Partition of India was perhaps one of the goriest happenings which ever took place in the history of human race. It was an outcome of a fissured and flawed freedom that came to the subcontinent on 15th August 1947, preceded by communal holocausts and followed by even bloodier massacres and uprooting of people across the frontiers. "It was one such happening," writes Jasbir Jain, "the shame of which has outlived the loss of life and values." Larry Collins and Dominique Lapierre have described the event as "a rare moment," "the most complex divorce action in history...." As soon as our erstwhile rulers drew random lines on the map, splitting the country into two unequal halves, mayhem followed. "Facts bear out the scale of the calamity—at least one million died and more than ten million refugees were displaced." Barbarism supplanted humanity and in the course of it most heinous forms of violence was inflicted upon the common man. The women became the prime targets of sexual savagery or physical mutilation. "More than 75,000 women are believed to have been abducted and raped by men of religion different from their own." Besides that innumerable women fell prey to the antipathy of their own community. Families were shattered, thousands went missing and moveable as well as immovable property was either looted or destroyed in spate of communal riots. The apocalypse resulted in "the largest human exodus in history" during which "thousands were butchered on the way and many others died of malnutrition and contagious disease...." It was "a shock
The painful divide of 1947 was recorded by a significant number of historians and literary writers. Since literature is “fundamentally an expression of life” it couldn’t remain oblivious of this bleakest phase of life that the partition presented. A galaxy of writers felt spontaneously inspired to write on the theme of partition in the wake of its ghastly consequences. Contrary to the texts of history, literature became a repository of localised truths depicting the actualities of human experience. Through their works the writers not only captured the ghoulish ambience of those murky days, but also made an attempt to diagnose the malady from a humanitarian aspect. Ever since then the partition theme has continued to reverberate in the literary imagination of creative writers. Even today, the theme has not outlived its importance and is still being explored by several authors with the same amount of energy and enthusiasm. However, it is worth mentioning that with the passage of time thematic stance of authors on partition has shown signs of gradual transformation. If the earlier writers on partition were more concerned with barbarism and bloodletting of that demented phase, the latter writers have expressed a sympathetic concern for the survivors of the holocaust. If massacres, rapes or sights of looting and arson had evoked the emotions of the writers in the earlier phase, the latter have been carried away by the aftermath of the divide—the refugee life, the experience of exile, of being unable to
return to roots. Even the recent writers on partition have not lagged behind the writers of the earlier phases in exploring the theme of country’s partition. Keeping partition, as a primordial cataclysm, in the backdrop of their narratives these writers have shown that neither have we learnt from our past mistakes nor have the saga of partitions ended yet. “Anger is still simmering not only among the countries of the subcontinent but also among communities within the countries.” Communalism, like “a many-armed octopus,” as Qazi Sattar defines it, is still spreading its tentacles to victimise humanity. However, despite all odds, the contemporary writers are optimistic and hope that peace and goodwill would finally triumph over all such vicious forces that are trying to polarise human beings from each other on one pretext or the other. The four texts, selected for study, comprehensively reveal the outlook of these recent writers. The narratives not only explicitly examine the historic divide and its horrendous consequences, but also build a vision of peace and harmony for a better future of humanity.

In *A River with Three Banks* Shiv K. Kumar has focused upon the partition holocaust to unravel agonies of the common man caught in the whirl of communal violence. Keeping the love affair of Gautam and Haseena at the focal point of his narrative the author has presented a trail of pathetic sequences from the awful days of partition. The narrative reveals how the stupendous rise in communalism led to the loss of mutual trust amongst different communities and unleashed unprecedented violence in various parts of the country. Besides
other irreparable losses millions of people confronted the grave problem of identity crisis, initially being defined on religious lines and later, after the partition, being identified as ‘Refugees’ or ‘Mohajirs’ by their own communities. The author has also given a vivid description of the terrible exchange of population and revealed the traumatic experiences of the common man through the painful journey of Haseena’s family to Pakistan. However, despite depicting so many melodramatic incidents in the novel the author keeps the ray of hope alive. By ending the love story of Gautam and Haseena on a positive note Shiv K. Kumar not only affirms faith in the power of love, but also feels that, irrespective of differences in caste, creed, community, race or religion, a peaceful and harmonious social order can certainly be built on the foundation of love.

