Chapter IV
Socio-Political Background
In the post-Independence fiction there is shift of emphasis in the perspectives. Most of the novelists seemed to have felt that, after the achievement of freedom which was the cause worth fighting for, and the initial euphoria that went with it, much of the ferment was lost. However, it is not to suggest that Gandhian ideology that sustained the pre-independence fiction, lost its relevance, nor was it relegated to the background. Politicians as of old and new were now fully engaged in nation building, with all their prioritization focused on the social and economic freedom.

An era of uncertainty seemed to have virtually ended with the dawn of freedom, and the vast sub-continent engaged in the world's biggest democracy. A period of relative tranquility prevailed after the nation had gone through the traumas of continual subjugation of nearly a century. The post-Independence fiction befittingly endorsed the luxuriant moods of the nation that awoke into freedom and the literal
transformations it underwent as a large Republic, proud in
the comity of nations.

The subsequent partition of India, based on the two
nation theory, once again opened the floodgates of anger and
resentment, for it was an experience that caused a lot of heart
burn. This vexatious turn in the national experience produced
fiction that was almost acerbic, self-critical and non chalantly
pessimistic. The changing political scenario and the changing
contexts of social reality had unleashed this uneasy
accommodation in national conscience which ensued in the
rich proliferation of fiction that was at once passionately self-
critical and corrosively cynical. As Dr. K.R. Rao observes:

"In the post-Independence fiction, there is, however,
a shift of emphasis. The writers who came after 1947
express a sense of disenchantment and frustration
although their anger includes humanistic compassion.
Their work is burdened by an adverse and contrary
awareness of the contemporary reality, so full of hatred, violence and orgiastic self-seeking." 

Devendra Satyarthi writes:

"No literature based on hate and prejudice can really be great. It was a drama of human decay. Showing how the minds of the two communities poisoned by the dogma of two nation theory."

K.A. Abbas's *Inquilab* (1958) is primarily concerned with the Gandhian ideology, like Raja Rao's *Kanthapura* and Venkataramani's *Kandan, the Patriot*. The picaresque method, with the overplus of significant national events and characters reminiscent of most of the important patriots who took part in the national struggle for independence impelled the novelist to recrudesce the Indian 'usable part', and the events in the life of the hero Anwar, which are shaped by the forces of history. Abbas keeps up the verisimilitude and retains the fictional veracity as close as to the real incidents
that took place during that momentous period of the freedom struggle.

Venu Chitale's *In Transit* (1950) is a novel dealing with the saga of a family and a village community. The novel proposes to deal with a phase of Indian freedom struggle with an emphasis on the ancillary modes of social change which is very dear to Gandhiji.

Attia Hosain's *Sunlight on a Broken Column* (1961) is a novel dealing with an adolescent girl's maturation into experience, and her attempts to grapple with the intricacies of political reality it is, as it were, a passage from “innocence” to “experience”, a translation into adult reality that impinges on her a sense of total involvement and immersion. K. Nagarajan's *The Chronicles of Kadaram* (1961) is a much more ambitious work than his earlier novel *Athwar House* (1939), which introduces Gandhi in person, and deals with the national resurgence at length.
Kamala Markandaya's *Some Inner Fury* (1956) is a tragedy engineered by the East-West conflict as it gets exemplified in the characters of Mira and Richard. The novel focuses its attention on the 'familiar dilemma personal relationship and racial prejudice.' Bhabani Bhattacharya's *Shadow from Ladakh* (1966) is more 'rooted deeply in Gandhian thought'.

Khushwant Singh's *Train to Pakistan* (1956) is an epic of suffering. As a legend of untold miseries that visited the whole of the Indian sub-continent, the novel pillories all our sympathy. It is pitiless in its exposure of the sham and cynicism of the two-nation theory which most of the politicians conveniently used for propagating their own warped ideas of the nations involved.

