

Roots of Power and Resistance: An Allegorical Reading of Syed Waliullah's *Lal Shalu* and *Tree Without Roots*

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Abstract

This paper traces the sources of power that Majeed, the protagonist of Syed Waliullah's *Tree Without Roots* (1967), manipulates to claim his influential position in Mahabbatpur – a fictional village in the then East Pakistan. *Tree without Roots* is Waliullah's own transcreation of his novel *Lal Shalu* (1948). While “lal shalu” literally means “red cloth,” the significant change in the title of the transcreation – with its recurrent use of images of roots, rootlessness and uprooting – reflects the author's added emphasis on Majeed's obsession with power. Exploiting social and cultural elements, such as religion, superstition, gender inequality and class structure, Majeed creates an atmosphere of fear to rule over Mahabbatpur. He becomes economically and socially powerful, for a time dominating the entire village with his narrative before any hint of resistance. This paper comparatively analyses the original novel and its transcreation, examining the works in the context of the Partition of India and Pakistan in 1947, a division based on religion – the chief of source of Majeed's power. The paper interprets Majeed's vulnerability and eventual downfall as an allegory of the futility of separate nation states based on religion.

Keywords: Transcreation, Partition, Power-knowledge, National Education Policy, Patriarchy and Resistance

Tree Without Roots (1967), Syed Waliullah's own transcreation of his Bangla novel *Lal Shalu* (1948) – literally meaning “red cloth,” traces the rise to power of a seemingly harmless *muezzin*, Majeed. Majeed uses his cunning to transform himself from a stranger to a person of eminence in Mahabbatpur, where he sets up his establishment on shaky ground. Mahabbatpur is evidently an ordinary village of East Bengal, and like any other village, it is home to a number of religious poor farming people. Majeed is not a native of the place. He was forced long ago to leave his home “where there were too many people and not enough food” (*Tree Without Roots* 7). He lived for a while in the Garo Hills where he worked as a *muezzin* to, in Majeed's words, shine “the light of God” on the “illiterate” and “infidel” locals (6). His life was lonely and difficult. To improve his economic and social condition,



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Majeed travels downhill. He takes with him religion and intoxicates the inhabitants of Mahabbatpur, exploiting them for his personal gain. It is here that he strikes roots deep in the soil. Majeed uses certain mechanisms to maintain a position of power in the locality and challenges all threats to his power. This article comparatively analyzes *Lal Shalu* and *Tree Without Roots* taking into consideration the historical context in which the works were composed.

Waliullah started writing *Lal Shalu* while he was in Kolkata sometime before the Partition of 1947. In the background of the novel is the formation of India and the two Pakistans – countries founded “in the context of religious and/or Islamic zeal” (Maksud 219, our translation). After Partition, Waliullah came to Dhaka, where he completed *Lal Shalu* and published it in 1948. The Partition, religious riots, and mass migration form the backdrop of the novel, where we find a common man turned conman abusing religion as a tool to reach a powerful position. The source of Majeed’s power is the *mazar*, which is not really the resting place of a holy man, but a forgotten tomb on the outskirts of Mahabbatpur. At the beginning of the novel, we find the grave “oozing with damp rot,” with two collapsed walls and “moss-overgrown blackened bricks” visible on the remaining ones (10). Majeed, with his narrative power, transforms this grave into the *mazar* of Pir Shah Sadeque. Sometimes he is afraid that he may not be able to sustain his con-game for long, but the people of Mahabbatpur are “so simple and good-hearted” that he is reassured in his ability to trick the villagers (12).

