Chapter Three

Fractured Vision of the Nation in Partition Fiction

How was Partition different for women and men? Hindu and Muslim, male and female writers wrote differently and from their own perspective. Whereas writers like Mumtaz Shah Nawaz (Pakistani Novelist, 1912-1948, wrote in Urdu) Attia Hosain (Indian Muslim woman writer, 1913-1998, wrote in English) and Ismat Chugtai (Indian Muslim woman writer, 1915-1991, wrote in Urdu) talked about women in conservative Muslim backgrounds who break new grounds, Bhisham Sahni (Indian Novelist of the Partition era, 1915-2003, wrote in both Hindi and English) Chaman Nahal (Indian novelist wrote primarily in English) and Yashpal (Indian novelist, 1903-1976, wrote in Hindi) give stereotyped portrayals of women characters in their novels, binding them to patriarchal ideologies and conservative trends; even as they struggle with the notions of a new nationalistic ethos.

Abdullah Husain (Pakistani writer, born 1931, wrote primarily in Urdu) and Khadija Mastur (Pakistani woman writer, 1927-1982, wrote in Urdu) deal with the Muslim ethos of nostalgia for a lost world, as ‘nation’ for them has meant more than just a piece of land called Pakistan. Their visions of belonging to ‘Pakistan’ and their own identity is fractured because of their own memories of pre-partition days. Amitav Ghosh’s (Contemporary Indian English writer) novel The Shadow Lines also questions the idea of drawing ‘boundaries’ and creating new ‘nations’.
Is the vision of the new 'nation' that which we call ours really united and secular or is it really an illusion that we have nurtured over the years? Is the woman who breaks new grounds in the novels of these women writers completely evolved or does she too, feels alienated and not so rooted as she would like to believe? These are some of the questions that I would attempt to answer in this chapter, which carries on the thematic concerns with the 'woman' and the 'nation'. The texts I have chosen are deliberately heterogeneous, occupying different historical, cultural and gendered locations. This heterogeneity fosters the exploration of difference and sameness within a broad thematic representation of Partition\ woman as the subject of narrative.

In Gender and Narrative, Jasbir Jain points out:

Men and women had different kinds of experiences. The manner of contextualizing, analyzing and communicating is also different. Social locations, roles, inherited strengths [and constraints] were different. Even the manner in which history constructed them or cultures negotiated through them was different. Narration was at one level, one more such negotiation. Discourses, sermons, political rhetoric have conventionally been the sphere of men, while gossip, storytelling, folksongs and religious recitals have been the area of women...when men and women narrate the same reality even then the descriptions, the images and comparisons, the perspectives and perceptions may differ...also within the text the different characters relate to their own time spans and personal memories which converge towards the narrative...these shifts in time are accompanied by similar shifts in space...texts now have their subtexts which are revealed through re-readings and culture contexts; they also have hypertexts which recognize the possibility of the roads not taken and clues for reading them are often provided by the ambiguity of an ending or its open endedness...
Reading and analyzing some of these texts by Hindu, Muslim, male and female writers, I feel that difference, multiplicity and hybridism reside both within nationalism and modernity. The varied cultures and languages and regional histories of our country have redefined terms like ‘Nationalism’ for us. Although as a nation, we revel in our differences, our multiplicity and hybridism; there is a common thread of our identity as one nation under all our pluralities. That is what our modernism has taught us, to be singly unique even in our multiple differences. Only a focus on the particular and the historical can reveal the full struggle and bring out the ‘negotiated’ self, crossing boundaries of old and new.

What was once called identity in the sense of social, shareable sameness today is being deciphered and described through pluralities; which are an outcome of difference. We see the similarities between the experiences of these Hindu/Muslim writers and yet we sense a plurality of the sense of the ‘self’ portrayed by each of these in their works.

In the novels of Attia Hosain, Ismat Chugtai and Mumtaz Shah Nawaz, we find portrayals of women protagonists caught in the throes of the Nationalist movement. The process of the creation of new nations and the new identities that they are trying to create for themselves run parallel in each of these novels. Zohra, Laila and Shaman (The Heroines etched out by Shah Nawaz, Attia Hussain and Chugtai respectively) portray women characters whose lives are inextricably linked with the revolutionary atmosphere around them. Each of the writers is trying to locate her woman protagonist in the
middle of a crisis—a certain crisis which has to do with her nation, her society and her identity therein. On the one hand, there is a sense of loss, a feeling of nostalgia for the world of the 'zenana'(female) which is slipping past them, a world which was secure and claustrophobic at the same time and on the other, there is a transgression to the other side of the threshold, to a world which is new and beckoning, full of challenges and struggle. This is the 'fractured' vision of the new nation that these women protagonists are face to face with. On their decisions, lies the fate of so many others like them. They belong here but their minds want to make them fly towards the unknown. This is a conflict, which comes out in each of these novels.

At the same time in the novels of Yashpal, Bhisham Sahni, Chaman Nahal and Abdullah Hosain, we find a kind of moral regulation or rather a hypocritical obsession with women’s sexual purity which marks the patriarchal foundation of the hegemonic class in India. A woman’s body is a pawn even in the game of nation building. Here contrary to what the rhetoric might suggest, the author’s anger is not the righteous anger of patriarchy protesting against ‘our’ women being violated by them, but it is directed against the dual control exercised by Patriarchy. According to these writers, riot victims are hit twice by patriarchy: first by the male of one community who establishes his own ‘identity’ by exercising his territoriality over her body, second by her own community which invokes compulsions of ritual purity to exclude her from the ritually pure domains of hearth and marriage. This is very aptly illustrated in a
novel by Jyotirmoyee Debi called *Epaar Ganga*, *Opaar Ganga* in Bangla also based on the partition.

Ismat Chughtai was a pioneering Urdu writer who belonged to the pre-independence era and she was widely acclaimed for her scathing though sensitive treatment of themes concerning the lives of Muslim women. Chughtai led her female counterparts on a remarkable journey of self-awareness and creative expression. Her novel *Tehri Lakir* [1945] is a brilliant work, which chronicles the socio-cultural scenario of a bygone era by capturing the life of its fiery female protagonist Shamshad. Although the novel was written in the colonial era, yet it comes across as a post-colonial critique of imperialism through the collective experience of the freedom struggle in the Indian nation and how it is delineated through the saga of an individual woman’s life, commenting on everything from convention, custom and ideology.