The holocaust, death and mutilation that engulfed the whole subcontinent only speak of the sheer shallowness of the politicians. Khushwant Singh writes of the horrors let loose
the communal frenzy that visited even a most remote village like Mano Majra which turns out to be the very eye of the storm. Mano Majra is a tiny village, comprising predominantly three racial groups—Hindus, Muslims, and Sikhs who lived in harmony, and who were disturbed by the communal frenzy that swept through the whole subcontinent, after India's partition. Two racial groups—Sikhs and Muslims plunged headlong into the war of attrition, with the cries of reprisal, rending the skies. Lala Ram Lal, the only Hindu, and the money-lender in the village, was mercilessly murdered. Suspicious were raked up and the rumours were in the air. The Hindus cried that it was then duty to kill at least a million of the Muslims and the Muslims, in turn, geared up into unleashing the orgy and communal violence. The result is an attempt to eliminate races and a perpetuation of genocide that knew no limits, ensuring in the ghastly murders and pitiless
rapes. Thus, the partition had brought in its wake irretrievable loss both to India and Pakistan.

Nevertheless the people in Mano Majra lived in amity. It was when the local money-lender, Ram Lal, was murdered that the village became suddenly disturbed. Jugget Singh and Iqbal were arrested. In fact it was the young Sikh boys from outside who were responsible for the communal flare up. They were in fact invited to Mano Majra by some people with vested interest, who conspired to derail the train that took the refugees to Pakistan. A rope across the bridge was tied to drag the Muslims down from the roof of the running carried. Juggat Singh had knowledge about the conspiracy and wanted to stop the genocide and he had successfully diverted the attention of the conspirators by cutting the rope meant for killing Muslims and allowing the train to pass over to Pakistan by risking his own life.
Khushwant Singh writes with a rare passion and fervour about the holocaust, the pity and fear of the communal violence that moved the whole subcontinent. Since he is also a witness to the incidents, he is also able to write with an accuracy that is very rare in fiction. The novel acquires the dimensions of an epic, with its large sweep and universal implications. The real ‘Indian tragedy’ has been telescoped by the novelist with an artistic ingenuity which is almost comparable to the American Theodor Drieser who wrote an “American Tragedy”. Khushwant Singh succeeds in communicating to the readers the grossness and meaninglessness of the partition tragedy. If Mano Majra is a fixed point in space, the train is the symbol of movement:

"The train signifies the groups of multitudes of people who are on the moves heading for their various destinies. The train in this context implies the movement of the vast communities, from their roots and areas of traditional
growth to a New Jerusalem. The train also suggests the fate of the individuals, the destinies of two newly born nations, consequent upon a political decision and the miseries, sufferings and privations which issue from it.\textsuperscript{5}

The communal frenzy and the orgiastic selfseeking of the communities in aversion are brought out by the novelist in clear terms:

"Tomorrow a train load of Muslims is to cross the bridge to Pakistan. If we are men, this train should carry as many people dead to the other side as you have received."\textsuperscript{6}

The people — both Muslims and Sikhs considered the genocidal killings as a ritual, and offered prayers to God to grant them victory, while Gandhian ideals do not approve of the violence because it is basically against the main tenet of the Principle of non-violence. But Khushwant Singh in fact
attempts to focus his attention on the value of non-violence. 

As he writes:

"The (Sikh) boy cleared his throat, shut his eyes and 
began to recite the names of Gurus. He ended by asking 
for the Guru's blessings for the venture. The assembly 
grew down on the knees and rubbed their forehead on the 
ground loudly proclaiming ... By the grace of God ... 'We 
bear the world nothing but good will?"/

He wanted to ask God to forgive these people and felt 
that human beings, with no faith in God, were animals. Only 
such people would indulge in communal frenzy, and indulge 
in killing thousands of innocent people:

"All the world respects religious men look at Sharif 
and the angel alongwith his Vedas and Shastras. People 
sing his praise in the four corners of the earth. I have sen 
pictures in the newspapers of Gandhi's prayer meeting. It 
showed a lot of white men and women sitting cross-
legged. One white girl had her eyes shut. They said she was the Big Lord's daughter."8