Upon Majeed’s arrival at Mahabbatpur, we notice him speaking at a gathering of people before the house of Khaleque. The protagonist could not have chosen a better place to announce his dramatic arrival in the village. He is drawn to the wealthiest man in the area. Seeking a powerful ally in the process of gaining control is part of his game; deposing that ally to become the dominant one is the next step. In Tanvir Mokammel’s film *Lal Shalu* (2001), Majeed is provided with a *mazar*-assistant, a would-be Majeed, who does not appear in Waliullah’s original novel or in the transcreation. The assistant, a menacing figure, has the potential to oust Majeed and seize power in the way that Majeed subtly overthrows Khaleque to become the most influential person in Mahabbatpur. The conman refrains from using force in his bid for authority. His ploy is more elusive and functions at an ideological level.

Michel Foucault, who theorized the nature of power, notes that after the end of the eighteenth century, the nature of exercise of power began to change. In the place of direct force, the process of domination began to incorporate “subtle coercion” (Foucault 181). Discourse was institutionalized to allow power to be “at once continuous, uninterrupted, adapted, and ‘individualized’” (Foucault 61). The discourse institutionalized an intact relationship between power and knowledge that gains a certain amount of authority and legitimacy. Majeed legitimizes his *mazar* cult through his narrative, which is based on a piece of knowledge he has created through lies and false perceptions. He produces an imaginary *pir*, and accuses the

villagers of neglecting his tomb, thereby committing a grave sin. Majeed instils in the villagers a deep sense of guilt and remorse: “You are all blind ... You are ignorant men, men without understanding. If you were not, then how could you have left the *mazar* of Saint Shah Sadeque unattended like this?” (10). Majeed then claims that he had been living in the Garo Hills in peace, comfort, and contentment, performing God’s will, till one night he dreamed a special dream. He narrates how he was called upon by the saint to save the latter from oblivion and remarks that he was “destined to see the dream” (11). “Allah knoweth, ye know not. We know nothing, my brethren, nothing, beyond what the Almighty wishes us to know,” he proclaims (10). Majeed’s myth and narrative are intended to establish him as among the elect, for the Almighty has apparently given him secret knowledge through the dream. Majeed converts this secret and sacred knowledge into power. He becomes the intermediary between God/the saint and the inhabitants of Mahabbatpur.

Moreover, knowledge about the villagers helps Majeed’s accession to power. The shrewd Majeed understands their psychology well. He is aware of their weaknesses and their strengths, their superstitions, and what may give rise to fear within them: “Day after day Majeed studied the villagers surreptitiously, seeking to learn their habits and customs, trying to penetrate their minds,” and he decides that they are “strong and vigorous, but a little naïve” (14). With his secret knowledge derived directly from the Almighty, and his knowledge of the villagers, Majeed succeeds in creating a hegemonic position for himself. He generates an aura of mystery and fear around the *mazar* and hence himself – holding himself beyond the common people’s wit and increasing his power. Consequently, Abul Maksud observes that the villagers become like domestic animals tied to the stake of the *mazar*; they can neither move freely nor go beyond their ordained space (231). The caretaker of the *mazar* here is similar to the King in Satyajit Ray’s *Hirak Rajar Deshe* (1980), who develops a “systematic prisonhood” to control the body and mind of his subjects: “The more they know, the less they obey.” Knowledge, therefore, becomes the property of the mighty. Majeed too does not allow the villagers to seek knowledge beyond the boundaries he has set for them. By casting a mist over Mahabbatpur with his knowledge of the divine, he spreads his network of power.

Majeed’s first wife, Rahima, becomes a symbol of the villagers. She is awed by the enigma surrounding Majeed. To solidify his hold, he constructs a world of “must nots” about her: “You must not walk that way, Bibi ... No, Bibi, you must not let yourself be seen like that out in the open” (18-19). Through the creation of fear and shame, “frail-bodied” Majeed establishes his sexual and spiritual dominance over “tall, heavily-built” Rahima (17). He transforms Rahima, once the village tomboy, into a “frightened, chilled, terrified” creature for behind Majeed “stood the enormous shadow of the *mazar*” (18). Within less than the length of a page in *Lal Shalu*, Waliullah pronounces the word *bhoy* or “fear” seven times in relation to Rahima (6-7). The novelist also remarks that the villagers are simply another version of Rahima – terrified and yielding.