Chughtai gives us a woman protagonist who becomes a metaphor for the nation under the siege of colonial/patriarchal powers, one who exposes the determinism of cultural, historical and ideological precedents and remains invincible by virtue of her attempted reversal of such patriarchal/colonialist strategies.

As the protagonist marches towards the road to selfhood, so does she symbolize the march of her nation in the crusade against imperialism? Woman is portrayed as ‘Nation’ not merely in terms of conquered territory, but as an agent of resistance. As a little girl, Shaman destroys her little doll manifesting
the need to emulate the tradition of matrimony and to destroy the romanticized norms of decorous and inert femininity.

In fact, Shaman, the tenth child of her parents is regarded as unwelcome and unwanted right from her birth. People feel irritated when she is born in the midst of a wedding in the family. Her parents forget about her, leaving her to the sole care of Anna who has been employed to breastfeed her. From the time Shaman begins to understand things, her unwantedness is brought home to her in different ways. As a result, she becomes a rebellious child taking delight in doing whatever her elders forbid her to do. She develops a predilection for the dirty, the shabby and the unconventional. Everyone wants to ‘tame’ her and no one really tries to understand her.

Chugtai probes the question of assimilation as against segregation of minority communities in the mainstream of society through the portrayal of a Christian woman Alma who is treated by her circle of friends with sceptical mistrust and yet whose fierce role as a social activist is emulated by Shaman even at the risk of ostracization. The quest for self realization in Shaman’s mind is almost like a metamorphosis enabling her to shed “the old cracked shell” to reveal “a solid kernel”[186] She identifies within herself “the hidden embers of rebellion and self reliance that enclosed in this flat, stony breast was a smouldering fire just waiting to be awakened...she felt blinded by its radiance...where had this sacred strength been all this time?”[185] Shaman’s decision to take up a teaching job at a school gives her a chance to make her even more defiant, not only against colonial subjugation but also, corruption,
deceit and mismanagement prevalent in the governance of Indian educational system.

Shaman’s disenchantment with the meaningless roles assigned to women who had “to tread the path designated for them” [267] including the perfunctory tasks of paper work and speech editing may be considered as a feminist/postcolonial critique of the assignation of marginality to the discourse of the so-called minorities including women.

Shaman’s tempestuous relationship with an elderly Professor, a member of the Progressive group of social activists exposes her to the nexus between chauvinism and sexism inherent in patriarchal ideology- “No matter who a woman is or what she is or where she is, it is foolish to try and understand her. She’s not to be analysed. She’s there to be used.”[288], proclaims the Professor.

The third phase of Shaman’s passage towards self assertion through financial independence and professional competence versus the fate of rejection and deprivation that she is subjected to is related against the sweeping backdrop of intensified conflicts between imperialism and nationalism. Once again the woman becomes a metaphor for the nation, as she confronts Ronnie Taylor, an Irish army man whose gaze is steeped in oriental fantasies. Shaman’s strife torn marriage to Ronnie is marked by implications of the quintessential East-west theme. As Chughtai brings up the momentous phase of India’s struggle for independence, the ecstasy and the trial of the cross-cultural tie now assumes the proportions of a combat, on the part of Shaman, for the
preservation of her nationalistic identity: “Why are you turning this into a personal battle?” questions Ronnie. “Because it is connected to our existence”, asserts Shaman… “After crushing my nation mentally, economically and physically, now you are out to attack its very soul.”[340]

Ironically, Shaman’s desire to wipe out “the imprints of imperialism”[350] from all the facets of her nation coincides with her realization that her body and psyche bear the indelible mark of Ronnie’s progeny. Just as the new nation has to bear the legacy of partition, the woman too has to bear the unwanted trauma of bearing a child from a man who is no longer hers. “Like India…she finally does achieve peace and independence, but much like her nation in the throes of labour not without a cost.” observe Tahira Naqvi.

Ismat Chugtai’s novel signifies an attempt to dislodge history from the filter of masculinist literary structures, which conceptualize women’s role at the intersection of home and history, culture and society, nation and tradition, to be one of passive acquiescence. The novel is an intense revelation of female sensibility in order to discern the response of woman towards her attainment of an identity within the broader framework of sovereignty and freedom, empowerment and autonomy both for her and the nation.

Mumtaz Shah Nawaz wrote The Heart Divided between 1943-1948. The book was however published nine years after the death of its young author. Her novel differs from Abdullah Husain’s Udas Naslein and Hyder’s Aag ka Darya. Mumtaz came from a well-to-do prominent family of Lahore and
independence was not synonymous for her with migration as it was for most
other writers on the Partition. However Shah Nawaz completely ignores the
violence by the simple device of ending the story before partition. She provides
only the briefest hints of violence in the image of the crimson coloured sky,
which ends the book.

Shah Nawaz begins the novel by portraying the close ties between
Hindus and Muslims. Thus Zohra, whose sensibility inspires the book, is very
close to Mohini, with whom her brother Habib falls in love. The two cultures
are quite amalgamated as shown in the novel. The ‘Kauls’ for instance are
‘Hindostani’ rather than Hindu. They speak Urdu, not Hindi and are as proud
of Urdu poets as their cultured Muslim friends. However the author was also
concerned with justifying the need for Pakistan. Thus throughout the book she
notes how Islam can be reinstated to its rightful place.

Though she is against ‘purdah’ and begins the narrative on the day that
her young heroine Zohra has inadvertently forgotten her veil, she speaks of
Islam as an equitable religion. It is Hinduism that prevents people from
mingling. There is no caste system in Islam. The treatment of the divorcee
Najma who later marries Habib is also brought in to show how progressive and
enlightened Islam is. The taboo against divorce is, in fact permitted under
certain conditions. Furthermore, in the acceptance by Jamaluddin of his
daughter Zohra’s love for the lower class Ahmed, Shah Nawaz shows an
enlightenment that did not always exist in upper class Muslim society. Both
Shah Nawaz and Hyder had been influenced by communist ideals.
The gradual shift of focus from the unity of the young people to the virtues of Islam parallels the gradual shift in focus from Zohra to Sughra; from the communist worker to the Muslim League worker, from the believer in a United India to the believer in an independent homeland for the Muslims. Was the shift from an ardent socialist to ardent Muslim Leaguer a betrayal? Zohra receives “tacit permission” from her father to go without a burqa (veil) as long as no one recognized her and her grandfather did not know” [17]. After this, whenever Zohra goes out shopping- things are brought to her in the car-she leaves her burqa behind. “Thus she took her first step towards a free and independent life, but she did not know it then.” [17]

