Chapter One

Historical Perspectives on the Partition

My aim in this study is an analysis of the intersections of the discourses of Gender and Nation formation and their representations in certain Partition novels and stories. My study is restricted to the writings in Hindi, Urdu and English. Some of these works, which include stories, novels and non-fictional accounts as well, have been translated into other languages, like English. Some others remain masterpieces in the original and are untouched as yet by translators. The writings thus belong to the North and northwestern regions and I have not included the Bangla writers and their works on Partition, not even the translations, except for a few short stories. Before we move on to the history of Partition, what caused it and what were its consequences, we need to enlighten ourselves about the main thesis of this study, which is the relation between Gender and the Nation.

We must at this point make a note of the fact that the strictures regarding codes of behaviour and forms of social purdah are found in both Hinduism and Islam, and similar patterns may be observed in the other minority groups: Sikhs, Parsis, Christians, Jews, Buddhists and Jains. There is a certain image conjured up by the nomenclature ‘Bhartiya nari’ (Indian woman) which cuts across religious boundaries and which women by and large conform to or question in varying degrees of defiance and revolt. The importance of the hold of tradition and mythology on the Indian subconscious should not be undermined. In very crucial
ways it affects sensibility responses to an extent not experienced in the West. Very few men or women in the west, even among the more conservative believers, would consciously use the Virgin Mary to uphold present day ideals of female purification or purity. On the other hand, the readiness with which most Indians grasp at mythological stereotypes like Sita or Savitri or their reservations about Draupadi are an obvious indication that, for us, time future is indeed dictated by the past.

Moreover, Sita (wife of Rama, the ideal hero of the epic Ramayana, a holy text of the Hindus) does not merely follow Rama into the forest, but has to prove her chastity after being rescued from Ravana who had abducted her. Draupadi (wife of the Pandavas, in the Mahabharata, the epic story by Ved Vyasa, another important Hindu text) is pawned in a game of dice, a clear indication of her status as a dispensable commodity owned by the five Pandava brothers to whom she is married. Both Sita and Draupadi upheld an ongoing tradition of long-suffering women whose life is all about the message of devotion and service to their husbands, a glorification of these qualities so that martyrdom is seen in some cases as, preferable, desirable, virtuous and even imperative. Thus, the concept of ‘pativrata’ [physical and mental chastity] had been gradually evolved and made into the principal ideology for women. On the chastity of the women depended the honour of the menfolk. In other words, women’s bodies were the repositories of men’s honour. Men felt obliged to one another to hand over their women chaste
while giving them away through marriage. It was like an unspoken contract between men to keep the women 'pure'. That was why a woman had to be guarded consecutively by her father, husband and son throughout her life.

Different cultures evolved their own identifiable priorities as to what being a woman means, though the objective may have remained the same—the exploitation and oppression of women. In Indian society, the normative thrust has increasingly been towards the concealment of the female body. This may be analyzed as a literal and metaphorical extension of purdah (veil): since literal purdah denotes various modes of physical constraints on the public display of the female body, metaphorical purdah marks a shift in emphasis to what is socially considered proper behaviour for a woman.

The public/private dichotomy restricted women's movements within the home while the model of the 'pativrata' (one who is loyal to her husband) was praised as the ultimate paradigm of good womanhood.

When the 19th century social reform movements prioritized the 'woman' question, it abolished cruel practices like the rite of Sati, legalized widow remarriage and introduced women's education. However, these movements did not question or interfere with the traditional ideology of gender or patriarchal relationships. In the new construction of womanhood, it was the conventional image of women as wife and mother simply equipped with education and some
Victorian womanly ideals borrowed from the West; that was projected as 'ideal' for the good Indian women.

In times of Civil war or external crisis, it is women who are inevitably singled out for particularly humiliating treatment—molestation, rape, abduction or forcible marriage—and it is they who have to suffer for the imposed ignominy. Indian men—Hindu, Muslim or Sikh—consider women's bodies as the repository of men's honour. Thus the rape of a woman is akin to the rape of the community to which she belongs. As Veena Das puts it:

To plunder women's bodies perceived as men's property was to indicate that the enemy had occupied the most intimate possessions of the men to whom the women belonged. On women's bodies thus, the 'political programmes' of the mutual enemies were 'inscribed'.