Khaleque, the most powerful man in Mahabbatpur before Majeed's arrival, is no different from the other villagers in bowing to the latter's wishes. The two men support each other while vying for influence over Mahabbatpur. The renovation of the burial site of an unknown person takes place with Khaleque's financial investment. The grave is covered with a red cloth with silver trimmings, a shelter is constructed to protect the grave, and incense sticks and candles are lit around it. The *mazar* even hoists a triangular flag. Soon we see Majeed becoming the owner of a house, then an inner house. He buys land and cows, and his storehouse is stocked with grain. In addition to the *mazar*, Khaleque funds the *maktab* and the mosque. While Khaleque's "friendship" is vital for Majeed, the relationship with Majeed is also important for Khaleque. The landowner needs to be perceived as a religious figure for his popularity and acceptance among the villagers. Majeed helps in the creation and upholding of that image.

Majeed begins the process of extending control over Mahabbatpur through small incidents. First he scolds an old man, Dadu, for not knowing the *kalma*, the declaration of faith. Verbal abuse turns into corporeal punishment when he circumcises a grown boy and his father before the village. However, the disciplining of Tara Mian, which occurs next in the novel, marks a more complex form of control established by Majeed.

Tara Mian is the father of Kulsum, a widow working as part-time help in Majeed's household. Kulsum brings an unusual request to Rahima. She demands that Majeed mediate with God for the death of her quarrelsome parents. Waliullah here provides a comic scene of discord between the old couple, where Tara Mian gets worked up by insults hurled at him by his spouse. The old woman reserves her "trump card" for the climax of the argument: "Do you still think you were the father of my children? ... I swear by God, that you were not their father" (26). Waliullah's presentation of their quarrels is lighthearted; it is as if the couple enjoys their sparring ritual. At one point, Tara Mian charges at his wife, stick in hand, and is relieved when his sons tackle him. No doubt exists in his mind that he is indeed the father of his three children, and his wife uses such language only to aggravate him.

Tara Mian's fault, for Majeed, is not that he has secreted his wife's crime as he pretends. Rather, Tara Mian threatens the image of omnipotence that Majeed has created surrounding himself in Mahabbatpur. He undermines the *mazar*-keeper's position as an all-seeing, all-knowing being. When Majeed starts meddling in the domestic affair, instead of attributing the latter's knowledge of his wife's comment to some intuitive ability, Tara Mian goes home and beats Kulsum – perceiving her part in informing the outsider. Tara Mian, therefore, must be chastised. Since Majeed is aware that he will not be easily subdued, he devises an ingenious method to punish the old man – a punishment of the soul.

According to Foucault, "It would be wrong to say that the soul is an illusion, or an ideological effect. On the contrary, it exists, it has a reality, it is produced permanently

around, on, within the body by the functioning of a power that is exercised on those punished” (177). On the evening of Kulsum’s beating, Majeed summons a special assembly at the *mazar*, inviting the village to witness Tara Mian’s ruin. He dominates the trial – planting suspicion in Tara Mian’s mind regarding his wife’s fidelity and the paternity of his children. In the course of the trial, the audience witnesses the fierce and bold Tara Mian gradually becoming “less defiant” and “less arrogant,” till eventually he is unable to meet Majeed’s eyes (30). Eventually, it is proven before all that Tara Mian has sinned by concealing the wrongdoing of his spouse. Moreover, he is seen as a cuckold, daftly bringing up three children who are probably not his own. Tara Mian’s manhood is shattered. He is seen as a spineless creature who, despite repeatedly hearing confessions of guilt from his adulterous wife, has failed to act. His soul is crushed. At one point, he begins to sob loudly, and on sudden impulse, leaps forward and kisses Majeed’s feet. Back home, he asks Kulsum to forgive him. Besides begging forgiveness from his daughter, prayer and giving “five-pice worth of offerings to the *mazar*” were to constitute Tara Mian’s expiation as prescribed by Majeed (33).