If the Muslim Zohra has problems with her family, so does the Hindu Mohini. Though her father and sister are in jail, her grandfather has forbidden her to court arrest. She disobeys him to participate in student demonstrations. Thus Shah Nawaz shows how the younger generation strove against the wishes of the older: “She was giving pain to her family only in order to ease the pain of the larger family- the nation.”[31] As the narrative proceeds, Habib falls in love with Mohini, but even though Zohra sympathizes with her brother, she thinks it would be better if Mohini left town. Though Muslims and Hindus had lived together for centuries, it was impossible for them to marry: “Muslims married Muslims and Hindus wedded Hindus, so it had been for centuries and so it would always be.”[154-155] A marriage, Mohini’s father tells her, is not a private affair. It is the warp and woof of society and “no individual has any right to disrupt this woven fabric for the sake of an imagined personal
happiness.” Hindus and Muslims, he tells his daughter, “Do not and cannot marry each other…because it just isn’t done.”[190] Shah Nawaz used the motif of a Hindu- Muslim love affair- as have several other writers of partition novels- to stress the common heritage, the human ties that bind people across religious lines.

Through the marriage of Habib to Najma, Zohra’s divorcée friend, the author stresses that in Islam, there is no stigma attached to divorce. Similarly, through the marriage of Zohra to Ahmed, the son of her father’s former clerk, she stresses that unlike Hinduism, which does not permit inter-caste marriages, Islam has no such restrictions. Islam is an egalitarian religion, which has no caste or class system.

The change that takes place in Zohra from an upper class woman in purdah to an active communist worker reflects the change in Mumtaz Shah Nawaz’s own life. Her transformation from socialist worker to Muslim Leaguer is replicated in the novel by the shifting focus from Zohra, the firm believer in Hindu- Muslim unity, to Sughra who believes in the egalitarian aspect of Islam. While Sughra is contrasted with Zohra, in certain ways, Sughra too reflects the writer herself.

*The Heart Divided* ends in 1942, but Shah Nawaz had seen partition and though the last lines of the book are full of optimism as Sughra and Mansoor see the glorious future ahead, Shah Nawaz also suggests the horrors and the blood that partition brought in its wake. There is therefore, not only the premonition of disaster in Vijay’s words but also in the imagery used.
Juxtaposed next to the "crescent moon with its accompanying star sailing in a sea of pale green" is the sunset sky. Thus even as Sughra rejoices to see the crescent and the star, emblems of Pakistan, she too senses the horror that lies ahead.

In the portrayals of Zohra and Sughra, Shah Nawaz gives us two women who stand apart from the conservative worlds they belong to. In the birth of the new nation lie their new dreams of fulfillment. Shah Nawaz does not pretend to be pro-Indian. She believes that the creation of Pakistan was the only way out for the betterment of the Muslims; and she makes both her central woman characters, Zohra and Sughra epitomize this new spirit. However, the novel itself tries to bring out the conflict and the fractured vision of the Hindu-Muslim ethos in its dealing with contemporary issues. The women of the nation give it a meaning, which defines its ethos. Shah Nawaz’s pride in the legacy of being a Muslim is reflected in her one and only novel.

In Attia Hosain’s novel *Sunlight on a broken Column*, [1961], politics appears secondary to the story of a young woman’s growth to sad maturity through personal loss. Coming from an aristocratic Muslim background, Hosain interweaves the story of the partition of India with questions of a Muslim versus a secular identity.

*Sunlight on a broken Column* is narrated through the consciousness of Laila, an orphan brought up by her aunt in her rich grandfather’s home. More sensitive than her cousin Zohra, Laila confronts prejudices, cruelties and hypocrisy and finally breaks away by marrying Ameer, a friend of her cousin
Asad. Simultaneous with the story of Laila's growing to young womanhood and then widowhood, when Ameer dies in world war two, is the story of the years before and immediately after Partition. Living together, not always comfortably, the Hindu and Muslim communities are unprepared for the violence that accompanied Partition. Part four of the book takes place fourteen years later and describes Laila's return to the now abandoned house in Hasanpur. The family is divided. Zohra and her husband have gone to Pakistan, the land created for the Muslims of India. But Laila and Asad have remained behind and in her quiet comment on the two-nation theory; Hosain makes Asad an important man in Indian politics. Laila, a widow now is united with Asad.

One of the strongest images of the Partition in the north is that of the train massacre, and Hosain alludes to it in Sunlight with Laila's cousin Zahid being killed in a train massacre.

Full of bright hope and triumph Zahid had boarded the train on that 13th day of August which was to take him to the realization of his dreams, on the eve of the birth of the country for which he had lived and worked. When it had reached its destination, not a man, woman or child was found alive. [310]

Asad's comment on Zahid's death also suggests that Hosain accepts the irrational violence that cropped up during the years of Partition—though she also suggests the pain that accompanies the acceptance of meaningless deaths.

The manner of Zahid's death had been a terrible test for Asad's faith in non-violence. He had accepted it as such, believing that bitterness and retaliation could only breed violence and starts a never-ending cycle, which
was a negation of life; but he was human and it needed a conscious effort of will to restrain his bitterness. [318]

The final impact of *Sunlight on a broken Column* is that of displacement and disintegration, an impact that is projected by the last book, which narrates Laila’s return to the home of her childhood and adolescence. The image of disintegration is projected through the picture of the decaying house.

The last section of the novel deals with the breaking away of the family following the calamity of Partition. Divided loyalties surface. When Zahra returns to Hasanpur, she quarrels with Laila about protection of Muslim culture and language. The disagreements were no longer youthful quarrels but echoed bigger divisions. Laila surmises the cruelest aspect of Partition when she says: “In the end, inevitably, we quarreled and though we made up before we parted, I realized that the ties which had kept families together for centuries had been loosened beyond repair.”(303)

Hosain touches upon the brokenness of the Muslim nation as she does upon the broken family. Thus, as the family squabbles about who will go to Pakistan and who will not, the point that Pakistan cannot be the homeland of all Indian Muslims is stressed.

