

The Illusion of Home and Belongingness: Understanding the Idea of Home in Kunal Basu's *Kalkatta* (2015)

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ABSTRACT : The idea of “home” does not offer a definite and concrete definition, as this particular term always demands a nuanced and multi-layered understanding of the aspects associated with it, such as, location, meaning, symbolism, emotion and belonging. However, many scholars admit the presence of a fixed and specific place/space of home, with which the assumptions of home are associated. Again, many writings on home studies explore other fundamental aspects of home by going beyond its physical structure. The idea of home invites more debate when it is viewed from the perspective of the migrants’ lives, as human mobility complicates the idea of home, resulting in a new debate between being at home and homelessness, belongingness and non-belongingness within a new form of political-cultural-economic ecology. Kunal Basu’s 2015 novel *Kalkatta* offers a gripping exploration of the intersecting themes of migration, refugee resettlement, alienation, identity, belonging and the process of home-making through the narration of the protagonist Jamshed Alam aka Jami. The novel, by going beyond the confinement of dwelling, illustrates the notion of home as not merely a physical space and problematizes the assumptions associated with home, such as, belonging,

identity, aspirations, emotion and performance. This paper seeks to explore how for a refugee, the idea of home becomes a contested space that is fractured, performative, and intricately entwined with ambition, societal alienation, identity politics, and urban marginality. This paper also argues that home, for the refugees, is not confined within a place or space, but it seems like a process, an endless search which they continue throughout their lives.

Keywords: *home, belonging, homeless, alienation, Kolkata, Kalkatta.*

INTRODUCTION

The idea of “home” does not offer a definite and concrete definition, as this particular term always demands a nuanced and in-depth understanding of the aspects associated with it, such as, location, meaning, symbolism, emotion and belonging. The notion of home invites more nuanced debate when it comes to study the migrant lives. Different kinds of human mobility, such as economic migration, internal and transnational mobility, refugee crisis etc., complicate the idea of home, resulting in a new debate between being at home and homelessness, belongingness and non-belongingness within a new form of political-cultural-economic ecology. Earlier in the migration studies, scholars have problematized the idea of ‘home’ keeping its association with ‘homeland,’ the loss of connection and past life in the country of origin after displacement. However, recent studies on home and migration tend to focus on ‘home’ as not a physical space in homeland but as a process of home-making, tied to the notion of belongingness (Blunt and Dowling; Miller). It has been argued that, the notion of home to the first-generation refugees/migrants throughout the globe, is marked by a sense of nostalgia, romantic association with homeland and a pain and regret for separation.

To them, the loss of home is a permanent loss, often characterized by traumatic condition, lifelong mourning, and the presence of the past in the present. However, on the other side, the following generations, growing up in the host country, always accomplish a wishful longing for their ‘imagined home,’ as they try to adapt and assimilate with the culture of the host nation.

Kunal Basu’s 2015 novel *Kalkatta* offers a gripping exploration of the intersecting issues of migration, refugee resettlement, alienation, identity, belonging and the process of home making through the narration of the protagonist Jamshed Alam aka Jami. Jami, a second-generation Muslim refugee grows up on the Zakaria street, an underbelly of the city of Kolkata, after being smuggled into the country as a child from Bangladesh. Placing Jami in a precarious condition between societal exclusion and his continuous attempt to survive, Basu explores the fragility of belongingness and the condition of being at home. The novel by going beyond the confinement of dwelling, illustrates the notion of home as not merely a physical space and problematizes the assumptions associated with it, such as, belonging, identity, aspirations, emotion and performance. This paper seeks to explore how for a refugee, the idea of home becomes a contested space that is fractured, performative, and intricately entwined with ambition, societal alienation, identity politics, and urban marginality. This paper also argues that home, for the refugees, is not confined within a place or space, but it seems like a process, an endless search which they continue throughout their lives.

Home and Belonging in Trans-national Migration: Indian Context

It is historically true that the South Asian countries, especially the Indian subcontinent, after World War II, have witnessed the largest trans-national population flows, a great influx of refugees

and displaced persons. The partition of India in 1947 and the independence of Bangladesh, erstwhile East Pakistan from West Pakistan in 1971 have caused two of the world's largest cross-border migration in twentieth century. India witnessed an influx of refugees from both sides of the country in 1947 and 1971. These two incidents and the concomitant violence of forced migration compelled over 10 million of people to be uprooted from their homelands, resulting in the trauma of displacement and homelessness. The memories of homes and belonging to the homeland continued to haunt the first-generation migrants, mainly Hindus, non-Muslims and untouchables (*Namashudras*) both from Pakistan and Bangladesh.