Manohar Malgonkar's *A Bend in the Ganges* (1964) is another significant work that throws up flood of light on the agonies of the partition, and the lacerations that went by it in the whole of the sub-continent. The sweep, the grandeus, and whole drama of inhumanity that was enacted are snapped with artistic fidelity and beauty. The epic dimensions of the novel bring close to Tolstoy's *War and Peace*. The novelist tried to probe Ahimsa which Gandhi offered to the world as a gift.

Chaman Nahal's *Azadi* (1975) is a novel dealing with the horrors of the partition of India whose parallel is perhaps Khushwant Singh's *Train to Pakistan*. *A Bend in the Ganges* seeks to depict the surcharged atmosphere and the chilling experience of the partition days. Chaman Nahal is more interested in presenting the partition tragedy than Gandhian perse. Thus the focus is more on the people who
are otherwise peace-living and who have been ruthlessly misused by the unscrupulous politicians for their selfish ends than on the projection of Gandhian values.

The aforementioned novels deal with the terror of the partition, have successfully projected the tragedy. Khushwant Singh endeavours to chart out the cruelty and cynicism. The brutality, and utter inhumanity on the part of the racist groups, who brought about the national holocaust in the wake of the partition of India. The massacres and mayhem which are perpetuated by the Hindus and Muslims left deep sears on the national consciousness.

Since Khushwant Singh is so near to the tragedy which is perpetuated with obvious relish, the novel acquires the immensity of an epic whose parameters are to be located in the intensity of collective suffering. Manohar Malgonkar, on the other hand, is more interested in the evolution of the Character and is more concerned with the fictionalization of
his pet thesis than in the efficacy of non-violence. The contrastive juxtaposition between the two modes of non-violence as a personal creed seems to have been overplayed by the novelist, though he succeeds in presenting the ineffectiveness of the Gandhian ideology as a moral precept. The novels of Attia Hossain, Chaman Nahal, though operate on a low key are yet significant achievements in terms of their acerbic contemporaneity.

In *Train to Pakistan*, the social milieu reveals that Sikhs, Hindus and Muslims made the traditional structures of the Punjabi society in the pre-partition India. Culture, Language and customs contributed to the larger Punjabi identity though at a certain level religion divided those into communal groupings almost separate identities. Another identity is a tense emotional belongingness to the village. It operated at the immediate level which gave shape to the separate religious identities.
The Punjabi rural people are not at all prepared for the big holocaust which the partition proved to be. It came as a big blow in the self sufficiency to the Indian rural life. The people are caught in a disaster beyond their understanding. It happens to inspite of national leader's proclamation that India would be partitioned only after their bodies cut into two pieces. This is the understanding of the Punjabi folklore. The people are on all of a sudden thrown over to an uncertain destiny.

Lahore, the capital of the undivided Punjab, emerges as the epic center of all kinds of revolutionary and reformist movements in northern India. It is also the largest concentration of the emerging Punjabi ruling class. The Punjabi middle class movements could not affect the Punjabi rural life. Hostility to the British presence in India finds an expression in the rising middle class and in few sections of the rural masses as could be involved in the national freedom
movement. Mano Majra has none of these opportunities and therefore, it has no other option than to surrender passively to the forces let loose by the partition. It doesn't have to think for itself.

The lecherous ruling class which the British gifted to India is symbolized in the flabbyfiness of magistrate Hukum Chand who camps at Mano Majra during the Partition or deal. A master in the art of lying, cheating, inventing alibis, he cares little for the butchery of thousands of innocents. The Police administration he rears is comparable to the fendal system under the Nawabs and the Maharajas. While whole of the Punjab is inflames. Hukum Chand must have almost every night a sweet sixteen to satisfy his impotence.