Meenakshi Mukherjee objects to the ‘individual case histories’ in the fourth part of the book:

As a piece of social documentation *Sunlight on a broken Column* is competently written, but as a novel it is not satisfactory because of its stock situations, its predictable conflicts between love and loyalty, its overindulgence in
nostalgia and sentimentality and a general weakness of structure. It is however one of the few novels where the partition of India is presented as the enormous event it was, and the narrator [as well as the author] being a Muslim, the issues of loyalty, idealism and expediency are fraught with a special significance. 4

Hosain ends on families divided and broken. She stresses the folly of Partition through Laila who suggests that, despite the pain, despite the loss, India is large enough to contain different religious groups.

In the words of Shahnaz Rouse,

The works of these women represent the various voices of struggle and reaffirm that women’s struggles must be seen and analyzed in terms of their multiplicity and hybridity. Their lives traverse a period that brackets and frames their particular encounters with colonialism, nationalism and post-coloniality. Each life represents a struggle to grapple with the contradictions created by these broader historical transitions. We who read these lives are forced to ask whether the contradictions are internal to each self or externally imposed by those others whose vested interests preclude a recognition and tolerance of the multiplicity and hybridity of identities...what is common is that writing for each of them is more than just about a cause... 5

Bhisham Sahni’s Tamas (Darkness) portrays the idea of the ‘Nation’ in a highly episodic narrative. Sahni provides us with a panoramic view of the period leading to the Partition. The novel is structured like a collection of short stories through which the protagonists pass through, disappear, reappear or die. Tamas is about the ‘Nation’ and the fractured vision of the nation, which is highlighted in the dispersal of communities and neighborhoods as they are engulfed by violence, of history gone awry. There is no sense of cohesion. It is
only the communists who try to actively preach the idea of peace and harmony, but the bickering representatives of the various secular and non-secular parties too outnumber them. The birth of a new ‘nation’ does not bring anything new. The ending is as powerful as the beginning. We once again encounter the same set of leaders we had met in the beginning. The common people of different communities, ‘make up’ keeping short term interests in mind but it is clear that the deep rifts cannot be bridged easily. The fragmented, fractured vision of the ‘nation’ is intact at the end of the novel.

As far as the women characters are concerned, the figure of the woman who stands apart in the novel is that of Rajo, who has given shelter to Harnam Singh and his wife. She is shown as compassionate as well as defiant, but vacillates constantly, surrounded as she is by a daughter-in-law, husband and son who hate non-Muslims. She portrays the strength of the ‘woman’ behind the creation of the new nation.

Liza, the character of the Deputy Commissioner’s wife is the memsahib figure that is trapped within the patriarchal structures of home and abroad. Bhisham Sahni takes pains to provide us with the complete perplexity of the woman faced with India’s religious and caste diversities. She regresses to an almost infantile state and the author takes pains to emphasize that this was a condition that struck wives of the other officials as well. She is as much at a tangent from the real world, as her husband is.

The fractured vision of the ‘Nation’ is highlighted in the novel when we see that the view from the above of the observer/outsider stands in opposition
to those ‘insiders’ who perforce have to live through the everyday experience of communal hatred and partition. In an ironic reversal, we have instead, in the novel, the look from below to above. This inverse look represents the equation of power between the colonized and the colonizer. When the worst rioting was nearly over, a sound arrests the attention of the dwellers of the town:

It was an aeroplane. Flying over hills and valleys, with its wings outspread...the aeroplane was, it would seem, out on a joy-flight...as it approached the village, people came out and stared hard at the aeroplane with breathless curiosity. (296-298)

The panoramic view was given to the colonizer. The colonized could only live through the particular, immediate horrors of their land that was being split in two.

Looking back at the history, we realize that it was natural for these writers to have had their specific ideologies. The answer lies in the growth of communalism, which began with the Partition. Communalism thrived due to several reasons. Firstly, there had been revivalist movements both among the Hindus and in the Muslims. Secondly, the British government followed policies, which resulted in the growth of the economic disparity among the people with enough scope of misinterpreting it on the communal line. Thirdly, on account of historical reasons, such as the fact that Muslims, unlike the Hindus, were able to appreciate the positive aspects of the British rule—there had occurred an uneven development of the Indian middle class. The Muslims could not compete with their Hindu counterparts in the job market. Lastly, as a
result of pressure from the Nationalist movement, the colonial government had to introduce the constitutional reforms, which provided the system of separate [communal] electorates that created the political chasm in the Indian society on the communal line.

Communal politics became organized during the first decade of the 20th century with the formation of the Muslim League and the Hindu Mahasabha. Initially, the Muslim League was a part of the National freedom movement. But its poor performance in the 1937 elections and the Indian National Congress’ refusal to accommodate the Muslim League as the former’s partner in the administration of the provinces led to the League’s demand for a separate homeland for Indian Muslims.\(^7\) It propounded the two- nation theory whereby Hindus and Muslims would lay their claims on two separate nations. It was clearly a communal interpretation of the theories of nation and the right to self-determination.

In pursuance of the two- nation theory, the Muslim League in its annual session, held at Lahore in 1940 passed a resolution demanding Muslim dominated states in the northeastern and northwestern regions of the subcontinent. Following the adoption of the resolution, the League launched a movement demanding a separate homeland for Indian Muslims called the Pakistan movement. The movement became popular because it had sentimental and emotional appeals; also during early 1940’s while the leaders of the National movement were behind bars and the Congress was virtually banned, the Muslim League was free to organize people in support of its demand for
Pakistan. Lastly, the exploited Muslim masses of Bengal [mostly at the mercy of the Hindu zamindars and Bankers] found in the Lahore resolution a hope for exploitation–free independent Bengal.8

The 1946 elections bear testimony to the growing popularity of the Muslim League. A party, which had won only 109 seats out of the total 533 seats in 1937, now captured 460 seats out of 533.9 The unprecedented victory of the League in the 1946 elections emboldened the Party and made it rigid in its demand for Pakistan. All negotiations failed and the subcontinent was partitioned along communal lines into two independent states India and Pakistan as per the provision of the India Independence Act, passed by the British parliament in July 1947.10

Thus two new states came into existence on August 15, 1947. But geographically and politically Pakistan was an unnatural state: its eastern and western wings were separated by a vast territory of supposed enemy land, India. Pakistan failed to develop itself into an integrated state and faced dismemberment in 1971. Now there are three states—India, Pakistan and Bangladesh in the subcontinent. Partition has also created new national boundaries, cutting across the natural features and dividing the otherwise coherent geography of the region. On the one hand, Partition divided historically developed nationalities like Bengali and the Punjabi, on the other; it disturbed the consolidation of the Sindhi, Pashtu and Baluch nationalities. It has also divided a composite and syncretic civilization and culture, which had
developed through a positive historical process. In its place have arisen communal discord, suspicion and hostilities.