Thus the whole question of 'woman' representing the territory of the 'nation' stemmed from this notion of patriarchy and this objectification of the woman continued through the Partition years. In the words of Rajeshwari Sunder Rajan,

Women exist and are conceptualized as belonging to religious, caste and regional communities in ways whose complexity is indicated by the double and contradictory sense of the term "belonging to" as meaning both "affiliated to" and "owned by": the one indicating voluntary and participatory membership, the other secondariness and symbolic status...the powerful moments of rupture occur when women are disaccommodated within these structures, these in Indian
history have been the moments when women became national subjects.²

Partition of the country was one such moment. It is possible to outline certain key events leading up to the partition. These were the culmination of certain processes started much earlier in the second half of the nineteenth century. During the Census operations in 1871, 'Hindus' and 'Muslims' were demarcated and assigned the labels of being two different communities. Their respective languages i.e. Hindi and Urdu were also identified as a part of their religious identity. This was the first move towards the spread of communalism.

In 1940, the Lahore resolution of the Muslim league demanded a separate Muslim nation based on the two-nation theory according to which Muslims represented one quaum or nation. However, the proposal for a formal 'Pakistan was made only in 1946. Thus the failure of the Cripps Mission in 1942 and the electoral success of the Muslim league in 1946 contributed towards the country's partition.

What is imperative here is to analyze some of these events, which led to the Partition. According to a number of Indian Historians³, the Congress used all sorts of arguments for accepting Partition; the foremost among them was that, that was the will of the people; and the only way to a free country. They also hoped, at the same time that it will not be permanent, that when the dust settled down, things would be back to normal. The Congress leaders were also under the assumption
that they were avoiding the worse alternatives of war. They finally decided that it was the only way out. As Mushirul Hasan points out

...Gandhi's role in introducing religion into politics, the anti-Muslim proclivities of the Hindu right, led by Patel in the 1940's, the Hindutva agenda of the Hindu mahasabha, the Arya Samaj and the RSS [Rashtriya Swayamsewak Sangh] and Nehru's arrogance and haughtiness in dealing with Jinnah and the Muslim League. At a time when the League was flexing its muscles, India's first Prime Minister is said to have jettisoned the plan for a Congress-League coalition in 1937 and dimmed the prospect of an enduring Hindu-Muslim partnership in Indian politics. Thus the mainstay of the argument is that the country's vivisection could have been avoided had Nehru acted judiciously at this and other critical junctures in the 1940's...

Then there was the problem of the anti-communal struggle. However the party did not have state powers and so nothing could be done. What needs to be emphasized here is the shortsightedness of these leaders and their inability to comprehend the reality of the communal hatred they were about to confront.

The Congress leadership believed that they had accepted the alternative of Partition because it was the people's choice. Gandhi's words are significant:

The demand has been granted because you asked for it. The Congress never asked for it...But the Congress could feel the pulse of the people. It realized that the Khalsa as also the Hindus desire it...they have taken this course because they realized that it was not possible to get around the Muslim League in any other way... We do not wish to force anyone. We tried hard. We tried to reason with them but they refused to come into the Constituent Assembly.
Nehru too, refused to pressures from both quarters in his explanation of the "various reasons that had forced the Congress to accept the division of India." The first pertained to Bengali and Punjabi Hindu pressure to divide the two provinces. The second referred to the unwillingness of Muslims to be part of India. "The Congress has to face the fact that certain sections of the people do not want to remain with the rest of India." Throughout, since 1942, Nehru and the Congress believed that while they opposed the League's demand for Pakistan, "if the Muslims wish to have Pakistan, it will not deny it to them."

In this way, Congress believed that it would always concede to the popular opinion and did what the people wanted from the party. As far as the communal divide was concerned, on the one hand it was a mirror to the public opinion and on the other; it also followed the popular opinion. This amounted to the people's belief that whatever their decision, the party would be with them.

