and therefore placed outside the margins of the mainstream society of Sirohi from the first day itself. She is ascribed a negative identity, which is “defined by faults, devalued and suspectable to discrimination” (Staszak, 2009, p. 43). She is also constantly reminded that she is a refugee, and it is as such that she is perceived by her new employers. Sobti goes to Divan Sahib’s house for a brief interview where he introduces her to Zutshi Sahib, the Superintendent of Education and the Principal of Colwin School. Zutshi takes her to the school, and on the way, he asks her many invasive questions regarding her origin and refugee status. He asks her, “Are you Sindhi?” (Hindus whose origin lies in the Sindhi region) (Sobti, 2019, p. 29). He tells her that there are many Sindhi refugees in that area, and if she fills out a refugee form, she will get free rations and blankets. Hearing this, Sobti feels discriminated and refuses to answer him. The sting of being othered intensifies her sense of loneliness and alienation in the unfamiliar city of Sirohi. As soon as the protagonist reached Sirohi, she was perceived as an ‘other’ and positioned as an outsider, which created an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating, and offensive environment. This process of systematic othering—through labelling, intrusive questioning, and negative identification—alienates and instills in her a sense of hopelessness and depression that hinders the integration process.

The cultural othering creates and maintains boundaries between one’s own culture and those deemed ‘other’, which in turn reinforce a sense of superiority and belonging within the dominant group while systematically excluding and devaluing those on the outside. In the Indian context, the Punjab region’s culture is diverse and shared by all religious communities, which is evident in Sobti’s mannerism

and clothing. Sobti's ethnic attire becomes a mark of her refugee status, which leads to creating a sense of 'us' and 'them' and distinguishing her as a cultural outsider. The transformation of cultural markers into signs of communal difference also resonates with Bapsi Sidhwa's *Ice-Candy-Man*, where Partition intensifies the visibility of religious and cultural identities within previously shared social spaces. As such, when Sobti and Zutshi go to meet the new Chief Minister of Sirohi, Gokul Bhai Bhatt, she feels the eyes of the crowd following her and taking note of her attire. She does not see much difference between "their round lehengas with choli and her round ghararas with kurtas" (Sobti, 2019, p. 68). However, the crowd's speculative eyes teach her to regard her clothing with a new eye. The partition of attire, which again labels her as a 'Sindhi refugee', segregates her in the minds of people, reinforcing the boundaries between the majority and minority. Instead of feeling welcomed in Sirohi, these biased identifications based on one's cultural attire and ethnic identity make Sobti feel alienated and disempowered. Even her own relatives question her choice of clothing and want her to blend in, as underscored by their remark, "Why do you always wear Muslim clothes? Ghararas and kameezes. Where you'll be working, they won't like that. It's a Hindu princely state" (Sobti, 2019, p. 115). Their voices reflect the dominant cultural prejudice that questions her clothing choices as though being a refugee is something to be ashamed of and urges conformity with the mainstream by hiding the differences. Consequently, this reflects the process of othering in a different setting, highlighting the lack of cultural and geographical integration of racial and ethnic immigrants.

Different patterns of othering manipulate the lives of the vulnerable ones. As such, economic disparity and its impact on the formation of out-groups play a significant role in creating distinction. This economic vulnerability of Partition refugees is also depicted in Khushwant Singh's *Train to Pakistan* and Chaman Nahal's *Azadi*, where displacement disrupts not only familial and cultural networks but also economic security. Here, the economic disparities affect the lives of the refugees by putting them in a marginalised position. Sobti's interaction with other refugees brings forth how deeply the differences

are entrenched in the minds of people. The protagonist sees how her aunt and uncle, refugees from Punjab who lost their house and lands, live in reduced circumstances as mill workers. They have only limited access to resources, employment, education, and social mobility because of the restriction imposed by the majority. Her other uncle, who is the chief engineer at the mill, helps them to secure a job, whereas his wife, the upper-middle-class aunt, looks down on her less privileged relatives. The same aunt treats Sobti better because she is well connected, and their family does not suffer any economic setback due to the socio-political change in the country. Even kin maintain social distance and make value judgements based on their refugee relatives' current economic position and their dependence on others' goodwill. Thus, the refugees are not only othered based on their cultural and ethnic identity but also their reduced economic circumstances, underlining their status as outsiders and limiting their freedom and independence.