The writers of Partition literature have recorded the birth and development of the communal politics in the region, the desertion of the people from the villages to the cities in search of security, how the people suddenly turned beastly enough to kill their own neighbour in the name of religion. However, finer aspects like maintaining communal harmony despite consistent communal propaganda, protection of life and property of the people belonging to the opposite creed, protest against fanaticism have also been dealt with.

Chaman Nahal’s analysis of two Punjabi novels is interesting. One is ‘Saanjh’ written by a Pakistani novelist Salim Khan Gimmi and the second is ‘Tuton wala Khuh’ by an Indian novelist Sohan Singh Sital. Both the novels are based in the forties—from World War 2 to the partition of the country. Both the novelists have woven the stories of their respective novels around small villages. Both the novels depict that the Sikh population of these villages, having fallen in Pakistan after partition, was rescued by the Muslims of the same villages to safer places. In both the texts, the intrinsic harmony of rural Punjabi people has been praised.

The contrasts in the two novels also emerge. Salim Khan Gimmi’s concept of a ‘nation’ is based on religion and the creation of Pakistan for him is ‘freedom for Muslim community’, while Sohan Singh Sital expresses his faith in Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs as equal constituents of the same Indian nation and he views the Partition of the country as a tragedy and a conspiracy. In
'Saanjh', the freedom movement of India finds little mention while in 'Tuton wala Khuh', the movement has been captured well.

Chaman Nahal's 'Azadi' [1962] too, deserves to be mentioned. It is relevant to point out that Khushwant Singh's *Train to Pakistan* primarily writes about rather than recreate "brutalities committed in his fictional border village, Mano Majra". Chaman Nahal's *Azadi* on the other hand, covers an expansive canvas with discernible political orientations among the displaced masses. Attia Hosain's *Sunlight on a broken column*, in an entirely different ethos, had earlier attempted a socio-psychological portrayal of uprooted individuals typifying the tragedy of Muslims in India, living in nostalgia. Nahal's *Azadi* places this alienation and sadness in perspective and thus transcends sentimentalism and reportage, despondency and utopia.

There is disbelief and bewilderment among the minorities soon to be displaced, in the novel represented by the well-established grain merchant of Sialkot, Lala Kanshi Ram and his neighbours. The partition was not logical in any sense, Kanshiram wonders, yet argues:

The Congress had a promise to keep with people. For last thirty years since that wizard Gandhi came on the scene, it had taken the stand that India was a single nation, not two. And Gandhi was not only a politician, he was a saint. He had his inner voice to satisfy too. Would that nagging voice of his let him accept the slaughter of so many? That's what it would mean, if Pakistan would come into existence. [pp.42-43]

Lack of adequate rehabilitation facilities and absence of planned schemes for coping with the enormous problems of displaced masses
highlighted lacunae of political imagination of those at the helm of affairs. The people at large truly felt betrayed. “If unwilling, the government is a party to murder. If incapable, we Indians had no right to ask for freedom.” [Pg.124]

Nahal is therefore blunt in his criticism of the erstwhile governments that “they should have devised means of mass migration to begin with, before rushing to partition.”[pg.204] The chaos was complete. It was tragic that political expediency had turned human beings into ‘refugees’ all of a sudden. For the refugees, suffering became synonymous with freedom. “Freedom was on its way and nothing could have stopped it. If only they had not given in so easily to partition.”[pg.366] It is nevertheless, a big ‘if’ of India’s political history, which Nahal repeatedly emphasizes.

However, towards the conclusion, when the news of Gandhi’s assassination comes in, there is a feeling of great loss among the people, including the refugees [pg.362] The author concedes that the people, even those who had suffered the consequences of partition, gradually began to realize the blessings which only freedom could ensure as against the exploitation suffered during the imperial domination. Azadi, thus ends on an affirmative note that a nation, resolved to persist with her quest for identity, outlives even tragedies, which are devastating to the point of annihilation.

Jhootha Sach (1958-1960) by Yashpal is the only Hindi novel, which depicts the partition of India over a whole span of time and space. It is the best realistic novel of that era and has been recognized as a classic. Yashpal had been living in undivided Punjab before the partition and it was the center of his
literary and political activities. The first part of Jhootha Sach, Watan aur Desh was published in 1958, while its second part Desh ka Bhavishya was published in 1960. The novel does not portray only the communal animosity, but it depicts also the traditional harmony among Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs, their similar problems and their relationships. In the words of Ramesh Kuntal Megh:

The untruth of this novel [Jhootha Sach] are events, the social forces which put obstacles in public life and feudal tradition, while its realities are the historical experience, the determinism, the development of social consciousness, human love and truth,”

The first part of the novel Vatan aur Desh actually deals with the partition year 1947 and portrays the atrocities of this massive communal upheaval in all its gory details while the second part Desh ka Bhavishya brings together a sense of cohesiveness by describing the recovery process of the people and how they picked up the pieces of their lives once again.

The novel begins with the announcement of a demise, that of the mother of Masterji. The mourners comprising of her two daughters in-law and the neighbourhood women are shown to be presenting an act of mourning—something that must be done because custom demands so. This is where Yashpal gives us the key to his novel—women often do and perform acts because they ought to and not because they want to. They are forever battling with this conflict between desire and duty and it is the latter which wins most of the time because for a woman, to desire is to sin. She should always keep the interests of her family before her own wishes.
Women in *Jhootha Sach* are doing this constantly and are not happy about it. Tara, Puri’s sister and Kanak are two characters who are involved in this conflict from the very beginning of the novel. Sheelo too, who is Tara’s cousin is seen as a woman who loves one man but has been married to another. She is forced to continue her marriage because of societal pressures but has no compunctions about giving birth to her lover’s child.

The world of *Jhootha Sach* is one in which women are seen as good if they are docile, can cook and stitch well, are educated enough to read and write and obey the commands of their elders. Physical beauty can compensate for the lack of certain other skills too.