But in reality, Congress was so influential that people's belief was nurtured by the stands taken by the party. Sarat Bose had pointed this out that if Congress had taken a firm position against the Partition of Bengal, it would have been able to sway the public opinion. One of the reactions to Partition was to see it as a temporary measure. Majority of the people believed that it was not going to last. They continued to believe that a united India would be forged and that the two countries would be reunited. Congress leaders too nursed this belief; they too "nursed the hope that one day Pakistan will come back to us." Hope in the belief
that one day India would be united made them compromise with the present reality of division.

The possibility of reunion after Partition had seemed a distant dream to Nehru in 1945. In 1947, he reaffirmed that unity would not only follow partition, it would flow from it. This would happen because there was no coercion involved. Nehru spoke about this in his AIR broadcast on 3rd June 1947, while making an appeal to people to accept the plan:

The United India that we laboured for was not one of compulsion and coercion but free and willing association of a free people. It may be that in this way we shall reach that united India sooner than otherwise and that she will have a stronger and more secure foundation.

Another hope that the Congress leaders nurtured in the 3rd June plan was that it would end the communal violence. The leaders felt powerless and in their inability to contain the communal onslaught, they felt that as only partition would satisfy League ambitions, it must be accepted in the interests of a final settlement. Once the political impasse was broken, communal tension would ease. It was the same belief that violence would cease with the partition, which lay behind Nehru’s statement that Hindus and Sikhs would be safe in Pakistan.

In April 1947, the Punjab Governor Jenkins had given a warning about the worsening of the communal strife after the announcement of the Partition. As it turned out, it was Jenkins who was proved right, not Nehru—Partition happened but the violence continued unabated; in fact it intensified at a number of places.
By Aug. 1947, “Punjab had become worse than all the hells we ever heard of.”

commented Rajagopalachari.

It was the cruelest of ironies that whatever the Congress leaders hoped to bring about by effecting Partition did not come about and the result was the ultimate catastrophe of communal violence and civil war. If they had known the consequences of partition, the Congress leaders wouldn’t have accepted it so willingly.

Here, Gandhi’s opinion differed from the rest of the Congress:

They thought it was better to partition the country so that both the parts could live happily and peacefully rather than let the whole country go to pieces. About this I did hold a different view. My view was that no one could take an inch of land by resorting to violence and murder. Let the whole country be reduced to ashes.

Sumit Sarkar points out that the Indian scene was transformed after mid August 1946. Jinnah’s Direct Action Day spilled over into communal rioting across Northern India from Bengal to Bombay and further north into the Punjab. There were widespread rumours about the fate of those who were left behind as minorities. Masses had begun migrating by now and communal violence was at its worst. Rape, arson, kidnapping, plunder and murder became regular events in Punjab from March ’47 onwards. Systematic killings were perpetuated and evacuations became necessary for survival. Trains arrived at the stations, loaded with dead bodies and so revenge was the name of the game.
Facts bear out the scale of the calamity. At least one million died and more than ten million refugees were displaced. Perhaps ten times the official figure of twelve thousand five hundred women [in 1948] may have been abducted during the Partition. The main reasons behind this terrible cataclysm were the passivity of the British govt. and the complete breakdown of law and order.

K.K. Aziz notes in 'The Making of Pakistan: A study in Nationalism' (London 1967) that the idea of Pakistan resulted from two factors: the Muslim fear of Hindu rule and their feeling of being separate from the rest of Hindu India. Aziz traces the idea of Pakistan to the revolt of 1857. However, it was not until 1937 that the fear of Hindu rule and the feeling of separateness led to the idea of a separate nation.

In Dec.1930, Muhammad Iqbal, the renowned poet and philosopher, had asked the All-India Muslim League’s council to endorse the call for the creation of a Muslim state in the North-west of India, including Punjab, Sind, the NWFP and Baluchistan. His ideas were ignored by most Muslim politicians but gained some momentum in the informal arenas of politics through the medium of the popular press. In 1933, Ayesha Jalal and Sugata Bose tell us,

they inspired Chaudhari Rahmat Ali, a student at Cambridge, to invent the word ‘Pakistan’—etymologically, the ‘land of the pure’. ‘P’ stood for Punjab, ‘A’ for Afghan [NWFP], ‘K’ for Kashmir, ‘S’ for Sindh and ‘tan’ for Baluchistan... by the late 1930's Iqbal and Rahmat Ali's ideas had been supplemented by a plethora of Muslim schemes, each looking in its
own ingenious way to a solution of a minority community’s political dilemma.  