The common aspect which binds these episodes of forced migration is "a sense of rootlessness and bereavement resulting from loss of home and homeland" (Singh 60). For the refugees, the concept of home becomes "a mythic place of desire," a place of "no returns even if it is possible to revisit the geographical territory that is seen as the place of origin" (Brah 192). Cartier and Lew opine that, "following a change in home, old and new places often vie for 'homeness', and as each new place becomes more of a home, each old home comes to hold a sense of 'past homeness'" (278). To these 'uprooted' people their past homes and belongings are coloured by the "elements of romanticization" (Vander Veer 7), and are remembered through memory.

Scholars of migration studies have attempted to conceptualize the notion of home in the migratory process by going beyond its physical structure, what is known as house. Boccagni offers a novel perspective to study the home-making process of the refugees by understanding the notion of home in association with sedentariness and mobility – moving and making a home. He conceptualizes his notion of home as "both a material environment and a set of meaningful relationships, re-collections and aspirations to be

emplaced, successfully or not, over space and time” (xxiv). For the displaced, the making of a home, according to him is a “search,” which indicates a continuous negotiation with the previous home in the place which was left, and on the other hand the refugees’ unending attempt to make a home in the new place. To Boccagni, migrants’ home is a relationship and a site of belonging to a place which is “performative” and “interactive,” marked by “security, familiarity and control” (7).

Living in a Liminal Space: Home-making and Quest for Identity in *Kalkatta*

The novel *Kalkatta* (2015) begins with the first-person narration of the protagonist Jami’s birth history in a refugee camp in Dhaka, Bangladesh and his arrival into the city of Kolkata, India as a member of a refugee family with his parents and physically challenged sister, Miriam. Jami’s family has crossed the border twice – first, his grandparents were forced to migrate from Bihar, India to the then East Pakistan due to the violence against Muslims after 1947 Indo-Pakistan partition; and second, his parents with Jami and his sister move to India again, come to a city “praised by one and all, and called by various names: Kolkata, Calcutta, Kalkatta” (Basu 7). After the arrival at the city, they manage to arrange a shelter for their own at the Number 14, Zakaria Street with the help of the local political leader of the ruling party, Uncle Mushtak. The whole space of Number 14 where the displaced families like that of Jami live, is controlled and monitored by Uncle Mushtak and his mother, who force the people to join and serve their party and to work for their factory. The living condition of Jami’s family on Zakaria street is nothing better than that of the animals in zoo – confined, subjugated and marginalized, as is evident in Jami’s mother’s statement, “We’ve come from the jungle to a zoo” (23). Primarily, it is the Number 14 at the

Zakaria Street which addresses the particular location of Jami's home. Many scholars have attempted to conceptualize 'home' in association with a particular 'place' (Easthope; McDowell; Proshansky et al.). Mary Douglas's 1991 essay emphasizes the notion of location of home when she writes, "The question is not "How?" nor "Who?" nor "When?" but "Where is your home?" (289) – thereby highlighting one of the fundamental aspects of home – the presence of a fixed and specific place/space with which the ideas of home and belonging are associated.

To understand the complex notions of home and belongingness, it is important to look at the family and its members, as the family, in most cases, is the very first source of belongingness which transforms a place into a home. In this context, I would like to refer to the sociologist Thomas F. Gieryn, who notes three "necessary and sufficient" features that define a place as home: "a geographical location, a material form, and investment with meaning and value" (464-465). However, home as a place, having a geographical location can be "variable and multiple" (Kusenbach and Paulsen 3), meaning a person can have more than one home in multiple locations, the location of the home can be changed in due course of time, and "that home is a matter of degree and can be missing altogether" (3). The second component, "material form" of a home, meaning the bundle of "stuff" that constitutes a home, can also be variable, varying from "an overbearing amount" to "absolute minimal," from "institutional furnishings" to "the natural trappings of a cave," and from "generic," to "natural" (Kusenbach and Paulsen 4). The third feature, the "investment with meaning and value", invested in the location of home and the material form, is the core reason for making the home as a place of belonging, emotional attachment, safety, security, and thereby creates a complex sentiment of home that leads to a relationship which connects the inhabitants with

the particular place (Kusenbach and Paulsen 4).