Tara, who plays the ‘perfect daughter’ role to perfection, is doing just that—performing a role; in reality she is a rebel of sorts. She wants to take up higher studies, has strong views about politics, takes part in political rallies and even wants to marry the person whom she loves. However Yashpal shows her initial strength as being dependent on the support of her brother Jayadev Puri. When she protests against her engagement with an uncouth character like Somraj, her family reprimands her. Her attraction towards Asad, a Muslim communist too impels her to run away from home but circumstances lead her to give up the fight and surrender to keep the family honor intact.

Tara goes through intense physical and psychological trauma in the period following her marriage with Somraj; and her subsequent abduction by Muslim marauders. Yashpal depicts the torture that women suffered during partition in her story and hence Tara becomes the symbol of the ‘woman’ who
is won, conquered, ravished and tortured in these cruel times. Yet, nowhere does she give up. There are weak moments, but she carries on relentlessly trying to reconstruct her life. The only thing that comes to her aid is her education and in this sense her awareness is a tool for her to pave her way ahead.

In *Vatan aur Desh*, (1958) one particular incident stands out in this context. The dungeon like place, where Tara is kept imprisoned with five or six other women after she has been abducted, is described with such vivid and horrific details that it seems unreal. Here each day brings a new calamity for these women. An old caretaker comes in every two or three days to feed the women halfheartedly and the rest of the time, they are kept locked. They eat, sleep, bathe and defecate in that same dungeon. Tara wonders why she was born in a poor family and why she couldn’t bring herself to convert into a Muslim. What is it that Hinduism has given her? All the women who have seen this horrific ordeal with Tara complain about ‘being women’ and “womanhood being a curse” [pg.430]

What we have then is a clear perspective on Partition history. The trauma suffered by the women is much greater vis-à-vis the men. According to Yashpal, the woman always gets a raw deal—“they don’t value a woman, they die for her and then torture her too, if they were not here, women would not suffer” [pg.431]14

Finally Tara escapes with some other women and reaches Amritsar. ‘*Vatan*’ is left behind and ‘*Desh*’ is waiting for their arrival. Yashpal uses the
title 'Vatan aur Desh' for the first part of the novel to illustrate that despite being synonymous, these two words denoted the two different realities of the two nations—Pakistan and India. What is common to both is the treatment meted out to women, whether they were Hindu or Muslim.

What is also significant here in Yashpal’s depiction of this sordid reality is the way he deals with the graphic details of the torture and exploitation that the women have to go through at the hands of the marauders. The rapes, the molestations, the hunger and the physical torture—the reader is not spared any details. Yashpal’s saga is realistic to the extreme, repulsive at times. He doesn’t run away from it, but keeps himself as detached as possible so that it is not voyeuristic, bringing out the horrors within it.

Kanak is another woman in the novel whose reality is different from Tara’s. Kanak belongs to a progressive-minded family and has a father who believes in his daughters’ desire to feel free and study further; even voice their opinions freely and boldly. Jayadev Puri, who is her tutor, gradually falls in love with her and Kanak marries him despite her father’s disapproval of the match.

After marriage however, Puri wants her unconditional surrender of her creative and intellectual pursuits. On the other hand, Kanak thinks that Puri would give her some share of the work related to his newspaper, as he is aware of her capabilities. She is mistaken. All that Puri wants from her is the fulfilment of her wifely duties and least interference in his Press and newspaper. Kanak’s gradual realization of Puri’s latent attitude about women,
his comments about his sister, who he disowns and his total disregard of Kanak’s feelings, all lead to the final disenchantment of Kanak with her husband. She is portrayed by the author as the ‘new woman’ of the fifties as she has a mind of her own and is not afraid to speak out whenever needed.

Unlike Tara, Kanak has a relatively easier life but her fate is no better. For Yashpal, a woman who speaks her mind is punished. However Gill is the redeeming factor in her life. She wants a man who can stimulate her intellectually, she had got married to Puri for the same reason but eventually turns to Gill. She understands and appreciates the fact that despite a series of ordeals, Tara has made a success of her career and is leading a self-fulfilled life. She is critical of Puri’s hypocrisy and his attitude towards his sister.

Kanak’s divorce at the end of the novel marks the end of the phase, where a bad marriage was considered a woman’s fate. The fact that the decisions to marry Puri and then to divorce him are both her own, make Kanak one of the revolutionary characters of the modern Hindi novel.

Coming back to Tara, we see Yashpal’s portrayal of a woman who comes across all kinds of men and women. Some try to manipulate her and others help her out. She offends a number of wives who are possessive about their husbands, she upsets a few men who ask her for favors but she is strong and can hold her own. The men in her life want to see her married and she gets irritated with their patronizing attitude. As she tells Mercy:

Why don’t you tell Mathur to lay off? Why is he anxious to ‘settle’ me? Why do these people believe that an unmarried woman is wanton by nature, why she should be
tied to a spot like cattle, why should she have a master? [pg.331]

So, what Yashpal presents is a world which is unfair to women and a Partition which has been doubly so; for the womenfolk. As he so succinctly puts it in his foreword to Jhootha Sach:

‘Having bathed the truth in my imagination, I want to give it to the public which inspite of being cheated by falsity ever so often, neither gives up its commitment, nor the courage to move towards it.’

Yashpal’s stand is balanced as far as Hindu-Muslim conflict is concerned and according to him, it was the British who wanted to and ultimately succeeded in planting the seeds of discord between the two groups; which led to the tragic culmination of partition.

The male gaze of the novel is graphic to say the least and presents the gory reality of the partition riots in its extreme objectivity. It is totally detached and seems at times to revel in its horrors. This is where it differs entirely from the women writers who are grappling with the same reality. It seems easier for the male writer to distance himself from the physical and the emotional trauma that the women go through, and this feeling reiterates itself as we read through Yashpal, Chaman Nahal and even Khushwant Singh (who roughly belonged to the same generation). However as we have already seen, Ismat Chughtai, Mumtaz Shah Nawaz, Attia Hosain, Bapsi Sidhwa and even Amrita Pritam shy away from these details of the atrocities that were done on women during these
riots. Being a woman brings in perhaps a subjective sense of reality and hence the absence of detailing.

There is too, a definite absence of pro-Pakistani novels during this period. There is a sense of defeat, disorientation and nostalgia in almost all the novels written by Muslim writers. Most of these seek to recapture and reconstitute the earlier ‘ambience’ of the ‘Nation’. The two novels that stand out in this context are *Udaas Naslein* (The Weary generations, 1963) by Abdullah Husain and *Aangan* (The Inner Courtyard) by Khadija Mastoor.¹⁷ Both the novels appeared in Pakistan in the early 1960’s and are generally regarded as the more significant novels of the period.