Following the trial of Tara Mian, the first storm in the novel breaks out. This storm foreshadows the hailstorm to take place near the end of the novel. During the inclemency, Kulsum enters Tara Mian’s room, where the old man breaks his self-imposed fast. A little later he goes out, and in the Bangla novel, simply disappears. In the transcreation, he goes to the *mazar*, where “sitting there in front of the grave covered with its red cloth and silver trimmings,” he dies (35). None of the villagers feel sympathy for the victim in either text, for “he had sinned ... and now he was suffering for it” (32). There is no mark of bodily harm in Tara Mian’s punishment; Majeed simply crushes his will to live. Nobody suspects that the punishment springs from Majeed’s dual motives of impressing Kulsum, and simultaneously, uprooting a threat to his omnipotence. Ironically, the soul-killer consoles Kulsum after her father’s demise. The bereaved daughter, like the other villagers, finds meaning in Tara Mian’s punishment.

The *pir* or holy man visiting the neighboring village of Nawabpur offers the next challenge to Majeed’s authority. Majeed’s enmity with the newcomer, Tanvir Mokammel points out, is grounded in professional rivalry (29). The episode receives varying treatments in the original novel and its transcreation. While in *Lal Shalu*, Majeed confronts his powerful adversary – winning back followers from Mahabbatpur, the core of the chapter is omitted in *Tree Without Roots*. The arrival of the *pir* merely serves as a transition, in the transcreation, for Waliullah to turn to the next topic, which he treats in detail – the chastising of Amena, wife of Khaleque.

The visiting *pir* seems to have done an even more thorough job than Majeed of establishing his narrative and spreading his branches of power, for masses from many villages throng to Nawabpur to pay homage to this professed religious leader. In *Tree Without Roots*, Majeed makes a feeble attempt to present himself as more

powerful than the *pir*. However, the miracle-maker's stay in the vicinity does not overwhelm him because Khaleque, his much-needed ally, shows no interest in the *pir*. Concentrating on Khaleque alone, Waliullah reduces an entire chapter of *Lal Shalu* to a few remarks in *Tree Without Roots*. The significant reduction of an important chapter marks a narrowing from the social to the personal, for while *Lal Shalu* can be read as an allegory of the social, economic, and political conditions of East Pakistan that led to the flourishing of Majeed and his kind, Majeed, the individual, is at the center of *Tree Without Roots*.

Though Majeed's hostility towards his rival is missing in *Tree Without Roots*, it is clear even in the later work that abusing religion for personal benefit is not unique to Majeed, but was a common feature of society during that period:

It is the custom in Muslim Bengal for the *pirs* to visit their followers each year immediately after the harvest when homes are well stocked with grain ... There they camp for days on end, feasting, holding prayer meetings, addressing huge gatherings, and showering blessings on the sick and healthy alike. (42)

It is evident that these *pir*-impersonators intend to reap maximum profits from visits to their admirers, for it is not only their hosts – like the well-to-do Matlub Khan – who are at the peak of prosperity following the harvest. Even the poorest peasants are capable of bestowing material gifts at the time. Majeed, in *Tree Without Roots*, seems less perturbed about the peasants of Mahabbatpur visiting the *pir*. His sole purpose is to prevent his own Matlub Khan, Khaleque, from falling into the clutches of his enemy – a man he ironically dubs *bhondo pir* or false *pir* in *Lal Shalu*.