In *What the Body Remembers* Shauna Singh Baldwin has given a true account of the changing communal relations, amongst the three major communities of Punjab – the Hindus, the Muslims and the Sikhs, from pre-Partition to the post-Partition period. Beginning the narrative somewhere in 1937, the author shows a peaceful coexistence prevailing amongst these communities despite their socio-cultural differences. However, the novelist keeps the narrative centred around the Sikh community and through the two Sikh families, of Sardarji and Bachan Singh, visualises the theme of country’s partition. Since the Sikhs acknowledged themselves as a separate socio-cultural community they looked upon the partition from their own communal
dimension. With the upsurge of communal politics in the country the Sikhs too organised themselves on lines of faith and launched their own political outfit, the Akali party, creating a threefold communal dimension in Punjab. Feeling spellbound by the communal politics of the province Sardarji, the protagonist of the novel, too transforms from a liberal-minded man to a communalist and feels that if the Muslims can get a separate homeland for themselves—why cannot the Sikhs have a ‘Sikhistan’? The communal politics, thus, divided the three communities and, consequently, repeated cycles of violence and vandalism marred the harmony of the province. In the course of this ghastly violence, completely oblivious of the miseries of the common man, political leaders stressed upon the partition of the country. Acceding to their demand the British acted in the most reckless manner and, as W.H. Auden puts it, “in seven weeks it was done, the frontiers decided / A continent for better or worse divided.” Besides presenting the ugly face of communal politics and the plight of the Sikh community the novel also captures the sordid state of women in those days. Through the two major women characters in the novel, Roop and Satya, the author has shown how amidst the deadly spells of partition violence the women became soft targets of rabid rioters. “When battle lines” were “drawn and territory mapped, the only way of humiliating the other was through victimising their women,” writes Rumina Sethi. Therefore, women became symbols of community honour during partition and faced the gush of communal violence at the hands of the warring community. Besides bearing the brunt of inter-communal violence they were also subjected to intra-communal
violence and in the name of ‘honour killings’ many of them were constrained to sacrifice their lives for the sake of communal pride. In the novel Shauna Singh Baldwin has also expressed concern over the subordinate status of women in a patriarchal social order. She feels that women were the worst-hit during partition since they also endured persecution at their homes besides facing the savagery of partition violence. Though the novel is laden with painful incidents of human plight, yet the novelist has concluded the study on an optimistic note. Despite losing his roots and ancestral holdings Sardarji feels that Punjab would once again regain its lost splendour and its people, seeking inspiration from the lives of the revered Gurus, would yet again depose an unflinching faith in the tenets of peace and harmony.

In *Partitions (Kitne Pakistan)* Kamleshwar has treated the theme of partition at a wider plane. By keeping the divide of 1947 at the centre of his narrative the author has thrown light upon several similar partitions that had taken place in different pockets of the world on lines of caste, creed, community, race, religion, nationality, etc. In the narrative the author has captured the historic divide of 1947 through several short stories centred around – Buta Singh, Zainab, Surjit Kaur, Salma, Bafati, Major Hasan and Vidya who represent the common man caught in the vicious web of partition violence. For extending the aura of his study the author has made the use of a surrealistic mode of narrative technique and has looked beyond the divide of the Indian subcontinent to reflect a sequence of global partitions, from the past
as well as the present, through the narrator of his novel, the adeeb. The adeeb acting as an arbiter of humanity transcends beyond the bounds of time and space to trace out the causes as well as the culprits responsible for fragmenting the global order. Kamlewshwar has further enriched the thematic dimension of the narrative by using the word ‘Pakistan’ as a metaphor of ‘partitions’—the partitions taking place the world over on flimsy grounds and signifying the growing gaps amongst the human beings. Besides providing a metaphorical treatment to the partition theme the author also deals with several other issues, such as—the malpractice of imperialism, the manipulative role of the international organisations in affecting partitions, the upsurge of terrorism, the growth of fundamentalism and the problems being caused due to the trespassing of politics into religion and vice versa, that have played an obnoxious role in the creation of ‘Pakistans’ the world over. However, the author is still hopeful and deposes a firm faith in the power of culture believing that its miraculous power could unambiguously unite human beings the world over. The following lines of Ella Wheeler Wilcox seem to depict the vision of the author for a peaceful and united future world.