While Aziz sees the idea of separateness as coming from within the Muslim community, other writers suggest that the British had a strong hand in creating this feeling. The British involved the Hindus closely with them rather than the Muslims, knowing well that a new sense of Hindu nationalism could be fanned by reminding them that they had been dominated for over a hundred and fifty years by the Muslims.

The most important figure that saw Hindus and Muslims as separate was Sir Syed Ahmad Khan. However his vision was not one of Hindus and Muslims living separately. What he stressed was Muslim self-awareness. He exhorted the Muslims to take advantage of the new Western knowledge while preserving their Islamic values simultaneously.

Aziz describes three stages in the movement towards Partition. First, the realization of the gravity of the communal problem, second, the voicing of the need for and possibility of separation and finally the realization of a political division—though this last was arrived at slowly and almost reluctantly.

Though as Aziz notes, there were at least one hundred and seventy statements that called for a separate homeland for the Muslims. Independence and Partition, when they did come, came suddenly. The first clear statement given by the British of their intention of leaving India mentioned their date of departure as
mid 1948. On June 3rd 1947, however, Mountbatten announced that the British would leave in August that same year. This act of bringing the date forward is in itself an example of the haste with which Partition finally took place. Anita Inder Singh\textsuperscript{16} notes that the transfer of power by the British to India and Pakistan was a last minute decision prompted by administrative exigencies.

Ian Stephens suggests that it was Mountbatten’s vanity that led to the haste and to the chaos that attended Partition. He notes that the Atlee govt. had announced in Feb. 1947 that power would be transferred not later than June 1948, Mountbatten came to Delhi in March—after he had demanded and received plenipotentiary powers.\textsuperscript{17} He suggests that the massacres of several hundred thousand people, the displacement of several million, the Kashmir dispute, all these might have been avoided had more time been allowed and the date of independence not been hastened.

Whatever the reason for the almost unseemly haste with which Independence came, what did transpire was that boundaries were demarcated without paying heed to the logic of such demarcation. Not only was this demarcation done in haste, it was also done by a man who did not know India and who had recourse only to a map. But even then it seems absurd that anyone could have thought of a country composed of two provinces separated by more than nine hundred and fifty miles of foreign territory.
The haste with which the entire business of handing over power was completed, coupled with the releasing of communal emotions resulted in riots that racked Bengal and Punjab. Most people were caught unawares in the political act and had to move rapidly. In the confusion and the spate of rumours, feelings ran high. And as millions of people started moving—eastward and westward depending on their religion—people wreaked vengeance for crimes, real or imagined. Looting, raping, killing continued on a scale unprecedented in the history of India. Hindus accused Muslims of ghastly crimes and vice versa. Undoubtedly, the riots resulted in unprecedented bloodshed.

Given the violence that attended Partition, given the traumatic movement of millions of uprooted people, it is not surprising that the first impressions conveyed by the creative writer were that of a communal conflagration. The stark images of abducted women being paraded through the streets, of mutilated bodies of men and women, of trainloads of corpses, of lines of moving humanity trudging through roads strewn with bodies and baggage left behind. All this can be seen in the stories of Manto and Krishan Chander and in the novels of Yashpal and Khushwant Singh.

What is surprising however is that some writers who witnessed violence chose not to talk about it. While this is generally the case with Bangla writers who ignored the riots to describe the attempt at building a new homeland, or in finding a new home, or on the continued struggle for a new order that independence had
promised but not achieved. This silence can be seen in some Urdu writers as well e.g. Qurratulain Hyder. Twice, once in Aag ka Darya (River of Fire) and again in Akhri shab ke humsafar (Companion of the Last Night) she writes about the years before and after Partition but chooses to remain silent about the Partition year.