Amena, Khaleque's first wife, falls an unwitting prey to Majeed's obsession with power rooted in the dual forces of the *mazar* and Khaleque's patronage. Amena, an attractive woman of about thirty, has been married for thirteen years but is childless. Khaleque, in the meantime, has remarried, and Tanu, his second wife, produces a new baby every other year. The elder wife dreams of a "sweet, fat little thing" to love and nurture, for which she instigates Khaleque to bring blessed water from the *pir* (47). Amena's crime, from Majeed's perspective, is obvious. Overstepping Majeed, she has commended Khaleque to his competitor. He fears that Khaleque's involvement with the *pir* may cause the already waning flock of Mahabbatpur to entirely lose faith in him. Amena's request also highlights her awareness of Majeed's incapacity – Rahima too is childless. She, therefore, cannot be spared. The challenge for Majeed, then, is to punish Amena without grieving Khaleque, for he cannot afford to lose the latter's support.

To put into effect the disciplining of Amena, Majeed concocts a theory of "coils" in a woman's womb preventing conception. The more coils there are, the more difficult it is for a woman to conceive; if there are too many, a woman remains childless. This fiction helps Majeed to explain both Amena and Rahima's condition.

Shifting the blame to Rahima for the couple's barrenness, he assumes the authority to solve Khaleque's problem. It is worth noting that though Majeed later remarries, Jamila, his second wife, too is shown childless in the duration of the novel.

As part of her punishment, Majeed invites Amena to circle the *mazar*, assuring his ability to unwind the coils if there are fewer than seven. She is to circle the grave after a day of fasting, without taking *sehri* or having *iftari*, and performing Majeed's made-up rituals. Amena's fainting in his custody is a stroke of luck for the keeper of the *mazar*. Instead of being startled into inaction by this "unexpected development," he calmly uses it to his advantage, explaining that her sinful soul shied away from the saint (58). He then craftily leads Khaleque to suggest divorce: "It would not be right to keep Amena under my roof any more. I shall send her away," Khaleque declares (68). Majeed engineers their divorce for another reason. Amena intrigues him. Since he has no power to make her yield to his desire, he ensures that Khaleque is stripped of the same power. Amena's punishment is also an indirect sentence on Khaleque for prioritizing his wife over Majeed.

Following the separation of Khaleque and Amena in *Tree Without Roots*, Majeed's ascension to power in Mahabhatpur appears confirmed. He is exempt from any kind of repercussion for his misdeeds. Even the most affluent man in the village is no match for him. Moreover, there is none to contest his assumed omnipotence, for Majeed never admits that he learned of Khaleque's order to bring blessed water from the *pir* from Dhala Mian, Tanu's brother. Rather, he pretends that his knowledge of the matter comes from his closeness to the saint of the *mazar* and to God. Mahabhatpur is, therefore, transformed into a panopticon-like state, where everything is controlled by the all-seeing Majeed.

Akkas, in *Lal Shalu*, could have provided stronger resistance to Majeed's authority than the illiterate population of the village or the ill-educated Khaleque. The young man has escaped Majeed's influence by venturing outside Mahabhatpur, where he picked up secular education. Yet Majeed, with his cunning, is also able to uproot the danger posed by Akkas – a character surprisingly absent in *Tree Without Roots*. The episode hints at the long-standing clash between secular and religious education in this part of the world. Abul Barkat et al. in *Political Economy of Madrassa Education in Bangladesh* provides a detailed account of the birth, growth, decline, and rise of *maktab*-madrassa education. During the Mughal period, these institutions "existed as the fountainhead of inspiration and guidance for the growth of the intellectual, moral, and cultural life of the society" (Barkat et al. 61). When the country was colonized, there were 80,000 madrassas in Bengal "functioning efficiently, maintaining high standard of teaching and offering a high degree of intellectual training" (62). However, the British rulers suspected these institutions of harboring the hope for a separate state of the Muslims. They started neglecting the madrassas, leading to their decline. In a further setback, the British government demolished many madrassas following the Sepoy Mutiny of 1857. The Darul Ulum Deoband

Madrassa then emerged, rejecting everything Western (63). This madrassa opposed the study of English, which would give learners access to the growing world of knowledge and science. Though it produced a number of scholars, historians, and poets, and played an important role in the movement against British rule, it is evident that its chief end was to disseminate Islamic education. This stance took a firmer grip after the Partition of 1947 based on religion. Barkat et al. attest that after the Partition, the government of Pakistan promoted madrassa education in both West and East Pakistan through direct patronization. Given the revival of *maktab*-madrassa education during the period when *Lal Shalu* was written, the ground is already prepared for Majeed to successfully shoot down Akkas' plan to set up a secular school that could churn out disciples capable of defying his reign.