In the case of Jami, “the investment with meaning and value”, invested at the Number 14 makes him share a strong sense of belongingness and emotional affection towards his home and family. It is his mother who first ignites his ambition of becoming a “true Kalkatta-wallah” by securing a good and respectable job like the Bengalis living in the city. She dreams that “My Jami will show us his real worth. Just wait till his exams are over” (50). His mother’s presence and dream occupy a large space in his consciousness, that forms his belonging to his family and Number 14. Whenever he roams the city or interacts with his friends who are allegedly recognized as “most wanted criminals of Kalkatta” (21), he always hides his misdeeds to his mother as he thinks, “that would’ve surely spoiled her dreams of Kalkatta” (31). Apart from his “Ammi”, Jami has a strong bonding with his sister Miriam aka Miri, whom he considers “my best friend” (26). Miri always tries to make Jami understand the lives of the refugees, orphans and the people who are left out and inspires him to be a financially stable person in the city. Financial stability and having a home of one’s own can liberate a refugee from her condition of homelessness and help her “live like everyone else lives in Kalkatta” (228). One of the reasons of Jami’s sense of belongingness, comfort and home about the Number 14 is its role as a protective space for him and Miri, where “others do not have access” (Fathi 981), as their parents feel “safer here than at the camp, not having to keep up a constant watch to protect their girl from pimps and their boy from agents who might take him away to race camels in Arabia” (30). To illustrate an individual’s nuanced feeling and belonging to the location of home, Jan Duyvendak suggests three aspects of home: “familiarity”, “haven”, and “heaven” (38-39). For “familiarity,” Duyvendak indicates a person’s thorough acquaintance with a place that has been evolved over the years. Though, familiarity

may have a negative impact in some cases, yet by and large, it is associated with “feelings of comfort and the reduction of fear” (Kusenbach and Paulsen 4), having a close resemblance to what Tuan (1974) called “rootedness” and Heidegger (1971) conceptualized as “dwelling”. The second aspect, “haven,” having a positive impact upon individual, involves a feeling of “safety, security, and privacy, which most often relate to the micro level of the house” (Duyvendak 39). Haven is commonly viewed as a comfortable experience, a home and is commonly associated with Tuan’s (1996) notion of the “hearth” and Bachelard’s (1958) metaphor of the “nest.” In this regard, the Number 14 in the earlier days of Jami can be analysed as what Duyvendak calls “familiarity” as the place assures the sense of comfort and security, and “haven”, as the Number 14 “pertain[s] to feelings of safety, security, and privacy...” (39). Boccagni’s insightful exploration of the concept of “familiarity” in the process of home-making is also relatable here, where he explains that both at cognitive and emotional levels, familiarity refers to “space, stability, routine, continuity or even permanence ... the connection made between the domestic space and larger settings.” (7).

In spite of living a life of a refugee in the most common way, they, from the very first day of their arrival, foster a wishful aspiration – becoming “a true Kalkatta-wallah and Kalkatta-wali” (Basu 8), by having a home of their own. Home is a place which confirms one’s own agency and subjectivity, allowing one to live freely from the “rules and expectations placed upon them in the public or work worlds” (Kusenbach and Paulsen 8). The philosopher Edward Casey argues that the place is “constitutive” in nature with the association of a sense of self, and vice versa, “the relationship between self and place is not just one of reciprocal influence... but also more radically, of constitutive coingredience: each is essential to the being of the other. In effect, *there is no place*

without self and no self without place (684, *emphasis original*). Jami's sense of loss of the self is characterized by his loss of agency at Number 14 as their 'home' is not permanent, forcing him to be haunted with a feeling of homelessness, as he narrates, "I hadn't thought of Number 14 as temporary, like a refugee camp that we might have to leave one day. ...even if we had to leave, it wouldn't be the end..." (Basu 64). This sense of being homeless is again highlighted when Uncle Mushtak, "... [their] protector had turned into a landlord" (86), demands rent for staying in his house at Number 14. Their process of home-making and reclaiming the agency in the city of Kolkata starts with the recognition of their legitimacy in the city, having a valid identity card, "you have a fixed identity, you become a *real* person" (53). To acquire that legitimacy, Jami's birth certificate is issued with the help of Uncle Mushtak, though illegally, in order to take admission in school to fulfil his aspiration of a bright career in the future.