Some others like Chaman Nahal and Khushwant Singh build an entire canvas around this cataclysmic event. Both Azadi (Independence) and Train to Pakistan open vistas of interpreting this event. Thus even as the Partition forms, as Robert Ross notes, a myth from which writers continue to draw again and again, there are many partitions and many treatments of partition.

In the words of Mushirul Hasan,

The Pakistan story is incomplete without recording the woes of divided families, the deepening nostalgia for places people lived in for generations, forcibly abandoned and the agony of parting with friends and neighbours... Saadat Hasan Manto, who went to Pakistan in Jan. 1948, was sad at leaving a city where he had spent many working days of his life. "Bombay" he wrote "had asked me no questions. It had taken me to its generous bosom, me, a man rejected by his family, a gypsy by temperament...after leaving Bombay, I was sad. In Bombay, I earned from a few hundred to several thousand rupees and spent it all. I was in love with Bombay. I still am.

Talking about the common peasants and the impact that Partition had on their lives, Hasan says:

They were indeed victims of a gameplan worked out by the British, the Congress and the League without care or consideration for a huge number of people who had no commitment to a Hindu homeland or fascination for an
imaginary dar-al-islam. They had no destination to reach, no mirage to follow. India or Pakistan was no more than territorial abstractions to them. They had no sense of the newly demarcated frontiers, little knowledge of how Mountbatten’s plan or the Radcliffe award would change their destinies and tear them apart from their familiar social and cultural roots. ‘The English have flung away their Raj like a bundle of old straw,’ an angry peasant told Malcolm Darling, ‘and we have been chopped in pieces like butcher’s meat.’

Thus there was not much to celebrate at the fateful midnight hour or at the dawn of independence. As Faiz lamented:

Yeh dag dag ujala yeh shab guzid-e-sahar
Woh intizar tha jiska yeh woh sihar to nahin
Yeh woh sihar to nahin jis ki arzoo leykar
Chalay thay yar key mil jayengi kahin na kahin
Falaq kay dasht mein taron ki akhri manzil
Kahin to rookeyga safna-e-gamey dil

[This stain-covered daybreak, this night-bitten dawn,
This is not that dawn of which there was expectation,
This is not that dawn with longing for which,
The friends set out [convinced] that somewhere they would be met with
In the desert of the sky, the final destination of the stars,
Somewhere there would be the shore of the sluggish wave of night,
Somewhere would go and halt the boat of pain.]

India was free, Pakistan was free from the moment of its birth, but in both states, man’s enslavement continued: by prejudice, by religious fanaticism, by savagery. The question in Manto’s mind was:

Were we really free? Both Hindus and Muslims were being massacred. There were different answers to the question: the Indian answer, the Pakistani answer, the
British answer. Every question had an answer but when you tried to unravel the truth, you are left groping.\textsuperscript{23}

Thus the 1947 Indian Partition lingers as a pivotal movement in the modern world, not so much for its political significance in the emergence of the sovereignties of India and Pakistan, but for its lasting impression of monstrosity and horrific emotional duress. From the killings, rapes, kidnappings, looting and banditry, the people continue to suffer from psychological wounds etched by Partition. Before the Indian Partition, the 20\textsuperscript{th} century had not experienced such a massive and excruciating migration of people. In response to this tumultuous period, a body of fictional explorations has arisen, attempting to define the inner turmoil and social complexes plaguing the subcontinent.

Partition and the literature to describe it are very much an attempt at reconciling different issues of tradition, culture, patriarchy and religion. For the large part, most people are still experiencing the enduring hurt from the era because the emotional and psychological issues from the past incidents were never fully addressed in a large arena or even considered a concern. As Mushirul Hasan puts it:

\begin{quote}
The History books do not record the pain, trauma and sufferings of those who had to part from their kin, friends and neighbours, their deepening nostalgia for places they had lived in for generations, the anguish of devotees removed from their places of worship and the harrowing experiences of the countless people who boarded trains thinking they would be transported to the realization of
\end{quote}
their dreams, but of whom not a man, woman or child survived the journey. 24