Akkas appears in *Lal Shalu*, shortly after Amena's departure, with the hope of establishing a school in Mahabbatpur to spread modern "English education" – "Only school education can save the Muslims," he declares (*Lal Shalu* 45, our translation). However, the elders of the village, who are under Majeed's scheme, are not convinced by Akkas' argument. There are two *maktabs* to take care of education in the village, they retort. However, Akkas is adamant. He starts collecting funds for his dream project, and even applies to the government to set up a school in the locality, compelling Majeed to intervene. As with Tara Mian's case, Majeed calls a meeting at the *mazar* – his home-turf. Akkas comes prepared to debate in favor of modern education, but Majeed's attack comes from a different angle. "Where is your beard, *mian*? Aren't you the son of a Muslim?" he charges (*Lal Shalu* 45, our translation). Akkas looks around the *mazar*-room. He does not see another face resembling his own. There used to be beardless men in the village before Majeed's era, but they seem to have become extinct, he reflects. Akkas is sufficiently embarrassed before the crowd. His desire to set up a school in Mahabbatpur is interpreted as a "*bodh motlob*" or "wicked purpose" (*Lal Shalu* 45, our translation). He wants to reason for the necessity of English education in the present day; but his intent is again overrun by Majeed, who agrees that times are indeed bad since people are disinclined towards Allah. Therefore, what the village actually needs is a mosque – a grand mosque to make the villagers proud. The assembly cheers as if Majeed has uttered what was in their hearts. Akkas, meanwhile, exits the meeting unacknowledged. With his retreat, Majeed becomes the unrivalled dictator of Mahabbatpur. With the acceptance of his proposal for a new mosque to supplement the religious instruction of the *maktabs*, Majeed evidently uproots the possibility of future contenders for leadership.

The formation of Pakistan in 1947 provided a firm ground for the growth of the madrassa like the ones existing in Mahabbatpur. The madrassa has continued to be influential after the liberation of Bangladesh. Barkat et al. again informs us that in the span of about six decades, the number of madrassas has rapidly increased from 4,330 in 1950 to 54,130 in 2008 (82). Further, during the period 1970-2005, the

madrassa grew at a faster rate (4.65%) than mainstream educational institutions (3.04%) (Barkat et al. 82). Haripada Datta compares Akkas' defeat to Majeed and his "mazar religion" to the defeat of secular education to religious education (97). The once prominent slogan "Send Your Child to School," according to Datta, has been overpowered by the slogan "Send Your Child to Madrassa" (97). Though, according to a report in *The Daily Star*, approximately 75 percent of madrassa students remain unemployed ("Three of Four," pp. 3-4), this form of education is still relatively preferred by people of the lower class in Bangladesh.

More recently, religious considerations have also entered the realm of mainstream education. The National Curriculum Board of Bangladesh, 2017, unexpectedly dropped a number of texts from the Bangla syllabus at the primary and secondary levels¹. The decision to exclude these texts was controversial, and it was alleged that non-Muslim and progressive writers were dropped to meet the demands of various fundamentalist organizations. It was also claimed that certain texts were removed as part of the process of making the curriculum a communal one. Bangladesh came into being in 1971 under the guiding principle of secularism, which was to be one of the baselines in theory and practice. Noting the fall of this promise, Jatin Sarkar laments that it appears that the ghost of Pakistan is still with us (13).