The extra flesh hanging loose on his decaying body is a pointer to the whole system gone plump. The social milieu of the novel is at the receiving end and precisely because of it the novel remains a significant documentary. Jugga being
peripheral to the main theme is a maverick. He is no better than a youth hardly anxious for the need to interact with the holocaust which overtakes his society.

Khushwant Singh's attitude towards his characters in *Train to Pakistan* can be easily determined. He sketches some very divergent characters which are types and individuals. He hints more at their complexity and does not develop them fully. Though there is feeling that his characters are hemmed in by their environment and traditions. This is the positive indication of individuality to many of his characters. Meet Singh, the Gurudwara priest, typifies the stratified members of society. He is too feeble, unheeded and unaccustomed to real leadership. Hukum Chand, the amoral magistrate and tawdry politician, has people touching his feet. He has enough capacity to avoid Mano Majra massacre but hides his potential ability out of his cowardice and uncertain nature.
British educated and inspired by communism Atheist Iqbal has all the theories but lacks the courage to put them into action in hours of crisis. He is the novelist's the young, self-serving idealist who knows all the right answers but is handicapped in asking right question. He is worried about his own safety and he is self-centres. The novelist wants to say that it needs courage to be a coward. Iqbal demonstrates that individuality is more than mere renunciation of religion and social mores, though he is trapped by his own selfishness. We see that heroism comes from Sikh Juggut Singh, a trouble-maker for the village, for an unexpected reason. Hukum Chand counts on the possibility of Juggut Singh taking revenge on Malli, a fellow criminal and achieves force behind the proposed train ambush. But Juggut's trust with destiny is motivated by a love, for greater than lust, for his Muslim Mistress Nooran. He feels it is his fate always to do wrong. He dies in a natural act of love and courage which at the same
time saves his mistress, Nooran and a train load of innocent Muslims. This individual love of one man for one woman transcends all religious hatred and it shows the dependability of love as the most important factor in human relations. The stark simplicity in Juggat Singh’s self-sacrifice is very genuine and universal. It is not a mere drama but is natural and convincing.

Khushwant Singh has also created weak characters without flesh and blood. He has projected them like caricatures. They are products of British universities. Iqbal defends the political freedom of 1947. He is associated with the Communist Party or People’s Party of India. He denounces the freedom as false and deceptive. Like Jugga, he also appears to be Maverick. He does not work or act as functionary deputed by a political party. The novel deserves popularity for a sincere belief in traditional, moral and social stands of Indian society. An occasional dose of sexual
sensationalism also punctuates the novel here and there. It is Khushwant Singh's masterpiece and most popular novel on partition themes.

The novel is replete with scenes of sex, violence and horrors. Dacoity may be conceived as a prelude to significant similar actions or situations. Malli, the leader of the gang raids Ram Lal's house in Mano Majra. They break open door of house, encounter two women and a boy of seven and the gunmen catch hold of the oldman, demand the keys of the safe and hit him in the face. Lala Ram Lal spits blood, a robber stabs him in the abdomen and he collapses instantly. This gruesome murder creates a sense of violence and horror among the villagers. After committing murder the dacoits leave the village. On their way, they fire shots into the air and drop bangles (marks of impotence and womanliness) in the house of Juggut Singh, by the violence and horrors while the dacoits are in or out of the village.
In the very first part the novelist has introduced Juggut Singh as a confirmed criminal who has served several Jail terms on various charges. Prior to the dacoity he has been released on the guarantee of good behaviour. The novelist shows the move intriguing aspect of Juggut Singh in love making scene with Nooran, the daughter of Imam Baksh (the Muslim priest). The novelist gives a pen picture of the sex between Juggut Singh and Nooran:

"Juggut Singh's caresses became lustful. His hand strayed from the girl's face to her breasts and her waist. She caught it and put it back on her face. His breathing became slow and sensuous. His hand wandered again and brushed against her breasts as if by mistake. The girl slapped it and put it away. Juggut Singh stretched his left arm that lay under the girl's head and caught her reproving hand. Her other arm was already under him. She was defenseless."
This love making and sex scene continue to cover four–five pages of the novel.

