ABSTRACT

Partition history and the fiction related to it have been the focus of many studies in the past two decades. The reasons are manifold: the need to go back to one’s roots, the growing interest of India and Pakistan in each other’s cultures, finding parallels, drawing upon common issues and a constant endeavor to reconcile with the past which includes understanding ‘history’ and its relation with Nation.

To emerge with fresh insights and delve deeper into meanings, which reflect my interest in the representation of Gender in, texts that are contemporary and relevant to our world is the aim of this study. Partition was a very big event in our history. In fact, its constantly present and visible as a contemporary phenomenon that continues to affect the politics of the two nations—India and Pakistan.

This interest and the resulting efforts have been fruitful in more than one sense. We have access to major Urdu writings on Partition in translation and simultaneously there is a growing interest in the writings of Hindi and other regional languages, which have focused on Partition history. We’ve had several anthologies comprising of Partition fiction, most of it translated from the original Urdu, Hindi and Punjabi, the three major North Indian languages and also from Bangla dealing with the Partition in Bengal. All these works have been motivational in reviving the interest in an event, which changed the course of
Indian history. This renewed interest has led to fresher insights and locating newer issues.

Two of these issues dealing with Gender and Nationalism have been my focus in this study. Gender and Nation both have historic connotations and they constantly merge with each other: Nations are often seen in gendered terms. The word ‘Matrubhumi’ (motherland) is familiar to every Indian irrespective of his birthplace or language. The mythology of a Nation too portrays traditional Gender roles and stereotypes and the history of the National movement is full of the images of the Nation as Mother, Goddess, ‘Bharatmata’—all female terms to drive home the same analogy of equating ‘woman’ and ‘nation’.

Women are constantly and persistently seen in terms of the boundaries of a nation. They also represent the nation’s fertility and also its territorial markers. Mothers, wives and daughters are constantly seen as the ‘property’ of their men and also of their nation. The ‘sons’ of the nation i.e. the men have to defend and protect this ‘property’ which can easily be defiled, transgressed, destroyed by the enemy state.

At its most extreme, the analogy sees the female bodies typifying the ‘land’ of the nation. Just as the enemy enters the country and conquers it, marking and inscribing it as his ‘own’; in the same way women’s rapes (during Partition) can be seen as a conquest, invasion and inscription of a ‘woman’ as the enemy’s own. She represents the ‘pure soil’ of the nation, which is in constant threat of being defiled and hence needs to be guarded and protected. This particular Gender
consciousness should lead us towards a transformative change—and to initiate this change, I focus on the double discourse of Gender and Nationalism. I intend to look at Partition fiction and cinema as an expression of this discourse in more than one sense.

In the first chapter, I look at Partition as a historical event and discuss the various perspectives on how or why it happened. The history of Partition has been variously interpreted by a vast number of Indian, British and Pakistani historians. I have tried to encapsulate this debate, while emphasizing on my analysis of the intersections of the discourses of Gender and Nation formation.

The second chapter, ‘Gender and Nationalism’ looks at the way ‘women’ are represented in the novels of Partition. There are major differences in the way; the male writers like Manto and Yashpal portray their women characters and the way they are seen in the works of the female writers like Amrita Pritam, Attia Hosain and Mumtaz Shah Nawaz. The men portray the ‘woman’ in all the stark reality of Partition and as a ‘piece’ of property where as the woman writer looks at the emotional trauma of the woman emphasizing not the physicality of the ‘rape’ but the devastation of the mind that comes along with it. Women in the Partition fiction represent the various voices of struggle and its modalities and reaffirm that women’s struggles must be seen and analysed in terms of their multiplicity. I go on to present an analysis of some of the Partition writings as representative texts of women’s experience of social hostility following their violation and their rejection at home and in their communities.
In the third chapter titled ‘Fractured vision of the Nation’, I start from the premise that the varied cultures and languages and regional flavors of our country have redefined terms like Nationalism for us. Is the vision of the new ‘nation’, that which we call ours really united and secular or are we suppressing our own natural ‘heterogeneity’ to conform to imported notions of ‘unity’ and ‘secularism’? Is the woman who breaks new grounds in the novels of women writers completely evolved or does she too, feel alienated and not so rooted, as she would like to believe? These are the questions, which I have attempted to answer in this chapter, which carries on the concerns with the ‘woman’ and the ‘nation’. The choice of writers comprising both Indian and Pakistani nationals is deliberate. I end the chapter with a discussion of Amitava Ghosh’s *The Shadow Lines* as moving beyond the regional; Ghosh’s view of the Partition is a truly international one.

In the next chapter which is titled ‘Territorial Conceptualization: Woman and Nation in the Short story of the Partition’, I present an analysis of the way ‘woman’ and ‘nation’ are defined as ‘territories’ in more senses than one. Short stories written in Urdu by Saadat Hasan Manto, in Hindi written by Krishna Sobti, Bhisham Sahni and Mohan Rakesh, in Punjabi by Rajinder Singh Bedi were all vignettes of the Partition holocaust. The urgency and the immediacy of the moment were captured by these writers and has been the most productive fictional output of this historic event. These stories provide an opportunity to study gender roles, both the accorded and the appropriated within a social system on the verge of total collapse.
What we see in these stories of Partition is the way the 'nation' and its 'women' have been conceptualized in territorial terms. Both are seen, analyzed and slotted similarly in 'territorial' terms, subverting their powers of resistance and invoking strong feelings against such proprietary attitudes, stemming from patriarchal structures and communalistic ethos. Partition identified the 'nation' and the 'woman' as conceptualized territories—to be conquered, inscribed and exploited and nowhere is this more evident than in the short story of the Partition.

In the final chapter titled 'Walk across the Border: Questioning stereotypes in Partition Cinema', I focus on Partition cinema as a genre and trace its growth from the late 50's to the 21st century. In the process, I attempt to establish that this particular genre has time and again questioned certain stereotypes of Gender, which have been prevalent in cinema for some time. The historicization of an event like the Partition is significant in terms of the way it portrays the women. Does it also cultivate a sense of 'national' identity? I present the thesis that in these films, the stereotyped possibilities of a free nation are questioned as well. There was an inherent sense of falsity in this belief of a free nation and that is what we see reflected in these films. Was it free for the women? Was it free for the masses? These are some of the questions that I examine in this chapter. I start my analysis with the very first film on Partition which came out in 1951 called Chhinnamool and go on to discuss landmark films like Garam Hawa, Tamas, Earth 1947, Pinjar, Khamosh Pani and of course Ritwik Ghatak's famous trilogy comprising of Nagarik, Meghe Dhaka Tara and Subarnarekha.
The stereotypes are broken, questioned and even trampled upon in Partition Cinema. What we need is to foreground this fact. Partition cinema is looking at possibilities of reconciliation and new beginnings. That is the need of the hour. It is historic and relevant not because it tries to capture those traumatic times as realistically as possible but also because it has evolved over the years and the newer it is, the newer its perceptions of the tragedy of Partition.

This study makes an attempt to fill up the lacuna, which was there in terms of coming together of languages, thematic concerns and genres. It brings together writers from different regions, languages and eras and tries to establish the multiplicity of meanings in the double discourse of Gender and Nationalism in Partition fiction.