With an official identity card, on one hand, Jami becomes a citizen, an insider of the country, but on the other, he always feels a sense of alienation in the same society. This peculiar position between an insider and an outsider is, for him, always creating "a tension between being at home but not belonging to it" (Fathi 987). His sense of belongingness expands to the community building with the other Muslim refugee boys of his age, likes of Rakib, Munna, GG, Bobby, in order to overlook the residential exclusion and religio-cultural marginalization, faced by him in his each and every negotiation. Jami's engagement with his community can be understood by the argument of Alund and colleagues, that asserts "a shared consciousness of institutionally embedded residential segregation and social subordination creates a sounding board for claims for social justice as a major expression of what home-making among contemporary youth is about" (137). In this way, the second-generation refugee youths, in an urban space,

by fighting against the societal inequalities and alienation, claim their right to, and form their identity in the city space through “...everyday creative struggles of home-making and through building support and solidarity communities” (Fathi 987).

Apart from participating in a community with a shared consciousness, the refugee youths also include their support and belonging to a football team in their process of home-making, as “home can mean a locality ... have developed attachment to a neighbourhood square or to a local football team” (Lloyd and Vasta 1). Jami and his friends also develop such kind of attachment to a local football team, Mohammedan Sporting Club. Jami says, “as supporters of Mohammedan Sporting Club, we were regulars at football matches” (Basu 40). In this context, Paul Dimeo’s statement is important; he states, “Football has the capacity to unite communities, produce and reproduce identities, maintain and shape social formations, and to create identities of a specific nature that draw upon wider social issues in diverse and sometimes contradictory ways” (105). Jami’s feeling of affection, belonging and community, produced by the football club, is thwarted by his mother, as he narrates, “Ammi didn’t like us supporting Mohammedan Sporting. She thought we should back a proper Bengali club like East Bengal...” (Basu 40). This oppositional position of Jami and his mother regarding supporting a football club, can be understood from a broader perspective of refugees’ identity politics. Historically speaking, Mohammedan Sporting Club, at the time of India’s anti-colonial struggle, was seen as a platform where the peaceful coexistence of two communities – the Hindu and the Muslim was challenged and consequently, it became a site for “transition from community to communal in Bengal football” (Bandyopadhyay 137). The football team, by performing on the field, was able to instil a sense of rage and animosity into the young Muslim supporters against the Hindu

population. On this communal tension on the maidan, Suranjan Das aptly remarks, "...the Mohammedan Sporting Club in football matches enraged Muslim feelings which were expressed in sporadic violence against the Hindu" (Das 170). Hence, Jami's mother never wants to see his son as a supporter of a football club which is historically associated with communal violence. Despite being a Muslim, she keeps aside her religious identity and includes herself within the broader corpus of refugee identity, assimilating with the other East Bengal refugees in the city of Kolkata. Her appeal to Jami to support East Bengal football team is for the establishment of their social identity, asserting, "refugees must support refugees" (Basu 40), as after partition, the East Bengal Club was formed to represent the cultural self of the Hindu refugees and to "win against the 'other', that is, the West Bengali Hindus" (Bandyopadhyay 173).

Jami's sense of belongingness and being at home with his family members at the Zakaria Street gets disrupted when he starts working first as a masseur at the Champaka, and then as a gigolo, a male prostitute in order to fulfil his mother's dream of becoming a "true Kalkatta-wallah". Visiting the affluent localities of Kolkata, shopping at the high-rise malls, spending time at the café with his "customers", compel him to emotionally detach from what he knows as his 'home'. His engagement with Monica Goswami, one of his 'customers', having lunch and dinner in the fancy hotels with her, wearing branded clothes and exploration of the glamorous Kolkata make him to forget the dark alleys of Zakaria street, losing the belongingness to the Number 14 and affection towards his mother. His profession and detachment with his family members turn him into a "stranger in Number 14, living like a refugee in [his] own family" (Basu 96). After knowing his profession, his mother also gives up dreaming of her Jami becoming a "real Kalkatta-wallah, the son who'd end the

struggles of three generations” (153). Hence, Jami’s ambition of becoming a “true Kalkatta-wallah” by performing as a gigolo and consequently his detachment with his family can be understood as his journey from belongingness to non-belongingness, being at home to homelessness, and eventually, at some point of time he also feels that he “didn’t have a permanent address any more” like the stray dogs in the city (278).