The depiction of Partition varies according to the point of view of the individual. There is a tendency to see 1947 primarily as an hour of sorrow or describe it, after the poet 25, as a “blemished dawn”. If Partition was the most traumatic event of the century, then Independence was surely the most significant turning point. For Pakistanis, Partition became their founding moment, the glorious outcome of the struggle of the Muslims to have a separate identity recognized by both the British and the Indian nationalist movement. For the British, it was a regrettable necessity. The British Colonial power had wielded considerable control in Asia. By 1805, they were the single largest European force in India and within fifty years they controlled the entire subcontinent. South Asians resented the British colonists because of the cultural disruption. The English did not have the power to impose their will on their Indian empire which left it unified; Partition came to be the only way in which they could extract themselves from a commitment which they could no longer afford.

Partition however, was an event, which should not have happened and hence required explanation. Partition was considered as the final act of the divide and rule drama or the inevitable outcome of the age-old Hindu-Muslim rift or as the betrayal by the compromising bourgeois nationalist leadership.
Thus the National movement was both a success and a failure. The task of the National movement was two-fold—structuring classes, communities and regions into a nation and securing independence from colonial rule for this emerging nation. While the national movement achieved the building up of a national consciousness, the process of making the nation remained incomplete and the Congress, the party of the national movement failed to keep the country united. 15th Aug. 1947 symbolizes a complex, contradictory reality. A hard earned, prized Independence was won but a bloody, tragic Partition took away the pride of an emerging free nation. Freedom came but the price to be paid for its gain was the Partition.

In the making of Pakistan, religion appears to have been the determinant of nationality. According to Ayesha Jalal in The Sole Spokesman, two theories surface to explain the cataclysmic events. Firstly, the theory that Indian Muslims were always a distinct and readily identifiable community. Jalal says:

India, this theory argues contained the seeds of two nations; the Muslims were never wholly assimilated into their Indian environment and had their own distinctive traditions.

Thus the emergence of Pakistan would be a political progression enforced by religious ties. The other theory concentrated on the role of imperialism in dividing two communities, which history and tradition had joined. The concept of
Pakistan according to this view, arose from the efforts of the British to divide and rule their Indian empire [and eventually to divide and quit] \(^{28}\)

Both these theories are problematic because of the political, social, economic and religious intricacies involved in the differing situations due to the vastness of Indian culture and geography. It would be difficult to base a theory on Partition on one model; the two models have to be amalgamated with other theories of religious and national consciousness.

Immediately after the two nations were born, communal riots flared up from the remote villages to the cities. Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs slaughtered each other by stopping trains to and from India and Pakistan and slitting the throats of the passengers. They raped women and murdered children in the fields. Property was grabbed from migrating groups. Civil tension kept on increasing for several months. More than seventy five thousand women were raped, kidnapped, abducted, forcibly impregnated by men of the ‘other’ religion, thousands of families were split apart, homes burnt down, villages abandoned. The destruction of families through murder, suicide, broken women and kidnappings caused grievous post partition trauma. In *The Other side of Silence*, Urvashi Butalia writes,

Refugee camps became part of the landscape of most major cities in the North, but a half century later, there is no memorial, no memory, no recall, except what is guarded, and now rapidly dying, in families and collective memories.\(^{29}\)
Entire generations of interconnectedness among differing religious groups were shattered in a matter of weeks or even days.

Butalia points out:

> The transformation of the 'other' from a human being to the enemy, a thing to be destroyed before it destroyed you, became the all-important imperative. Feelings other than hate, indifference, and loathing had no place here. Later, they would come back to haunt those who had participated in violence, or remained indifferent to its happening.  

The heart of the matter is not determining what groups created such a situation because in actuality, all sides contributed to the physical, emotional and sexual violence. The purpose of Partition literature can be seen as steps in conflict resolution because accusations, threats, insecurities and fears are prevalent among those that were and continue to be traumatized by the events surrounding the Independence movement.

