Introduction

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 and the realization that histories are constructed through narratives and are not epitomes of 'truth'.

However, as I look back, I think one can always come up with fresher insights if one delves deep into the fiction that was written so many years ago but still carries meanings, which are so contemporary and so relevant to our world. Partition was a very big event in our history. It is not just an event from the past but a contemporary phenomenon that continues to affect the politics of the two nations—India and Pakistan. Indo-Anglian Partition and post-Partition works are part of an emerging genre of Post-colonial literature which endeavour to cope with the intimate concerns of relationships against the backdrop of Nationalism and religious fervour by linking the political with the personal.

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. There is also an upsurge of writings about the ‘oral’ history of Partition and not the ‘official’ history, especially the ones that focus on women. Urvashi Butalia’s *The Other Side of Silence* (1998) and Ritu Menon’s and Kamla Bhasin’s *Borders and Boundaries* (1998) deal with the oral narratives of Partition victims and what they went through during that entire holocaust leading to the creation of two new nations.

*Engendering India* (2000) by Sangeeta Ray is a book, which is about Gender and Nation in which she underscores

the necessity of a more comprehensive understanding of gender as a category, one that goes beyond an initial commitment to the representation of a specific constituency to an inquiry that challenges the assumption behind the masculinist, heterosexual economy hitherto governing the cultural matrix through which an Indian National identity has become intelligible.

Simply put, this book explores the manipulation of gender politics in the exercise of national rule. In *From Gender to Nation*, (2004) edited by Rada Ivekovic and Julie Mostov, there are essays, which consider the significance of nation and gender in the context of post 1989 transitions in the former Soviet Union and Yugoslavia. The essays foreground the relationship between gender and nationalism and show how feminism engages with the ideology of the nation. The texts critique the way in which narratives of nationhood and womanhood naturalize and essentialize difference and hierarchy.
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 reexamining certain issues.

Two of these issues dealing with Gender and Nationalism have been the 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, and ‘Bharatmata’—all female terms to drive home the same analogy of equating ‘woman’ and ‘nation’.

Social roles for women are constructed similarly. Woman is often seen as ‘Janani’ (the one who gives birth) and seen as the one who sows the seed to grow the crop. (A healthy crop is also a signifier of ‘fertility’, which again can be related to both the land and the woman) Man cultivates the crop but he has the choice to feed on it or damage and destroy it. Hence, woman produces the crop and man owns the land. Men also protect it and defend its honor just as they would protect and defend their women.
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 eventually defiled by the enemy and hence needs to be guarded and protected.

In this way, the rape and violation of individual women becomes symbolically significant in Nationalist discourse and the politics of National identity as a violation of the Nation and an act against the collective men of the enemy nation.

Where does one go from here? As Cynthia Cockburn puts it:

Gender consciousness calls, first for a sensitivity to Gender difference. It invites us to see how women and men may be positioned differently, have different experiences, different needs, different strengths and skills and how in different cultures, these differences have different expressions. Second, it invites us to notice Gender power
relations—to see how they shape institutions like the family, the military, and the state... and how power, oppression and violence work in and through them. And not only of course to see. It invites us to act for transformative change.¹

My purpose in this study is to initiate this 'transformative change' by focusing 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.

The need is to bridge the gap between writers of different regions, cultures, languages and religions, who have written on this traumatic event of Indian History, and whose works have been seen as the only authentic source of what the masses of this country went through when India was partitioned by the British.

In the first chapter, I discuss the 'Partition' as a historical event and 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 and made it concise while emphasizing on my analysis of the intersections of the discourses of Gender and Nation formation.

In fact, Partition was one such event, which was directly related to these two discourses considering the trauma of thousands of women and the debates over national boundaries was caused by this single event, which has been a cause for embarrassment for both India and Pakistan. The literature that it
evoked, the cinema it produced still sends a shiver down one's spine and we wonder if it was too big a price to pay for the freedom that we gained.