In the same part of the novel there is another sex scene between Hukum Chand, the Magistrate and deputy commissioner of Mano Majra area and a teenager, Haseena Begum. The young girl just stared at Hukum Chand with her large eyes lined with antimony and lampblack:

“The two stoos in silence for sometime – the man a little apprehensive; the girl relieved of the attentions of a lover whose breath smelled of whisky, tobacco and pyorrhea. But the silence told Hukum Chand that all was well. He took another whisky to make assurance doubly sure. The girl realized that there was no escape.”

Soon after this sex scene the novelist presents a horror scene:

“From Mano-Majra came sounds of people shouting and the agitated barking of dogs. Hukum Chand looked
up. Two shots rang out and silenced the barking and shouting."\textsuperscript{11}

The morning after the dacoity the Mano Majra railway station is more crowded than usual. The trains also present scene of horror:

"They were crowded with Sikh and Hindu refugees from Pakistan or with Muslims from India. People perched on the roofs with their legs dangling, or on bedsteads wedged in between the bogies. Some of them rode precariously on the buffers."\textsuperscript{12}

Again the novelist gives a horrifying scene in second part of the novel:

"The arrival of the ghost train in broad daylight created a commotion in Mano Majra. People stood, on their roofs to see what was happening at the station."\textsuperscript{13}

After the cremation of the massacred corpses the village was stilled in a deathly silence. The sight of so many dead had
at first produced a cold numbness. At the time of parting of the Muslims from Mano Majra the reader is horrified when he sees the villagers wiping off the tears from their faces and turning back home with heavy heart as to what would happen next. It is not without horror looking at Malli's gang unyoking the bullocks, looting the carts and driving the cows and buffaloes away. It creates a panic and terror in the hearts of the Mano Majrans.

In the last part of the novel train loads of people coming over the Mano Majra is the center of horror. The river Sutlej is flooded with corpses. The people are inside doors. People are left to pray and wait.

The novel is divided into four parts (a) Dacoity (b) Kalyuga (c) Mano Majra and (d) Karma. All these chapters are symbolically designed. The first part constitutes a true to life description of an actually committed dacoity but it echoes far beyond the inhuman and cruel actions of Malli and his gang.
The reader realizes that humanity itself has been looted of its human attributes. It symbolizes, that the humanity has been deprived of its values. It is a material expression of our inner and spiritual deprivation. The second part ‘Kalyug’ is named after Hindu’s religious and theological concept. It is the age of darkness. At the time of partition in both India and Pakistan there was darkness everywhere. Millions of people were uprooted from their homes and hearts. They felt restless, rootless and helpless, everything became topsy turvy. There only negative voices. This part of the novel is symbolical of inner blackness of human heart and the darkness all around the whole of India and Pakistan.

The third part is Mano Majra. It is the focal point in the sequence of events in the novel. It is deeply rooted in the very structure of the novel. The small world of Mano Majra is invaded by the larger world of India Pakistan division. The engine of the train has taken hold of man and the bulldozer
have succeeded in dehumanizing us. The realities of human relationships break here and the Muslims decide to leave Mano Majra for safety at Chandannagar refugee camp.

The fourth part is Karma which is significant enough. It has double bearings in the narrative strategy. Karma denotes the totality of a person's action in one of the successive cycles of his existence. It determines man's fate in his next phase of life. It may also be used to denote the unpredictable ways of fate or wheels of fortune. The characters are also symbols of good or bad, health or wealth, and virtues and vices. The symbolism of rain is also a significant aspect of the atmosphere in the novel. The rain is the source of life on the earth but it also creates death and desstruction:

"With the monsoon, the tempo of life and death increases."
REFERENCES


11. Ibid.

12. Ibid. p. 32.

13. Ibid. p. 78.