So many gods, so many creeds,
so many paths that wind and wind,
when just the art of being kind is
all that the sad world needs. 

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In *Blood Brothers* M.J. Akbar provides a vivid account of changing relationships between the Hindus and Muslims over the years. Set in a small town of Bengal, Telinipara, the narrative begins with the picture of undivided India—a time when “communal peace, political calm and toleration showed its welcome face.... Hindus and Muslims were present at each other’s festivities.” A peaceful coexistence prevailed. However, as the nation drew closer to its dawn of independence the relations between the two communities began to grow sour. On parameters of faith random lines were drawn to segregate the two communities which, despite their socio-cultural differences, had lived amicably together over long stretches of time. The nebulous feeling of separatism was crystallised by politics and partition followed. M.J. Akbar opines that with the creation of Pakistan the dilemmas of the Indian Muslims multiplied manifold. They became aliens on the very piece of land that had remained their nourishing ground for generations. A state of indecisiveness, as to whether they should stick to their roots in India or relinquish the land of their ancestors to survive through the communal carnage, created a terrible mess in their lives. Owing to such psychological probing thousands of Muslim families were disintegrated. M.J. Akbar feels distressed to observe that even after sixty years of partition the attitude of the Hindus towards the Muslims has not changed completely. They still feel as if, to quote the words of Shashi Tharoor, “Muslims are like a lemon squirted into the cream of India.” It is most unfortunate that even today the Hindu masses look upon the Muslims as one big caste and as trespassers in India. The author feels pained to observe that the
allegiance of Indian Muslims is still under a scanner. The antipathetic attitude of the Hindus, what M.R.A. Baig calls “Hindu Xenophobia,” makes the author to cry in anguish. However, the very feeling, quoting the words of Belu Jain Maheshwari, that “even amidst the chaos and barbarism, there are human beings who keep alive the spirit of courage, generosity even at the risk of losing their own lives” makes the author hopeful. Recollecting the sacrifice of his Hindu friend Kamala, who laid down his own life to save M.J. Akbar from the Hindu radicalists, the author feels elated. Such exemplary bonds of inter-communal friendship as well as the vision of India’s harmonious past engenders a hope of the possibility of peaceful coexistence in the mind of the author. The narrative, ultimately, ends on a positive note, that could well be described in the words of M. N. Roy thus, “in the throes of a belated Renaissance, Indians, both Hindus and Muslims, should profitably draw inspiration from that memorable chapter of history” and should live like blood brothers once again as they had done in the past. It is expedient for them to sink the differences and realise, “In this spirited nation, there are no Hindus or Muslims—we are all Hindustanis and nothing but Hindustanis!”

So, from the perusal of the four texts an inference could well be drawn that recent writers on partition acknowledge peace and brotherhood vital to human existence. By deposing faith either in the essence of love or in the guiding principles of religion; either in the power of culture or in the coexistence of bygone days these authors have not only concluded their
narratives on an optimistic note, but have also suggested distinct ways to achieve the all important milestone of peace. The following lines from K. M. Panikkar’s “The Waves of Thought” appear apt enough to affirm the vision of these writers upon the ideology of peace.

Real peace can only be known
Through an even mind, rooted in love
And nourished in the feeling of oneness
With all created things.²²
Notes


6Collins and Lapierre, Foreword, Mountbatten and the Partition of India, ix.


15 Quoted in Singh, *The End of India*, 163.


20 Quoted in Baig, *The Muslim Dilemma in India*, 44.