In *Tree Without Roots*, Waliullah omits the chapter involving Akkas. Hence, the debate regarding secular and madrassa education is overlooked. The mosque is the brainchild of Khaleque, in the later version, to reduce Amena's guilt. He predictably offers to bear the cost of its construction as well. The mosque, an institution for the dissemination of religious knowledge along with the *maktabs*, is decontextualized from the conversation regarding forms of education and its social impact in the transcreation. *Tree Without Roots* was published in 1967 – years after Waliullah had immigrated to France. Evidently, while recomposing *Lal Shalu*, Waliullah either thought that the debate regarding secular and religious education was no longer relevant, or he was influenced by the Western novel, where, in many cases, the inner workings of the individual takes precedence over matters of social concern. The exclusion of Akkas marks a narrowing of the social dimension of the work. The political edge of *Lal Shalu* is made blunt in *Tree Without Roots*.

Following the humiliation of Akkas, the stage is set for Majeed to reign indefinitely over Mahabbatpur. However, resistance comes from an unexpected source – his second wife, Jamila, no more than "a young kitten" at first glance (79). Jamila's "gale of laughter" unsettles the formidable position that Majeed had created for himself (80). There is a subversive quality about her laughter. It threatens to shatter the institutionalized hypocrisy of the *mazar*. Jamila's laughter comprises what Showkat Ali calls "*pran dharma*" or "life-force" (27). She has a natural energy, full of courage and vigor, that directly defies the restrictions of Majeed's artificial, concocted, and merely ritualistic *mazar*-religion. Jamila's laughter, at times, tinkles "merrily like an armful of fine golden bracelets" (80). However, often it is also like "a warm, bright

sunburst piercing the clouds, utterly fearless and irresistible” (81). Within the span of two pages of *Lal Shalu*, Waliullah pronounces the word *hashi* or “laughter” thirteen times just after the appearance of Jamila (50-51). Against it, he presents Majeed’s growing feeling of bitterness and bewilderment. Jamila ignores the world of “must nots” that had subdued the physically powerful Rahima. She is not at all frightened by Majeed’s threat, “It is not proper for a Muslim woman to be heard laughing. No one is to laugh that way in my house again” (80). Majeed, the master-puppeteer of Mahabbatpur, does not know how to handle this young girl. As the conflict continues between Majeed’s created fear and the life-force that Jamila represents, Majeed gradually weakens and, ironically, starts fearing Jamila.

The inhabitants of Mahabbatpur had so long suppressed the life-instinct within themselves in their fear of Majeed, but the latter’s hold is temporarily broken when Jamila inadvertently distracts the men during the *ziker*. Soon after Majeed’s arrival at Mahabbatpur, we find him grumbling when the peasants sing and entertain themselves during the harvest. He explains his discontent as the danger that happiness poses “because it makes one forget one’s ultimate duty” (15). For Majeed, it is the duty of every villager to bow down to the made-up saint of his *mazar* aborting all pleasures of life. This is precisely what Jamila refuses to do. We observe her tending to her appearance before the mirror, her eyes sparkling as she gazes upon her reflection – “eyes that fear neither God nor man” from Majeed’s perspective (87). During the *ziker*, while the men are busy chanting the name of God, Jamila wanders beyond the boundary of the inner house and comes to rest beneath a tree near the *mazar*. Standing there, she appears “mysterious yet fascinating, like the moon seen through filmy clouds” (93). Once they spot her, the men cannot take their minds off Jamila. Even when she moves on, they look for her “like hungry beachcombers searching for nourishment on a shore bare as bone” (93). Majeed, with his best efforts, cannot make them regain concentration on the *ziker*. As the deposed ruler strives to regain control, it becomes clear that for the first time, Majeed has met a worthy opponent.