Marginalisation as a Mechanism of Othering

The focus shifts to how the *difference* and *othering* lead to structured marginalisation, where a particular group is continuously excluded and discriminated in social, cultural, political, and economic spheres. This is evident from Powell and Menendian's (2016) definition of othering as a "set of dynamics, processes, and structures that engender marginality and persistent inequality . . . based on group identities" (p. 17). Marginalisation based on cultural geography and ethnography has serious repercussions on the refugees' right to life with dignity as they are denied recognition, voice, and visibility. It often appears undisguised through systemic inequalities such as limited access to education, healthcare, and employment opportunities leading to fighting poverty, lack of resources and disenfranchisement. As Sobti hesitates to accept the job due to the unwelcoming atmosphere, Zutshi tries to shake her confidence by pointing out that no one expected her to come and another experienced candidate is also selected. He aims to discourage her so the position can go to a male candidate, which suits his interests. Later, he invites her to dine at the medical officer's house and promises to pick her up but never shows—having shifted his attention to the new candidate who arrived for the interview. He

needles her indecisive behaviour through sly and veiled comments. He does not even hesitate to find ways to place insurmountable obstacles in the path of her survival. Once the refugees are identified through the process of ‘othering’, the host country, through a set of processes and conditions, propagates inequality and marginality. As Daniel and Linder (2002) observe, “To be marginalized,....., is to be distanced from power and resources that enable self-determination in economic, political, and social setting” (p. 713). This dynamic is evident in Zutshi’s treatment of Sobti, wherein, ascertaining that she is a refugee woman, he places every obstacle in her path to dissuade her from gaining employment, therefore limiting her opportunity and resources.

In many cases, individuals suffer differential treatment and multiple oppressions on the grounds of several characteristics individually. Each individual belongs to more than one identity group. It is common for a woman’s multiple identities to be simultaneously subjected to discrimination—especially when, in addition to being a woman, she happens to belong to a marginalised group or an oppressed race or religion. In a number of ways, the protagonist is constantly excluded for being an outsider (a migrant from Delhi), a refugee (from Lahore and Gujrat), and a woman in Sirohi. The servants speculate on the reasons why a young single woman has to leave her home in search of a job instead of marrying. Even the food is prepared too spicy and not brought on time in the guest house. Employers as well as servants all alike isolate Sobti because they socially categorise her as an outsider and create a new kind of partition, as underscored in these lines: “There is Partition here as well. Where are these people from? Were they born and raised here? You are from the outside. This is what makes you a refugee” (Sobti, 2019, p. 53). Sobti, thus, experiences another kind of partition in the host land which creates a hostile working environment and negatively impacts her psyche, leading to feelings of alienation and low self-worth.

Holistic Integration: Internal Empowerment and External Social Support

Unless there is integration with the mainstream, refugees will continue to suffer further marginalisation and exclusion. Integration