*Udas Naslein* begins in the days of Tilak in Delhi and in a village that would be in Haryana in the present times and it ends in Lahore immediately after partition. The villagers comprise of all three communities viz. Hindus, Sikhs and Muslims. Descendants of a Jagirdar who obtained this status as a reward from the British in 1857 own the village. These descendants have acquired all the trappings of old Awadh taluqdars. The only character who comes out unharmed and prosperous at the end is the direct heir of the family, who moves to Pakistan, takes up a high post in the civil service and acquires a vast property left behind by a Hindu family.

Naim, the protagonist and son of a rich peasant from the same village, moves between the village, Delhi and Calcutta. As a forced recruit in the First world war, he serves in Southern Europe, then returns, joins the Congress,
begins moving towards the Congress socialists but then falls in love and marries the daughter of the illustrious and loyalist Jagirdar.

Thus begins his tortuous journey of ambivalence between his political leanings and his class and status acquired through marriage. This ambivalence of commitments, and the communal killings of 1947, finds him in the end on a trek to Pakistan in the midst of millions where he feels completely lost and disillusioned.

Amongst the novels of that period, it stands out for a fine portrayal of a broken marriage and an individual self that gets enmeshed between the incongruities of class and politics. There is a gradual sense of accumulating grief and loss as a sea of refugees moves toward the newly fixed borders. The author’s nostalgia for the ‘lost’ world mirrors the plight of many Urdu writers, who felt alienated, isolated and cut off from their roots.

Aangan by Khadija Mastoor begins in Uttar Pradesh in the early thirties and ends twenty years later in Pakistan. It is largely confined to domestic space. Aliya, the main protagonist, who is the daughter of a declining and conservative landowning family, tells the story. She experiences the three great political forces of the time, the Congress, the Muslim League and the Communist Party, all within the confines of her courtyard.

There are three simultaneous strains in the novel—Aliya’s personal and domestic confinement, her being surrounded by a large number of relatives and the external world imbued with politics constantly impinging upon herself. The men in the novel are shown making wrong choices of patriotic idealism,
misplaced communal opportunism and suffer as a consequence of these. Aliya is a mute spectator to their various downfalls and weakening wills. In the end, a refugee in Pakistan, she learns to provide for herself and those she can still support. It is a very limiting freedom that comes to her at last as she frees herself from the confines of the Aangan but it is ‘freedom’ nevertheless.

The most striking aspect of the Muslim writers who wrote in Urdu was that their nostalgia and the feeling of loss is reflected in their novels, irrespective of whether they belonged to India or Pakistan. This was the cultural consequence of the fact that Urdu was not a language of a particular region or of any identifiable religious group. In the words of Aijaz Ahmad:

The ‘nation’ indeed became the primary ideological problematic in Urdu literature only at the time of independence, for our Independence too was peculiar: it came together with the partition of our country, the biggest and possibly the most miserable migration in human history, the worst bloodbath in the memory of the subcontinent: the gigantic fratricide conducted by Hindu, Muslim and Sikh communalists. Our ‘nationalism’ at this juncture was a nationalism of mourning, a form of valediction, for what we witnessed was not just the British policy of divide and rule, which surely was there, but our own willingness to break up our civilizational unity, to kill our neighbours, to forego that civic ethos, that moral bond with each other, without which human community is impossible. A critique of others [anti-colonial nationalism] receded even further into the background, entirely overtaken now by an even harsher critique of ourselves. The major fictions of the 1950’s and 1960’s—the shorter fictions of Manto, Bedi, the novels of Qurrat-ul-ain, Khadija Mastoor, Abdullah Husain—came out of that refusal to forgive what we ourselves had done and were still doing, in one way or another, to our own polity. No quarter was given to the colonialists; but there was none for ourselves either. One could speak, in a general sort of way, of the ‘nation’ in this context, but not of
‘nationalism’. In Pakistan, of course, there was another overriding doubt: were we a nation at all?  

The last novel that I want to take up for analysis is *The Shadow Lines* (New Delhi: Ravi Dayal, 1988) by Amitav Ghosh. The narrative here is unconventional, anecdotal at times and fractured too, however the themes of nationalism and freedom suit this fractured narrative and overlap with each other. In fact Ghosh’s vision of the Nation in this novel is also a fractured one. The novel is questioning the whole concept of Nationalism, as we know it. “Devotion to one’s own nation; patriotic feelings, principles or efforts” is how the Oxford English Dictionary defines Nationalism. However, what we see is a constant undercutting of Nationalism in the novel, not just in the character of Tha’mma but others as well.

For Tha’mma, the narrator’s grandmother and a fairly distinctive figure in the novel, ‘freedom’ is defined as political freedom for the nation from colonialism. “I would have done anything to be free” [89], even killed for it. Her view of freedom, which is overshadowed by violent anti-colonial struggle, is an antithesis of Ila’s, who is seeking ‘freedom’ in London, since she doesn’t belong there. She believes: “Everyone who lives there has earned his right to be there with blood; with their brother’s blood and their father’s blood and their son’s blood. They know they are a nation because they’ve drawn their borders with blood.” [77-78]

Borders to Tha’mma are very physical and absolute, something which can be touched and felt. As she makes plans to travel to Dhaka in 1964, she
ponders over whether she will be able to “see the border between India and Bangladesh [then East Pakistan] from the plane.” When her son finds it amusing and says, did she really think “the border was a long black line with green on one side and scarlet on the other, like it was in a school atlas”, she muses:

“But surely there’s something...if there aren’t trenches or anything, how are people to know? I mean, where’s the difference then? What was it all for then—partition and all the killing and everything—if there isn’t something in between?” [151]

The novel shows us that the grandeur of Tha’mma’s concept of Nationalism is not something to gloat about; in fact it is Ghosh’s stance on Nationalism. He is putting a question mark there, every time the word ‘Nation’ is mentioned in glorious terms. Tha’mma is the lone voice in the entire novel who firmly believes in her ideas of ‘Nationalism’. She’s always had it in her—in her craving to be free from colonial rule. She tells the narrator that she would not have hesitated even from killing the English magistrate in the name of freedom: “yes, I would have Killed him, it was for our freedom: I would have done anything to be free” (39)