Soon, nature joins Jamila in countering Majeed. All attempts to teach Jamila a lesson fail. When Majeed dictates that she must perform the long *tarabi* prayer, she falls asleep in the *sejda* position. When he drags her to the *mazar* to tie her up, she spits in his face – “the face that inspired awe in everyone in the village, the face that commanded respect from all” (101). Unlike with Rahima and the villagers, Majeed cannot subdue her with his cunning. The first raindrops signaling the storm feel to him “like the saliva which Jamila had spat at him” (105). Waliullah intentionally connects the two forms of resistance, Jamila’s life-force and the natural force, both of which work effectively against Majeed’s hypocritical regime. Even Rahima becomes rebellious out of sympathy for Jamila and presses him to bring her from the *mazar*-room. There, he discovers the girl unconscious on the floor: “One of her feet, which were painted with henna, touched the grave,” telling the story of Majeed’s defeat (106).

Majeed's downfall at the end of *Lal Shalu* can be interpreted as an allegorical depiction of the futility of the formation of a strange nation like Pakistan, with its two distinct parts, in 1947. Haripada Datta observes that while Waliullah shows the futility of a state based solely on religion in his novel, he does not represent its complete defeat because of his awareness that the forces behind the creation of such a state cannot so easily be uprooted (97). That is why, at the end of *Lal Shalu*, we witness Majeed trying to convince the villagers to retain faith in God and the *mazar* (Datta 97). Datta contextualizes Majeed's persistence in the political situation around the time of the Partition. The birth of a nation like Pakistan, in his view, opens the gateway for hungry but clever individuals like Majeed to abuse religion for their survival: "The philosophy of the nation-state supports this kind of activity as if it were natural," he claims (Datta 94, our translation).

Whereas *Lal Shalu* ends amid a storm, Waliullah extends the conclusion of *Tree Without Roots*. In the final scene of the transcreation, having transferred his wives to Khaleque's residence, Majeed returns to the *mazar* amid fear of his dwindling influence over Mahabbatpur. Earlier that day, his "friend" had refused consolation from him. He had also noticed the villagers turning to the landowner bypassing him, for Khaleque could provide them with material support. Majeed knows that if he deserts the sinking *mazar*, the villagers would lose their trust in him. He, thus, forsakes the apparent safety of the village and returns to the *mazar* – not to protect the tomb, but the "truth" that he had created.

Waliullah, in a way, generates sympathy for Majeed even while exposing his cunning and hypocrisy. Majeed is the hero, not the villain, of the work – as Serajul Islam Choudhury points out (x). In fact, Waliullah makes it clear, in both the original novel and its transcreation, that the instinct for survival guides many of Majeed's misdeeds and lies at the root of his *mazar*-profession. Our sympathy for the protagonist is amplified at the end of *Tree Without Roots*, where Waliullah focuses on the conman's final attempt to save his *mazar*-based faith. Majeed is afraid of the rushing floodwaters, but he is more afraid of being displaced from Mahabbatpur and having to start afresh. Therefore, we see that the protagonist's final action in *Tree Without Roots* is directed by his desire to remain in power, indicating that forces like Majeed will not easily be uprooted.

Note

1. Among the excluded poems are Humayun Azad's "Boi" (Books), Rabindranath Tagore's "Bangladesh-er Hridoy" (The Heart of Bangladesh), Sanaul Haque's "Shobha" (Meeting), Jasim Uddin's "Desh" (Our Country), Bharat Chandra Ray Gunakar's "Amar Shantan" (My Child), Gyan Das' "Sukher Lagia" (For Happiness), Lalon Shah's "Shomoy Gele Shadhon Hobena" (If Time Runs Out), Sunil Gangopadhyay's "Sanko-ta Dulche" (The Shaking Bridge), and Rudra Mohammad Shahidullah's "Khotian" (The Ledger Book). The prose pieces omitted are Satyen Sen's "Lal Goru-ta" (The Red Cow), S. Wazed Ali's "Ranchi Bhromon" (Trip to Ranchi), Ronesh Dashgupta's "Malyo Dan" (Garlanding), Kazi Nazrul Islam's "Bangaleer Bhasha" (The

Language of the Bengalis), and Sanjib Chattopadhyay's "Palamou Bhromon Kahini" (Palamou Travels).

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