Home in Everywhere: Feeling of Home and the Unhomely Self

Debate on the notion of home, in most cases, exclude the experiences of the prostitutes, as scholars think that the prostitutes disrupt the notion of home by violating the norms of traditional and heterosexual home. Selling of sexual services, as Hubbard argues, “outside the ordered institutions of the family and the home ... has come to represent a threat to heterosexual norms” (204). The prostitutes vehemently defy the norms of home-making, first by placing the sexual encounters, which is strictly considered a homely experience, at the commercial space; and secondly, commercial sex is viewed as a contrary notion to the process of home-making, as the latter is regarded as a process of “creating and understanding forms of dwelling and belonging” (Blunt and Dowling 23). However, the prostitutes’ move from one place to another, leaving one home to attend another, can be best understood by following Bhabha’s idea of “unhomely self”. Bhabha conceptualizes “unhomely self” as not a condition of homelessness, rather a peculiar feeling of home when one is homeless and a sense of homelessness when one is at home. The person who is unhomely always moves, physically as well as emotionally, from one home to another, as an everyday practice of her life against any kind of displacement and subjugation.

In this novel, the protagonist, Jami, to fulfil his mother’s

dream, chooses the profession of a “gigolo, male escort, toyboy, playboy...” (Basu 110). Hailing from a dark underbelly of Kolkata, Zakaria Street, which is infamous for being a place for the most wanted criminals, Jami after becoming a gigolo, experiences his visibility, presence and also his public recognition in the public space, that he always longs for. It is evident in his narration when he says, “People pay attention to you when you’re with a beautiful woman, doormen salute and open doors; rather than throwing down a menu, waiters unfold napkins on your lap” (83). His intimacy with Monica creates a sense of belongingness and comfortability, through which he recollects his childhood memories of his mother, as during shopping, he thinks, “she seemed like Ammi” (84). Again, at some point, Monica’s presence in his life seems more requisite than that of his mother, as he does not wish to return to Zakaria Street from the comfort zone which he creates with Monica. He regrets, “Losing Mrs Goswami meant more than missing out on dinners in five-star hotels and returning to my old world with Ammi’s leftovers” (96). Here, home for Jami, is a liminal space of conflicting experiences, centred on the binary oppositions of camaraderie and segregation, privacy and publicity, marginalization and belongingness, strangeness and familiarity. It is the “unhomely self” of Jami, who dwells between home and homelessness, challenging the normative notion of home and dwelling. As Bhabha opines that the “unhomely self” does not mean being homeless, but conveys “the estranging sense of the relocation of the home and the world in an unhallowed place” (142), blurring the boundary between the home and the world. Again, in this profession, a person always has to anticipate threats from the external world, in the forms of police, police informer or the other groups of the same profession. Jami is also aware of these threats from the external world, as he describes, “Gigolos were known to be vicious to poachers. The street

belonged to them along with all those who were looking for some night action” (Basu 214). Hence, on one hand the street seems like home to the gigolo, and on the other, they feel homeless on this same place because of the “the spectral presence of ‘others’ in the home” (Bennett 964). As a ‘product’, leading a life of a gigolo, Jami continues to move from one customer to another, from “North to South Kalkatta” in order to give “treatment to [his] parties” (Basu 120), leading to the feeling of experiencing home neither here nor there, yet also here and there. It is his profession, which makes him financially stable, wearing good clothes, allows him to be able to buy anything for his Ammi and Miri and to feel a “true Kalkatta-wallah”. As an unhomely self, he yearns for home everywhere by moving from one place to another; to him, home has become, “a rather generalized notion of an “elsewhere” that constitutes the real place of belonging” (Olwig 216).