What we see in the novel is Tha’mma’s deep involvement with the community that she belongs to. She believes in a war that would make “people forget that they were born this or that, Muslim or Hindu, Bengali or Punjabi: they become a family born of the same pool of blood.” (78)
She also believes in sacrifice for her country as that is a unifying force too. However, she is comfortable with borders because a Nation has to chalk out its own boundaries. Her Nationalism insulates her in her own physical boundary. Therefore she cannot trust any “Indian” who lives beyond the Borders. Ila is in London; because she is “a greedy little slut”(78) In fact all her efforts to bring the old man from Dhaka are borne out of her belief in Nationalism: “Imagine what it must be to die in another country, abandoned, alone in your old age.” (135-6)

But as the novel progresses, we see that there is a serious questioning of this view of Nationalism. Tha’mma, a devoted Nationalist, is puzzled and confused to find her “place of birth...at odds with her Nationality,” (152) for the Partition of Bengal has made her an alien in her hometown Dhaka. She realizes to her horror that no amount of bloodshed can make the borders ‘real’.

By highlighting her dilemma, that even after Partition there might not be any difference between the two regions across the border, the novel questions the ideology of Nationalism. She keeps on asking, “Where’s Dhaka” (194) but realizes ultimately that there is nothing weird or strange across the border. By mocking this ideology of Nationalism, the novel is also questioning the official/state versions of history. The history, which is a personalized one, seems to be the more reliable version in the novel’s narrative and thereby exposes the whole idea of the ‘nation’.

Also, we see that Thamma’s views on freedom and the nation and her criticism of Ila’s choices are all viewpoints which relate to the larger questions
and discourses of gender and nation. To be more precise, they are indicative of
the uneasy alignment between overarching nationalisms and individual
freedom of its citizens, especially its women. In the words of Meenakshi
Mukherjee:

The construction of a nation is a two-way process,
entailing on the one hand a broad homogenization despite
seeming differences, of what lies within the boundaries
and a projection of alienness upon what is situated
outside.  

What the narrator learns is that the separatist political logic of the
nation-state cannot enforce cultural differences, that some ‘thing’ will always
connect Calcutta to Dhaka, Bengali to Bengali, Indian to Pakistani, as images
in a vast mirror. As Suvir Kaul puts it:

At the origin of India and Pakistan lies the national trauma
of partition, a trauma that freezes fear into silence, and for
which The Shadow Lines seeks to find a language, a
process of mourning and perhaps even a memorial. 

Partition writing is peculiar because despite so much having been put on
record, we still haven’t learnt our lessons from this calamitous event. We have
been better at maintaining records of political and social aspects of Partition
than at examining the human dimension of this dislocation. When we talk
about Partition in polarized terms of Jinnah’s guilt or the culpability of the
Muslim League, we are in fact reinstating what we wish to erase.

By making and emphasizing such polarized history, we are in fact
forging these ‘religious’ and ‘national’ communities. Our concept of the
‘nation’ is both religious and even jingoistic. We are in effect reinventing not only the relations between two nations but also within ‘nations’. When we talk in secular terms in India, we are constantly reiterating a legacy of religious difference as well. For us, Partition has taught us the sharp separated ness of ‘Hindus’ and ‘Muslims’.

In fact, every time we assert our ‘national’ identity, we are in effect invoking our hostilities with our neighbour. Partition when studied in schools, is also dismissed as unfortunate and merely glossed over as regrettable history, one that we are not proud of, instead we dwell upon a false sense of elation by reading about a nationalism which made no mistakes. This hollow sense of patriotism will have to give way to a more authentic and reliable sense of ‘national’ history. Partition writings are helping us explore these new vistas of meaning, helping us to conceptualize a whole new sense of the ‘Nation’.
Notes

1 Jasbir Jain & Supriya Aggarwal, Eds. *Gender and Narrative*; (Jaipur: Rawat Publications, 2002) pg.45


3 Tahira Naqvi, Introduction, Ismat Chugtai; *The Crooked Line*, trans. Tahira Naqvi, (New Delhi: Kali, 1995) pg.5

4 Meenakshi Mukherjee, *The Twice born Fiction*; (New Delhi: Heinemann, 1971) pg.53


6 The Deputy Commissioner sees his drunken wife in a stupor and realizes that she has wet the sofa: “Looking at the patch on the sofa, Richard was reminded of a strange coincidence. That sofa had been taken by him from Mr. Lawrence, the Commissioner, when the latter was leaving for Lucknow under transfer orders. When he had removed the cover from the sofa, he had noticed an ugly patch on it ...And he had learnt that the Commissioner’s wife too was a victim of boredom who would, when in her cups, wet the sofa either in a fit of laughter or of crying.” Bhisham Sahni, *Tamas*; trans. Jai Ratan; (New Delhi: Penguin, 1988) pp.310-311

7 A section of the scholars hold the opinion that had the Congress agreed to make a condition with the Muslim League, the League would not have propagated the idea of the two nation such as Mushirul Hasan, ed. *India’s Partition: Process, Strategy and Mobilization*, (Delhi: OUP, 1996). Prof. Bipan Chandra and others hold different views. Bipan Chandra et al, *India’s Struggle for Independence*, (Delhi: Harper Collins, 1989)

8 “Lahore resolution gave the impression that Bengal would be an independent state, dominated by the Muslims”, Kamruddin Ahmad, *The Social History of Pakistan*, (Dhaka, 1967) pg.44

9 “In the general elections of 1945-46, the Congress did extremely well in the general Hindu constituencies but it failed to substantiate its claims to represent the Muslims of India...The Muslim League attracted 86-7 percent of the total Muslim votes in the election in contrast to Congress’s mere 1-3 percent. In the Provinces, the League won 74-7 percent of Muslim votes and the Congress won only 4-6 percent. Joya

10 The Indian Independence Bill was presented on 4th July 1947 to the British Parliament. The Bill became an Act on 18th July 1947 when a Royal Commission of Peers announced the Royal Assent to the India Independence Bill.


12 C. Kulshreshtha, Khushwant Singh's *Fiction, Indian Writing Today* 2,4, (Jan-March, 1970) pg.20

13 *Alochana*, (No.27, 1963) pg.21

14 My translation

15 My translation

16 My translation


19 Meenakshi Mukherjee, *Maps and Mirrors: Shadow Lines by Amitav Ghosh*, (Delhi: OUP, 1988) pg.262