CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

Indo-Anglian fiction is to a large extent sociologically motivated\(^1\) all art – fictional art most noticeably – reflects socio-
logical trends and pressures to greater or lesser degree. The
partition of Indian in 1947 was one such event in recent history.
Indo-Anglian fiction which had earlier mirrored the freedom
struggle, socio-political unrest and Gandhian reforms in the pre-
Independence era came to portray the Partition and its attendant
holocaust. The tragedy of Partition stirred the fiction imagination
of the writers in creatively explore the various dimensions of such
a colossal event.
The partition and its horrendous consequences, therefore, find thematic focus in a number of novels: Khushwant Singh’s *Train to Pakistan* (1956), B. Rajan’s *The Dark Dancer* (1959), Attia Hossain’s *Sunlight on A Broken Column* (1961), Bonophul’s *Betwixt Dream and Reality* (1961), Padmini Sen Gupta’s *Red Nibiscuss* (1962), Manohar Malgonkar’s *Distant Drum* (1961) and *A Bend in the Ganges* (1964), Chaman Nahal’s *Azadi* (1975) and H.S. Gill’s *Ashes and Petals* (1978). Of these works, only *Train to Pakistan*, *A Bend in the Ganges* and *Azadi* are particularly known as Partition novels, for they directly, and at some length, deal with the theme of Partition. 

Whereas *Train to Pakistan*, and *Azadi* directly deal with the Partition, *A Bend in the Ganges* is “an epic presentation of the whole struggle of the Indian Independence and its aftermath.” The divergent strands of the plot are woven together through this focus on the Partition. Gian Talwar, Debi-Dayal, Sundari, Shafi Usman, Mumtaz, Tek Chand and his wife—all of them are caught in the communal holocaust when Independence brings the Partition, and there is a massive exchange of Muslim and Hindu populations. The glory and defeat of the hour of freedom and the shame of Partition emerge as the theme of *A Bend in the Ganges*.
in its final chapters. That is why it can be described as a partition novel although it is more than a mere partition novel.

In his novel, *Train to Pakistan*, Khushwant Singh remains within “the obvious limits of socio-cum-political narrative fiction of contemporary interest”\(^4\) because of his restricted canvas and limited range, and his novel, therefore, concentrate on the partition holocaust itself. He depicts the human tragedy caused by the partition and the attendant communal disharmony but he does not fully explore the politicio-historical background and sociological factors responsible for it except in a few opening paragraphs.

Similary Chaman Nahal’s *Azadi* portrays the Partition but his emphasis is more on the rehabilitation of the refugees and various other problems faced by them than on the forces which produced it. In sharp contrast to these two novelists, Malgonkar has covered a wider canvas in *A Bend in the Ganges*, and shows “the fateful effect of the past on the present.”\(^5\) The chief strength of his novel, particularly in regard to the partition theme, stems from the detailed historical introduction that it provides to the partition tragedy.
The Partition which came as a fellow traveler of freedom was not the outcome of an overnight political decision. It was rather the culmination of a steady process that slowly gathered momentum and exploded with a bang. IN this novel Malgonkar shows how gradually, drop by drop, communal poison emittered the lives of such dedicated freedom fighters as Shafi Usman and Basu and converted them into communal fanaties. The young terrorists who blew up railway tracks, bridge and aeroplanes are ironically at each other’s throat at the end of the novel. Manohar Malgonkar has explored the issues connected with the Partition rather ironically. ‘The sunrise of our freedom’ for which Debi–dayal and Shafi Usman worked together, tragically becomes an occasion of their own destruction.

The partition and the method with which it was carried out have caused sheer disgust in the novelist. He shows “tryst with destiny” as “also the death-trap fashioned by the Malignant time-spirit.” Debi-dayal is faced with a number of questions raised by the partition holocaust. But he does not live to find answers for them because while traveling in a train he is discovered by Muslim rioters and, despite the passionate protestation of Mumtaz, is dragged out and felled. She hurls herself upon him
but she is wrenched apart and carried away naked and struggling, screaming at the top of her voice. The sun is just then rising over the Punjab but the sun of Debi’s fate is going to set:

That was the last thing he ever saw:
The rising sun in the land of the Five rivers on the day of their freedom
The next second his eyes were blinded by
A great flash of pain that seemed to Shoot up from the centre of him, as
Though a bomb had exploded between his lions.7

The tragic murder of Debi-dayal and the way Mumtaz is separated from him is a clear indication of the enormity of the evil of Partition.