Examining Partition from a literary perspective provides keener insight into the vacillating personal experiences and national histories. The Novel form creates a discourse for understanding the sentiments of various sides of the tale because the author is not bound to a superficial sense of historical objectivity.

Anita Desai, in her introduction to *Sunlight on a broken column* says:

> To read Attia Hosain's novel and short stories is to become aware of the many and varied threads that go to make up a rich and interesting life as well as the doubts and struggles and contradictions it contained.
The fiction writer has the astute ability to produce a greater comprehension of the events because he or she inserts racial, religious, socio-economic and political biases in front of the reader to present an honest narrative account of Partition. The account is honest as it provides a medium to relate personal experiences without the guise of objectivity. Even though the narrator and characters in the text will not be free from bias, they can still offer a broader scope of the emotional and personal ramifications inherent within and penetrating into the social construct.

Along the same lines, because of the element of recalling certain memories, fiction is also able to do what history and historiography fail to do. To leave out the reminiscing is to discount the personal and emotional element of Partition trauma. History constrains memories in its futile attempt to be objective, but it is humanly impossible to achieve absolute objectivity. Yet the 'new' historiography of Partition is attempting to counteract the traditional mode of relating historical events.

The novels provide the backdrop for dealing with issues of Partition, particularly of women, that were often overlooked in retracing partition. Critics such as Urvashi Butalia, Mushirul Hasan, Ritu Menon and others are trying to recover the fragmentary and the overlooked by looking at a different kind of 'history'—one based on memoirs, interviews and women’s testimonies. Hence fiction is a better medium to cope with these emotions because fiction is intended to be subjective, and thus is more valid as a testimony than history on account of
its honesty. The memories are embedded in the consciousness and the realm of the intellect; these memories are expected to open the doors for future understanding.

A few years back, Urvashi Butalia had pointed out that “the human history of Partition has a lesser status than the political history.” [‘The Problem’ Seminar, New Delhi: India 420, 1994: 12-4]. This is no longer the truth. Her own book, based on oral narratives and testimonies illuminates the ‘underside’ of Partition history. In fact the disconnection between the rarefied decisions lending to partition and the searing consequences in individual lives, remains one of the most powerful motifs that has been carried from Partition fiction into the work of historians. Anguished by the communal riots, Nehru wrote in June 1947: ‘It is curious that when tragedy affects an individual, we feel the full force of it, but when that individual is multiplied a thousand-fold, our senses are dulled and we become insensitive.’

However, this was not true of creative writers; many of whom reveal the other face of freedom, the ‘freedom drenched in blood and gore.’ They magnify, in a way official documents do not, the plight of migrants, the woes of divided families, the trauma of raped and abducted women, and the nerve-racking train journeys which no one survived.

Literary narratives, whether in Hindi, Urdu, Bengali or Punjabi are an eloquent witness to ‘an unspeakable history.’ In the words of one writer:
Every time I visited Amritsar, I felt captivated. But the city this time presented the look of a cremation ghat, eerie and stinking...the silence was so perfect that even the faint hiss of steam from the stationary engine sounded a shriek...The brief stoppage seemed to have lingered into eternity till the engine whistled and gave a gentle pull...we left Chheharta behind and then Atari and when we entered Wagah and then Harbanspura everyone in the train felt uplifted. A journey through a virtual valley of destruction had ended when finally the train came to a halt at Platform no. 2—Lahore, the moment was as gratifying as the consummation of a dream.35

What political debate will never fully do is defeat the impulse to blame the other person/community and thus keep the hatred and the enmity alive, and that is the reason why we need to study this literature.

