**CENTRE FOR CITIZENSHIP AND PUBLIC POLICY OCCASIONAL SEMINARS 2010**

*Re-scripting ‘Home and the World,’ Re-composing ‘Woman’: Sabitri Roy’s The Notations (1952)*

**Paulomi Chakraborty**  
Department of Film Studies  
Jadavpur University

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**ABSTRACT:** In this paper, my text is Sabitri Roy’s novel *The Notations* (original *Swaralipi*, in Bengali publ. in 1952) written from deep within the left culture of Bengal formed around the Communist Party of India, in the years immediately after the independence of India from British colonial rule and the concomitant partition of colonial India into India and Pakistan in 1947. I will read the novel as an attempt, from a gendered perspective, to renegotiate in the early years of post-colonial nationhood the ‘legacies’ of dominant cultural nationalism. I will argue that the novel offers a critical intervention in the signification of the term ‘woman’ within the dominant nationalist discourse, which had taken a definite shape in Bengal by the late nineteenth-century.

A salient feature of this nationalism was that, within its imaginary, the signifier ‘woman’ was constructed as a sign of the nation, erasing women’s agential subjectivity and women’s claims to the nation. As custodian of the home, the middle class woman, ‘the bhadramahila,’ became a depository of tradition and purity, and thus of values which provided resources against the assault of British colonialism. Crucially, for this nationalism to work, the signification ‘woman’ had to overlap with home. It is in this context that I will posit *Swaralipi*, as an interventionist text. This intervention, I will argue, amounts to re-composing the signification of ‘woman’ to reflect a feminist critique of cultural nationalism. Like the cultural imagination constructs ‘woman’ as a *sign* because of and through the split of the home and the world, *Swaralipi* rewrites ‘woman’ through an orchestrated questioning, contesting, and critique of the divide between the home and the world, especially in a post-Partitioned world. It therefore radically deconstructs the spatial politics of nationalism and the construction of women within this restrictive spatial politics. I will also argue that it is the culture of the political left, to which *Swaralipi* and its author at once belonged and were deeply critical of, that allows *Swaralipi* its necessary *idiom* of recomposing ‘woman’ and for constructing its intervention. I will suggest that the novel is an attempt to craft an idiom of political being, becoming, and belonging for women.

**BIO:** Paulomi Chakraborty has recently completed her PhD from the Department of English and Film Studies, University of Alberta, Canada. Her dissertation, titled “The Refugee Woman: Partition of Bengal, Women, and the Everyday of the Nation,” examines the figure of the refugee woman in three major narrative texts of the Bengal Partition from the Indian side. She is now working on a post-doctoral project funded by the Shastri Indo-Canadian Institute, tentatively titled “Love and Hate in Bollywood: Partition of India in Popular Hindi Cinema since 1990,” at the Department of Film Studies, Jadavpur University.

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