

70 is Bengali, but he is a Muslim,” my father informed me. “Therefore he lives in East Pakistan, not India.” His finger trailed across the Atlantic, through Europe, the Mediterranean, the Middle East, and finally to the sprawling orange diamond that my mother once told me resembled a woman wearing a sari⁶ with her left arm extended. Various cities had been circled with lines drawn between them to indicate my parents’ travels, and the place of their birth, Calcutta, was signified by a small silver star. I had been there only once and had no memory of the trip. “As you see, Lilia, it is a different country, a different color,” my father said. Pakistan was yellow, not orange. I noticed that there were two distinct parts to it, one much larger than the other, separated
80 by an expanse of Indian territory; it was as if California and Connecticut constituted a nation apart from the U.S.

My father rapped his knuckles on top of my head. “You are, of course, aware of the current situation? Aware of East Pakistan’s fight for **sovereignty**?”

I nodded, unaware of the situation. **C**

We returned to the kitchen, where my mother was draining a pot of boiled rice into a colander. My father opened up the can on the counter and eyed me sharply over the frames of his glasses as he ate some more cashews. “What exactly do they teach you at school? Do you study history? Geography?”

“Lilia has plenty to learn at school,” my mother said. “We live here now,
90 she was born here.” She seemed genuinely proud of the fact, as if it were a reflection of my character. In her estimation, I knew, I was assured a safe life, an easy life, a fine education, every opportunity. I would never have to eat rationed food, or obey curfews, or watch riots from my rooftop, or hide neighbors in water tanks to prevent them from being shot, as she and my father had. “Imagine having to place her in a decent school. Imagine her having to read during power failures by the light of kerosene lamps. Imagine the pressures, the tutors, the constant exams.” She ran a hand through her hair, bobbed to a suitable length for her part-time job as a bank teller. “How can you possibly expect her to know about Partition? Put those nuts away.”

100 “But what does she learn about the world?” My father rattled the cashew can in his hand. “What is she learning?”

We learned American history, of course, and American geography. That year, and every year, it seemed, we began by studying the Revolutionary War. We were taken in school buses on field trips to visit Plymouth Rock,⁷ and to walk the Freedom Trail, and to climb to the top of the Bunker Hill Monument.⁸ We made dioramas out of colored construction paper depicting George Washington crossing the choppy waters of the Delaware River, and

sovereignty

(sŏv'ər-ĭn-tē) *n.*

complete independence and self-governance

C THEME AND CHARACTER

Reread lines 50–84. In this passage, Lilia’s father shares information about India and Pakistan. Does she understand the conflict between these two nations? Explain.

6. **sari** (să'rē): a garment worn mostly by women of Pakistan and India, consisting of a length of fabric with one end wrapped around the waist to form a skirt and the other draped over the shoulder or covering the head.

7. **Plymouth Rock**: a boulder in Plymouth, Massachusetts, said to be the site where the Pilgrims disembarked from the *Mayflower*.

8. **Freedom Trail . . . Bunker Hill Monument**: historic sites in Boston, which commemorate critical events in the American struggle for independence from Great Britain.