Literature brings out the trauma and the pain and shows that the pain is universal. These works on Partition are ultimately a more powerful medium of reconciliation than any amount of political negotiations. In these stories and fiction, the experiences of each community distinctly mirror one another, indeed reach out to and clutch one another. In the words of Ali Sardar Jafri:

_Tum aao Gulshan-I-Lahore se chaman bardosh_  
_Hum aayen subha Banaras ki raushni lekar_  
_Himalaya ki hawaon ki taazgi lekar_  
_Phir uske baad ye puchain ke kaun dushman hai?_

[You come covered with flowers from the garden of Lahore. We bring to you the light and radiance of the morning of Banaras, the freshness of the winds of the Himalayas. And then we ask who the enemy is] 36
To conclude this brief look at the history of Partition, I would like to say that my effort is to pursue the two discourses of Gender and Nation formation in the contextual warp of this period, which was tumultuous for our country. I think that these two discourses parallel and intersect each other at several levels and to perceive the resulting plurality is my aim in this attempt.
Notes

1 Veena Das quoted in Bharti Ray & Aparna Basu ed., _From Independence towards freedom: Indian women since 1947_; (New Delhi: OUP, 1999); pg.15

2 Rajeshwari Sunder Rajan, ed. _Signposts: Gender issues in Post Independence India_; (Delhi: Kali for Women, 1999); pg.24

3 Indian Historians like Bipan Chandra, K.K. Aziz, Mushirul Hasan, Durga Das.

4 Mushirul Hasan, ed.; _Inventing Boundaries: Gender Politics and the Partition of India_; (New Delhi: OUP, 2000); pg.29

5 Gandhi’s address to the prayer meeting, 11th June, 47; _MGCW_ Vol. 88, pp.73-75

6 Nehru’s speech at Liberty week meeting, 9th August 1947; _JNSW, 2nd series_, Vol.3; pg.134

7 Nehru, pg.138

8 10th March 1946, _JNSW_; Vol.15; pg.34

9 Patel to Bozman, 11th July 1947, _SPC_ Vol.4; pg.469

10 Mushirul Hasan, _India’s Partition: Process, Strategy and Mobilization_; (New Delhi:OUP, 1993) pg.41

11 _JNSW; 2nd series_; Vol.3, pg.99

12 Rajaji to Rajendra Prasad, 30th August 1947; _R.P. Papers_, 23-c\46-47

13 Rajaji’s talk with visitors from Punjab, 17th July 1947, _Vol.88_; pg.356


16 Anita Inder Singh, _The Origins of the Partition of India, 1936-47_, (Delhi: OUP, 1987) pg.8
In the second Nehru Memorial lecture, given on Nov. 14, 1968, Mountbatten described how he had told Atlee that he would only accept the Vice-Royalty if he were allowed to make his own decisions in India. The Viceroy had until then been under the orders of the Secretary of State for India. Mountbatten insisted that the Secretary of State would have to support and accept that decision. "Atlee consulted Stafford Cripps and even after 22 years, I can remember his next words: 'you are asking for plenipotentiary powers above His Majesty's govt. No one has been given such powers in this century.' There was silence for quite a while, then he went on: 'surely you can’t mean this?' 'Escape at last, I thought as I firmly replied that I did indeed mean just that and would quite understand if as a result the appointment was withdrawn. But Cripps nodded his head and Atlee replied, "All right, you've got the powers and the job." [Reflections on the Transfer of Power and Jawahar lal Nehru]; The Jawaharlal Nehru Memorial Lectures: Being the four lectures given in the years between 1966 and 1971 (London: The J.L.Nehru Memorial Trust, 1973) pg.209


Manto, Kingdom's end and other Stories, trans. from Urdu by Khalid Hasan, (Delhi: Penguin, 1989) pg.5-7


Faiz Ahmad Faiz's poem quoted earlier on pg. 14


28 Jalal and Bose, pg.48

29 Urvashi Butalia, The Other Side of Silence, (New Delhi: Penguin, 1988) pg.27

30 Butalia, pg.176

31 Anita Desais Introduction to Attia Hosain, Sunlight on a broken Column (New Delhi: Arnold-Heinemann, 1979) pg.12

32 Butalia, pg.44

33 S.Gopal ed. Selected works of Jawaharlal Nehru, second series (New Delhi: J.N. Memorial Fund, 1985) pg.180

34 Anis Kidwai quoted in Mushirul Hasan ed. 'In the shadow of freedom'; India Partitioned: The Other face of Freedom Vol.2 (New Delhi: Roli Books, 1995) pg.161

35 Mohammed Saeed, Lahore: A Memoir; (Lahore, Bilquis Pub.1989) pg.94