Into the Mainstream: Gaining and Losing of Home and Belonging

Jami’s identity as a refugee and a member of a religious minority community leads him to be perceived as a ‘stranger other’ in the public space of Kolkata, the city, which is famously regarded as a place of Bengali intelligentsia. Indeed, the city is rich in Bengali culture, but it is also true that the city hosts an ample number of people who are not Bengali, belonging to different ethnic groups. As a second-generation refugee, unlike his parents, Jami participates in various social and cultural groups, gets acquainted with many persons, mostly affluent, residing in the city, whom, he considers as the specimens of real Kalkatta-wallah. His engagement with the people from different socio-cultural groups blurs the line between the home and the world as well as between the first and the second-generation refugees. Understanding and experiencing “the values, traditions and practices of the society”,

is a tactic, adopted by the second-generation migrants in order to settle in the new place, which leads to reconfiguring of “individual and collective identities” (Vasta 42). In this process, migrants are very often perceived as “the stranger”, “the other”, as their sudden presence in the society causes a sense of eeriness to the settled citizen.

In the case of Jami, his place of residence, that is, the Zakaria Street, has already been disregarded as a place of criminals, and his religious identity places him in a vulnerable position, where he repeatedly experiences the lack of recognition and belongingness, what Vasta calls “a stranger at home” (42). It is evident in the speech of Nasrin, wife of the political leader Dr Sala, when she remarks, “All Bangladeshis are thieves!” (Basu 17). Again, when Jami gets a job in a passport company, named “Galaxy”, he becomes aware of how Muslim citizens are treated during the process of issuing their passports, simply suspecting them as terrorists. As Rajesh Sharma of the Galaxy Passport Company tells Jami, “There’ll be many more checks by the police ... we could get into trouble if a terrorist was arrested after a bomb blast and it so happened that his passport was arranged by one Rajesh Sharma of Galaxy helped by his subagent” (62).

Jami’s longing to become a “true Kalkatta-wallah” is based on his feeling of an outsider and the lack of recognition and belongingness in a society which is culturally dominated by the Bengali people. His aspiration to become a Kalkatta-wallah is surely a step towards climbing the predominant power hierarchy in the society in order to gain recognition and to uplift himself from the “stranger other” to a familiar one in the city. In this regard, he encounters as well as experiences some psychosocial changes during the process of acculturation and assimilation, which can be viewed as a tactic where a migrant individual creates contact with the members of majority group and vows to adapt

their social and cultural values in the host land. Acculturation and assimilation, to a migrant, who is culturally bereaved, assists to “gain a semblance of equilibrium”, resulting in the formation of a sense of belonging to the new homeland (Bhugra and Becker 22). Jami, in order to assimilate, comes into contact with a Kalkatta-wallah, Anirban Mitra, who illustrates three rules of becoming a crucial member of the city. They are:

Rule number one, you have to believe that you know everything. It’s a must. ... Number two, you must accept that rumours are more important than facts. ... Rule number three requires that you make a grand gesture every now and then. (67)

Another one, Deepti, with whom Jami meets in a gathering of a poetry group in Mandira’s house, tells him:

There are only three absolute requirements, nothing more, nothing less. First, owning an original painting from the great Bengal school, not a fake, mind you. Something like a Jamini Roy or even Hemen Majumdar, ... Second, you need to properly display all twenty-five volumes of Tagore’s works, even if you haven’t managed to get through any one of them. ... teach your cook the fine art of making a pure vegetarian meal without a hint of fish or fowl. (140-141)

After a close engagement with these so called “true Kalkatta-wallah[s]”, Jami understands that these people who can spend time by discussing poetry, art and culture, propose their thought in a way that is completely based on theoretical abstraction, devoid of any practical and real-life experiences, “A Kalkatta-wallah has learnt to drive his thoughts away from things that hang like a cloud over Zakaria Street” (219). Jami builds a relationship of trust and belonging with people like Anirban, which he considers “a comfortable home” (169), but eventually, the sheer hollowness in the thought process and attitude of these people makes Jami

feel the same lack of recognition and belongingness again. In this context, John W. Berry's observation on the process of acculturation can be noted, as he opines that the very process of acculturation includes a psychological model of going towards, moving against and moving away from a stimulus. The process of acculturation always needs an interaction between two cultures and most of the cases, the dominant one influences the other; however, during the adaptation, there is a possibility of rejection or deculturation (Berry 25-30).