will act as a barrier against discrimination to a great extent. In order to integrate, the othered and marginalised individuals must internally empower themselves and externally seek social support to withstand the pressure of exclusion, discrimination and social invisibility. In this regard, the protagonist exemplifies this dual strategy. First, she internally empowers herself to adapt to the lifestyle of the host society without having to lose her own cultural identity and outmanoeuvre the oppressing forces. As such, empowering oneself helps in acquiring a strong sense of confidence, autonomy, self-worth, and identity. These attributes help the individual to actively adapt to the new environment and find ways to resist, disrupt, and subvert the opposing forces while rejecting the imposed labels and stereotypes that restrict them. In doing so, she is able to reclaim her agency and identity and dismantle the psychological, emotional and social impact of othering and marginalisation. In this context, Sobti cultivates inner strength and exhibits the spirit of resistance as she navigates through the socio-political terrain of Sirohi in search of a sense of belonging and a redefined identity. Learning from the servant boy, Devla, that the other candidate, Mr Popat Lal, would get the job and Zutshi is telling everyone that she would not stay, Sobti is infuriated. However, she refuses to be silenced or invisibilised by the scheming of others. Finally, she decides to accept the job and subverts Zutshi's manipulation to oust her by submitting the joining report in the District Office, which in turn asserts her presence and her autonomy. This rebellious act becomes a significant movement in her journey because it symbolises her resistance to marginalising and oppressive forces that try to displace her. Accepting the job marks the beginning of her emotional and psychological integration into the new place, as she "began to feel a connection with this city spread over the ancient ground" (Sobti, 2019, p. 59). Submitting the report gives her a sense of relief and release, as though she feels lighter and all her troubles have disappeared. On her way to the guest house, when she encounters an infuriated Zutshi, who demands to know who gave her the authority to do as she wishes, she confidently replies that she is her own person and thinks for herself. This calm yet firm reply reflects her growing inner strength and unshakeable self-worth. Sobti is aware of the challenges she would

face in Sirohi, the social exclusion and even more discrimination from people like Zutshi, who will try to silence or isolate her. However, her inner strength and psychological resilience equip her to adapt to the lifestyle of the host society, withstand the oppressive forces and navigate the socio-political challenges with dignity.

Empowering oneself internally helps in gaining emotional and psychological resilience, which in turn aids in speaking out against discriminatory remarks, questioning biased assumptions, and refusing to conform to imposed stereotypes. Confrontation serves a dual purpose, as it exposes the prejudices embedded in social interactions and also forces the dominant group to recognise the humanity and dignity of the marginalised individual. Sobti experiences such a prejudiced interaction when she goes to the District Office to submit her joining letter, wherein the Head Clerk insults and stereotypes her as a refugee. Upon presenting the report, he pointedly asks if Zutshi directed her to submit it—meaning if she has Zutshi’s permission to submit it. She responds that she is acting in response to the appointment letter sent to her. Anticipating further manipulation, she retrieves the report back and makes a copy of it before resubmitting it—fearing they might try to give an advantage to the other candidate by falsely claiming that she failed to submit the report. When she steps out of the door, she hears the peon calling her and giving back her Parker pen. She overhears the clerk’s derisive remark: “Such an expensive pen for a refugee. Where must she have got it?” (Sobti, 2019, p. 53). The remark reveals a deeper prejudice—implying that a refugee having an expensive thing in her possession is only by an illegitimate means because she would be virtually dispossessed in the aftermath of Partition. Sobti angrily marches back into the office and replies it is a gift for her birthday and asks if he has any objection to her owning it. The clerk does not reply and pretends to look at a document. Sobti’s confrontation and contention make a powerful declaration that discriminatory assumptions and biased remarks will no longer be passively accepted or silently endured by the victims. In confronting marginalisation, she asserts her own right to voice her opinions while contesting the social hierarchies that define who belongs and who does not. In this way, Sobti’s act of defiance contributes to collective

resistance which appeals for broader social change and more inclusive spaces.