Malgonkar extensively explores the historical facts of the Partition through an indirect commentary on the slow but steady growth of communalism, the history of the Partition, the background and the mass exodus of ten million people accompanied by communal violence as “a fellow traveler of freedom”.
Malgonkar views the partition as the outcome of the suppression of violence in Indian people by Mahatma Gandhi’s creed of non-violence. He has portrayed it from a political angle unlike Khushwant Singh, Malgonkar, “presents the political side of the Partition from the point of view of Gian, the ardent disciple of Gandhi and his creed of non-violence; Debi-dayal, the terrorist, and Hafiz Khan and Shafi Usmani, the communalist. Malgonkar’s account takes the form of a cool, impersonal debate among the characters; it looks like a scientific analysis of the situation rather than something which emerges out of the characters themselves and their convictions. This ‘deatchment’ also marks his narration of the Partition riots, when they are compared to similar descriptions by Khushwant Singh.”

There is enough evidence in the novel to support Mr. Batra’s observation in broad sense. One can find illustrative passage in the conversation between Debi-dayal and Basu at Calcutta: “The British have succeeded in what they set out to do set the Hindus and Muslims at each other’s throats, what a lovely sight! Basu calls his wife and shows her face to Debi-Dayal, which was burnt with sulphuric acid filled in an electric bulb, the
standard weapon of Hindu-Muslim fend in those days. Basu’s wife is symbolic of what has happened to the face of India.

Devi-dayal is stunned by the horrors of Partition. Tek Chand’s viewpoint also confirms Mr. Batra’s charge against the novel. But is is quite natural that Malgonkar should not be as passionately involved in the portrayal of Partition as Khushwant Singh and Chaman Nahal are, because he views the events a historical perspective. A Bend in the Ganges, however, shares the assertive and affirmative vision projected in both Train to Pakistan and Azadi, Each of the three novels has a love-story in order to intensify the human tragedy of Partition. The love between Jugga and Nooran Train to Pakistan, Arun and Noor Azadi, and Devi – dayal and Mumtaz A Bend in the Ganges represents one of the positive and humanistic forces in these Partition novels. Jugga dies saving the train by which Nooran is travelling from sabotage. As for Debi and Mumtaz, the following is a tell-tale description:

‘Debi Deb, my darling! I shall never live without you! I am coming with you too … I’m coming.¹⁰

“The ending of A Bend in the Ganges observes Professor Amur “recalls the conclusion of Khushwant Singh’s Train to
Pakistan, where the affirmation is even more deliberate and emphatic.” 11 The piercing cry of Mumtaz, as Mohan Jha points out, is “indeed the cry of outraged humanity.” 12

Partition was an event of such magnitude that its treatment in the novel-form has changed the formal properties of the novel. Chaman Nahal’s Azadi has elicited the following observation from Sujit Mukherjee:

The whole strength of Azadi, a to me,
Lies in its lack of a pretension –
As if the theme chose its own form
And style, refusing to submit to
Any existing theory or prior
Practice of fiction. By surrendering
To him them, the novelist found
His freedom and power. 13

In grappling with the Partition tragedy Azadi has become a ‘double focus novel’. The events of the novel are viewed through the authorial focus as well as the focus of Lala Kanshi Ram, the central character of the novel. As against Azadi, Khushwant Singh’s Train to Pakistan has a single intensive focus on the human tragedy caused by the Partition. In his book on
Khushwant Singh Professor Shahane has described it as a realistic epic on the ground that it shows “a growth in space and movement in time”\textsuperscript{14} which widens its scope into that of an epic. It is largely true that \textit{Train to Pakistan}, like \textit{A Bend in the Ganges} and \textit{Azadi}, is an excellent work of neo-realism but it is not epical in its focus. In focusing on the partition it becomes what Aristotle calls “spectacle” in tragedy, Professor Shahane’s description, however, aptly applies to \textit{A Bend in the Ganges} because more than \textit{Train to Pakistan} it shows a growth in space and movement in time. It has an epic aspiration as well as epic magnitude. Professor R.S. Singh has noted:

\begin{quote}
\textit{Malgonkar’s A Bend in the Ganges is multifaceted, ambitious and epic novel like War and Peace.}\textsuperscript{15}
\end{quote}

\textit{A Bend in the Ganges}, presents an epic portrayal of the historical reality of the Partition is a part. It derives this feature not only from the epic movement and structure of the novel but also from the epic material covered in it. As Professor Amur has observed:

\begin{quote}
\textit{“Richard Church has drawn our attention to the epic movement of the novel but it is also important to note the epic dimensions of the world that the novel offers.”}\textsuperscript{16}
\end{quote}
It will be seen that all the three major partition novels devise situations to voice protest against communal discord. *Train to Pakistan* shows how Jugga and Nooran are separated from each other: *A Bend* present Debi and Mumtaz who are finally separated in the holocaust of Partition; and in *Azadi* the tragedy attendant on the Partition lies in the separation of Noor from Arun.