All through his life, Jami experiences the futility of his aspiration, the lack of recognition and constantly feels the sense of non-belongingness and homelessness. He realizes that being the son of a refugee parents, it is impossible for him to own a home for himself, to be a "true Kalkatta-wallah" in the city of Kolkata, as he thinks, "it is impossible for a son and grandson of refugees to live normally in Kalkatta" (255). Gradually his sense of belongingness fades away, and it is again recovered when he meets Pablo, the little son of his friend, Mandira. He discovers that his own situation and that of Pablo are the same, as they both are stuck in a vulnerable state with no one by their side; "neither of [them] had friends or a future in Kalkatta" (255). His sense of belongingness to Pablo is similar to what Duyvendak refers to "heaven", the third feature of home, "a public place where one can collectively be, express and realize oneself; where one feels publicly free and independent" (38). Here, individual is allowed to embody "shared histories" and it itself becomes "a material and/or symbolic place with one's own people and activities" (38). The home here is not limited to one's own self or household, it goes on to extend its boundary to encompass a wider arena that includes public locations, such as neighbourhoods, cities, regions, and even the nation states. Hence, the concept of home is interpreted in terms of its association with belonging, safety,

privacy, comfort, desire and community. The self-effacing love and affection for Pablo reaffirms his sense of belongingness, and that is so strong that he vows to quit his profession as a gigolo and lead a life of a gentleman. He feels a different sensation when he enters Mandira's house to spend time with Pablo, as this house does not compel him to be alert and treat him as a product. The presence of Pablo in the house creates a sense of being at home for Jami, as he feels:

It invited me to stay for no reason. As Pablo and I became friends, I had felt something strong inside, making me think of every reason to keep on staying, as if leaving him would mean giving up something I'd lost long ago. (210)

Jami's sense of belongingness and being at home, that revolves around Pablo, is again shattered by the child's mother, Mandira, when after knowing his profession as a gigolo, she does not want to continue any connection with him, however, he is extremely keen to clarify to her the reason behind choosing a profession of a gigolo. In a monologue, Jami vehemently illustrates his failure to secure a respectable job that he always wants; his destiny of being brought up in a refugee family subdues him in achieving his dream. As he says, "The *real* story, I'd tell her, hadn't started with Monica but the day Abbu left Geneva [a refugee camp in Dhaka for Bihari Muslims] to take us across the border to Kalkatta" (307). From the cover design onwards, Basu, through the text of *Kalkatta* repeatedly exploits the image of stray dogs to indicate the homeless condition of people like Jami, who want to achieve the 'home' but fail repeatedly. The death of Jami hit by a running taxi draws the connection between his ultimate fate and that of the stray dogs. As Jami in his last monologue, says:

Just like our first night at Number 14, I'd seen a giant form taking off noisily from the branches. It had silenced the dogs, but not the screeching tyres of the Devil taxi setting off down

the lane in a headlong rush to complete one last errand. Thus far, I had managed to stay clear of its path but had known that it'd come calling someday. It'd be impossible to avoid that moment, because of the pain that would've numbed all other sensations by then. None though, could've spotted the danger, until the Devil's breath was too close, burning hot over my face. The blow was unexpected. It shot me off my feet like a rocket, sending me up and flying high, higher even than the gulmohar. (309)

CONCLUSION

The understanding and interpretation of Jami's experience in the city of Kolkata as narrated in the novel *Kalkatta*, enable one to understand the life of the refugees in the city, who are forced to live in a ghetto, leading a life in the most unpleasant way. Their continuous struggle to accomplish a life of a respectable common citizen is always thwarted by the sense of lack of recognition and belongingness. From his childhood, Jami, a second-generation refugee, is brought up in the poverty-stricken refugee ghetto on the Zakaria Street, experiences alienation, a sense of homelessness and non-belongingness in the society. He is influenced by the predominant autonomy of the Bengali culture and consequently tries to climb the inherent power structure of the city to be a "true-Kalkatta-wallah". From making friends in his locality to getting associated with the affluent individuals in the city, he continues his search for home and belongingness. To him, home is not a place that is associated with dwelling, but a quest, which he carries on till his last breath. However, at the end of his life, he finds his resemblance to the stray dogs as he remains homeless and feels the lack of belongingness and recognition, and this ultimate identification leads to his realization that he is "one of many creatures that inhabited Kalkatta..." (309).

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