To facilitate physical integration, marginalised people must seek external support and build allies to create a sense of belonging with the place and people around them. Sobti, through her bold and straightforward personality, has gained the favour of the Maharani and cultivated the friendship of Miss William, the companion of the Maharani, in their first meeting. The Queen Mother's trust in her gives her hope that she can sustain herself in the traditionally male-dominated and hierarchical Sirohi society. The Maharani, who is the most privileged person in the Sirohi community, advocates for the welfare of a refugee girl. She praises Sobti for her self-confidence in submitting the joining report and calls her a "brave and clever girl" and tells her these qualities are "the mark of a displaced person" who is beginning to make her own way in the world (Sobti, 2019, p. 73). Her recognition and appreciation of Sobti's determination and courage act as a symbolic validation of Sobti's efforts and resilience. She, thus, encourages and supports Sobti to pave a way for herself in Sirohi. As such, Sobti, amidst all struggles, establishes a good interpersonal relationship and affinity with the people around her. The Maharani stands in solidarity with Sobti against the systems of oppression. This pivotal moment of considerateness from a figure of privilege towards someone who is socially othered and marginalised suggests that effective external social support plays a transformative role in dismantling structural inequality.

This support becomes inevitable when Sobti encounters subtle yet manipulative resistance from local officials like the Inspector and Mr Champak Lal, who are tasked with the duty of helping Sobti to choose an accommodation in Sirohi. They try to make Sobti accept a house in the bazaar, which she dislikes. All the other houses shown are small and rudimentary. This gesture reveals that marginalised individuals are expected to accept the bare minimum. The Inspector reminds her that it is a suitable accommodation and how she is earning her 'wages for free', as the preschool is yet to open. All of this is said so courteously she could not show her anger or talk back. She silently laughs at the whole farce and thinks, "What sort of houses had they

shown her? Those were some truly amazing conveniences. It could be that such arrangements were the standard for refugees” (Sobti, 2019, p. 86). She is no fool to be taken by their games. She deftly decodes these microaggressions and navigates through their little games by refusing to be manipulated by their words. She asserts her choice to live in a cottage, which they try to dissuade by stating that it is haunted. Instead of reacting confrontationally, she employs subtle resistance as she writes to Miss William and gets the permission of the Maharani to live in the cottage. Choosing her own living space symbolises her finally finding a sense of belonging and connectedness with the place. It provides a quiet reprieve, living in the cottage as if “a pleasant dream had been granted her in the midst of a dust storm. So lovely after the trials she’d faced up to now” (Sobti, 2019, p. 87). Thus, she circumvents the obstructive officials and reclaims agency over her living conditions through the external support. It marks the beginning of her metamorphosis from a displaced outsider to a fearless individual who is starting to establish a place for herself in the new environment. Consequently, Sobti’s journey shows not only resistance to marginalisation but also the creation and establishment of spaces of inclusion and recognition. Earning the Queen Mother’s trust and support leads her to become the governess to the royal heir, Tej Singh Maharaja. Sobti, thus, transitions from being a helpless, lost refugee girl to a respected educator of Sirohi’s future ruler. This reveals how her inner strength, self-assertion, and emotional and psychological resilience, compounded with the external support systems, can empower the marginalised to reshape their lives and destinies.

Conclusion

In conclusion, *A Gujarat Here, a Gujarat There* is often interpreted as a tale of Partition loss and dislocation, but it is rarely examined through the diasporic lens of refugee marginalisation and discrimination. The novel sheds light on how refugees, particularly women, face layered othering as displaced individuals and as outsiders in their new socio-political environments. The refugees are ascribed a negative identity which creates a divide between them (the other) and the mainstream, inevitably leading to marginalisation and constant microaggressions. In this context, the narrative delineates the

inequalities, subtle and overt acts of discrimination, group-based distinctions, and institutional bias that refugees have to endure while trying to rebuild their lives. The lack of integration in the host country inevitably increases the scope of ‘othering’. In order to integrate, refugees must internally empower themselves to adapt to the lifestyle of the host society without having to lose their own cultural identity and to outmanoeuvre the oppressing forces, which aids in the emotional and psychological integration into the new place. In a way, this leads to confrontation and contesting that subvert the system of othering and marginalisation and dismantle its effects. The novel also emphasises the need for effective external social support to create a sense of belonging and connectedness with the place and people around them. Undoubtedly, Sobti’s journey and metamorphosis reflect the effort of the collective to empower and transform their lives in post-Partition India.

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