Thus, the three major novels have an almost similar situation which views the Partition as a human tragedy separating two passionate lovers. S.C. Harrex says of *Train to Pakistan* that “the perspectives of meaning are forcefully implicit in the dramatic action.”

This observation is equally true of *A Bend in the Ganges* in which love represents of the positive and humanistic forces. The way in which Debi – dayal is ruthlessly separated from Mumtaz is a clear proof of the evil that is epitomized in the partition fury.

As a partition novel, *A Bend in the Ganges* is not backed by the direct involvement of the author in the human tragedy as is true of Khushwant Singh or Chaman Nahal. Furthermore, the detached realism of the novels is not totally objective as
demonstrated earlier, but the novels do succeed in the delineation of the complex factors which led to the Partition.

The violence and disorder of the novel has been given a symbolic meaning and coherence through the Shiva image. H.M. Williams’s assessment of the Shiva image is well-worth quoting in this context.

_There is an obvious appropriateness in the recurring appearance of the God of destruction in a novel that explores with unflagging energy and horrifying detail the violence and hated that swept over India during and after Independence and Partition._

_A Bend in the Ganges_ is in the opinion of Meenakshi Mukherjee no better than a skilful reportage, this seems too brash an opinion. Like _Train to Pakistan_, to adopt a phrase of S.C. Harrex, a “workable compromise between documentary and literary modes,” have been obtained in the novel. The documentary appeal of the novel arises largely from its neo-realistic and historical framework although a romantic gloss has been given to its socio-historical reality. The realistic mode and the historical content of the novel are not at variance with the imaginative extension of reality achieved by the use of symbols
and motifs. Commenting on the use of symbols in a traditional novel, K. Ayyappa Paniker says:

*The symbols in a realistic novel are part of the reality depicted in the work with an added suggestion of meaning. They have their sole existence in the world of facts. The novelist finds them given to him; he does not create them himself.*

Symbols and motifs are not a necessity in a realistic novel but then use does lend effectiveness and suggestivity to its theme, as they do in *A Bend in the Ganges*.

The only categorization possible is in respect of the so-called Partition novels and the novels of East-West Encounter. But to label *The Serpent and the Rope* as a novel of East-West Encounter will to miss and overlook all that is great and unique in the work and one will not be doing full justice to the various dimensions of novels like Malgonkar’s *A Bend in the Ganges*, Khushwant Singh *Train to Pakistan* and Chaman Nahal’s *Azadi* by calling them political novels or Partition novels. Each of them has an overall structure which calls for much deeper analysis in terms of criteria which one applies to epics, sagas and tragedies, for they
show as V.A. Shahane points out, “a growth in space and movement in time” which widen their scope into that of an epic.”

Love is the prime cause of his emergence as the real hero of the novel and it invites a comparison with Khushwant Singh’s *Train to Pakistan*, the hero is a probationer of Mano Majra. His brutal conquest of Nooran, a Muslim girl of his village, at the beginning of the novel is, as S.C. Harrex has said, “the prelude to the growth in him of a vital and responsible love.”

He transcends himself and his criminality and, for the sake of love, makes a heroic sacrifice worthy of a tragic hero, to save Nooran and other passengers of the train from annihilation. Nooran is at the centre of the regeneration of humanity in a Budmash No. 10.

Similarly, Gian Talwar who had jettisoned non-violence and truth is morally regenerated by his love for Sundari. Love retrieves this moral identity. Though Sundari humiliated him, he comes to rescue her from the clutches of Shafi Usman. Debi – dayal shuns revenge and violence to saviour love, and Gian learns to live in love. Thus, although *A Bend in the Ganges* is for the most part devoted to violence and revenge, it finally projects a lyrical vision of love and sound a positive note of life-affirmation.
To sum up, Langonkar uses sex and love for purposes other than mere thrill or excitement. Gian-Sundari affair proves it beyond doubt. Just as violence is a basic reality of human nature similarly love is at the bottom of *A Bend in the Ganges*. Khushwant Singh, Chaman Nahal and Manohar Malgonkar are certainly not the social realistic like ‘the big trio’ but they are almost always true to life and document with detached realism.

The spread of communalism embitters the lives of freedom fighters. The stage is now set for the tragedy of partition which causes communal frenzy and ends in barbarities. *A Bend in the Ganges* has a distinct edge over Khushwant Singh’s *Train to Pakistan* and Chaman Nahal’s *Azadi* is that it gives a detailed account of the forces that led to the Partition. The integration of the personal and national in the various stands of the narrative makes this novel a valuable socio-historical document. Their novel lays emphasis on the value of love and portrays Indian life on an epic scale. The romanticism is paradoxically realistic. The depiction of the social and cultural milieu is realistic. Their novels represent the conflicts of cultures and rare portrayal of Partitioned soul.
**Reference**