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 Husain 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 analyzed in terms of their multiplicity. Each life represents a struggle and what is common is that in each of these women, we see strands of self-definition, self-exploration and survival.

The recovery of abducted women and the fiction written around it had the power of the communal logic by which in practice the two new states defined themselves. Such logic took no account of the wishes of the women concerned; and in many cases 'forcible repatriation' became the norm. Thus here I 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'.

Here I look at the works of Mumtaz Shah Nawaz, Attia Hosain, Ismat Chugtai, Bhisham Sahni, Yashpal, Abdullah Husain, Khadija Mastur and Amitav Ghosh. The choice of writers comprising both Indian and Pakistani nationals is deliberate. I end the chapter with a discussion of The Shadow Lines, as moving beyond the regional; Ghosh’s view of the Partition is a truly international one.

Chapter Four which is titled 'Territorial Conceptualization: Woman and Nation in the short story of the Partition' is, as the title suggests, an analysis of the way 'woman' and 'nation' are defined as 'territories', in more senses than one. It is important to note that the short story is the only genre, which has successfully captured the immediate trauma of Partition. 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 are all vignettes of the Partition holocaust. The urgency and the immediacy of the moment were captured by these writers and has been the best 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. Assault against women can be read both literally as the suppression and exploitation of the 'other' and also metaphorically as symbolic of the chaos of the times.

My focus in these stories is on the ‘women’. Women were the worst sufferers of the trauma of Partition. Men suffered because of death, destruction and displacement, but apart from their deaths, their losses were not irreparable. But the women’s loss of dignity, self respect and individual esteem all inseparably aligned with sexual purity could not be regained.

What we see in these short 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 stories of Partition.
In the last and fifth chapter on 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.

My discussion of films ranges from the first film made on Partition Chhinnamool in 1951 to the blockbuster commercial film of the early 21st century Veer-Zara. In the span of these fifty years there were landmark films like Garm Hawa, Tamas, Earth 1947, Pinjar, Khamosh Pani and of course Ritwik Ghatak’s famous trilogy comprising of Nagarik, Meghe Dhaka Tara and Subarnarekha. The human dimensions of this political event have been captured in these films.

Ghatak’s films are an attempt to portray the relationships between the new classes formed by the process of urbanization and the machine-revolution and their old traditions. It led him to take a fresh look at the whole issue of rootlessness – the search of the refugee for a new identity. The stereotypes are
broken, questioned and even trampled upon in Partition cinema. What we need is to foreground this fact.

We have moved on. In Yash Chopra's *Veer- Zara*, we have a heroine who breaks out of the traditional mindset and even the audience is in for a surprise when they see an unwed Zara looking after the Girl's school and day-care center which was set up by Veer's parents. It is the hero who is caught in a conventional 'timezone' and does not speak up lest he sullies her name and honour.

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.

A word about methodology. My approach in this study is an eclectic one comprising of sociological, historical and at a few places psychological viewpoints. As this is an essentially multi-genre study, there are bound to be overlapping issues, which constantly intersect each other. My objective has also been to highlight writings done in Hindi, Urdu and Punjabi languages along with those in English and Bangla. For the latter I have depended solely on English translation of Bangla stories. Most of the Urdu and Punjabi texts are available now in Hindi transcriptions and these along with their English translations have been the sources I have relied upon.
I sincerely hope that this work attempts 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 to enhance the multiplicity of concerns with Partition. Cinema is incorporated for its sheer visual impact and because it is so topical in our times and last but not the least, it salutes all those fictional and real women who have stood out the most in fiction as much as in real lives.
Notes

1 Cynthia Cockburn, 'The Gendered Dynamics of Armed conflict and Political Violence' in *Victims, Perpetrators or Actors?* Ed. Caroline O.N.Moser and Fiona C.Clark; (New Delhi: Kali, 2001) pg.28