The Partition and Manohar Malagaonkar

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Manohar Malgaonkar's *A Bend in the Ganges* concentrates upon the painful drama of the partition comprehensively and suggestively. It shows convincingly how the 'terrorist movement' - - a symbol of national solidarity - - designed to oust the British from the Indian soil, degenerated into communal hatred and violence, and how the emphasis from the struggle between Indian nationalism and British colonialism shifted unfortunately to the furious and malicious communal hatred between the Hindus and the Muslims, throwing into shade the basic Indian fight for freedom from the British rule. The double conflict led to freedom and the division of the country, but before it happened, a hell was let loose in many provinces of the nation.

The novel depicts powerfully the horrible developments resulting in the partition, the triumph and tragedy of the hour of freedom, the screams of the victims renting the morning air, the dawn of freedom greeting the sub-continent in the pools of blood, the barbarous cruelties heaped on men and women, catcalls of the crowd and innumerable women being carried away naked, struggling and screaming at the top of their voice. The Muslim fears of being ruled by the Hindus in the absence of the British rule in the country where they had been rulers, their notion that Hindus were more dangerous than the foreigners and ought to be their real target and their subsequent striking at
them, their struggle for a safe homeland from India leading to the partition, and the terror and pity of it -- all these form the content of the novel.

The novel opens with the ceremonial burning of British garments. The cries of "Boycott British goods", "Bharat Mata Ki Jai" gave expression to the fire of freedom that was burning in the heart of the Indian masses. The ceremonial fire that raged in the market square was "just one of hundreds of thousand fires similar all over the country"(7). Gandhiji himself appeared on the dais. He did not speak, it being Monday -- his day of silence. Gian, a young student from the college, felt overwhelmed at the sight of the apostle of truth and non-violence. He was swayed away by the conviction that non-violence was not for the weak, that "the path of ahimsa is not for cowards..."(9). He threw away his blazer -- his most elegant garment made of imported English material -- into the fire, and thus showed the zeal of a nationalist.

Gian, a student from Konshet with limited means, surprisingly received an invitation for a picnic on the sands of the old riverbed at Birchibagh from one of the important boys at the college, Debi-dayal, the only son of Dewan-bahadur Tekchand Kerwad, a member of the elite of the town. He reached Kerwad House at the appointed hour, and was fascinated by Debi's sister. In the absence of Debi's father, Gian showed a desire to see the museum -- a prize collection of bronzes. Sundari took Gian to the museum. Gian had a strange feeling there. For a moment he became "the statue, life-less, age-less, unbreathing."(14) As the spell broke, Gian found Sundari holding him by both the shoulders and her eyes staring with alarm. His announcement of becoming a
follower of Gandhi was subjected to sharp criticism. Strangely, he was in the company of the terrorists headed by Singh – viz., Shafi Usman in disguise.

The revolutionaries criticised Gian for being a follower of Gandhi, but Gian took pride in having come under the influence of that hypnotic power because he fervently believed that only Gandhi could lead India to victory. Singh’s agitated invitation to name any country that had shaken off foreign rule without resorting to war perturbed Gian but he declared in a sudden defiance that Gandhiji was a God. Singh cited the examples of America, Turkey and Shivaji, and affirmed:

"... Freedom has to won; it has to won by sacrifice; by giving blood, not by giving up the good things of life and wearing white caps and going to jail. Look up at America – the United States! They went to war. Turkey. Even our own Shivaji. Non-violence is the philosophy of sheep, a creed of cowards. It is the greatest danger to this country." (18)

The picnic threw enough light on the two distinct ways in India’s fight for freedom: the one of non-violence hated and rejected by the terrorist; and the other of revolution dreaded by Gandhi and his followers. As the events clearly showed, it needed superhuman discipline to follow the path of non-violence. Gian Talwar, who announced to follow ahimsa even in the face of the strongest provocation, very soon took to violence showing the hollowness of his defiant statements. Shafi Usman, in the disguise of a Sikh talked of fight against the British, but very soon this fight changed its
target - - his own Hindu associates and the Hindus in general became the object of his attack. The fervent advocate of shaking of foreign rule through violent ways degenerated into a narrow-minded communalist siding a particular, community against the other, and eager to have blood bath.

The bloody battle between the two closely related families - - the Big House and the Little House - - has an important bearing on the theme of the novel. Vishnu Dutt was killed by the same Gian, who, a little earlier, had taken pride in proclaiming himself a true disciple of Mahatma Gandhi. The two houses in the small village were in an unwarranted struggle. All this was a pointer to the main acts of horror caused by the partition. “Like a prologue to the main act”, as Iyengar aptly observes, “This story of family feud - - suspicion, hatred, vindictiveness, murder - - is to be viewed as the advance rivalry, micro-tragedy foreshadowing the macro-tragedy on a national scale in the year of the partition.”(K.R. Srinivas Iyengar, Indian Writing in English, 433).

The terrorist movement was very active in Duriabad. It was an integrated group of young men hailing from different communities and province, and all were united in the sacred cause of fight against the British rule. The members of the club were nationalists and fellow terrorists. Shafi Usman, alias Singh, with his battle cry, ‘a million shall die’, was the leader of the club. His close associate was an outstanding figure, Debi-dayal. All young men despised the foreigners. As Malgonkar states: “Debi hated the British, as they all hated the British; that was what brought them together,
Hindus and Muslims and Sikhs, men of differing religions united in the cause of freedom as blood brothers; the Freedom Fighters.” (BG, 68).

The ‘Ram and Rahim Club’ stressed the need and the survival of the national solidarity to oust the British from the Indian soil in the face of the hot wave of religious fanaticism that swept the country:

They were all fervent patriots, dedicated to the overthrow of British rule in India. Anyone, who represented that rule, British or Indian, was their enemy; anything that represented that rule was their legitimate target. “Jai-ram! answered by ‘Jai-rahim’ was their secret mode of greeting. The name of Rama sacred to all Hindus, and that of Rahim equally sacred to the Muslims.” (71-72).

The Indian national scene of the time revealed signs of sharp religious differences between the Hindus and the Muslims. But this group under the secular leader, Shafi Usman, remained unimpaired. The terrorist movement “was the last gasp of those who wanted to carry on the struggle united. They were all willing, almost eager, to die for their motherland, and it needed a leader of Shafi’s calibre to keep them from making thoughtless sacrifices.” (72) They knew exactly that the religious differences were the root cause of the country’s slavery, and that the British played upon this weakness and continued to rule India by dividing the Indians into different communally antagonistic groups. All the thirty seven members of the club kept themselves away from the fire of religious differences that burnt in the country: “They themselves were the elite, having
smashed down the barriers of religion that held other Indians divided; blood brothers in the service of the motherland." (73)

The Congress and the Muslim League "had come to a final partings of ways, with Hindus and Muslims separated into opposite camps, learning to hate each other win the bitterness of ages." (81) Hafiz, the erstwhile leader of the terrorist movement was won over by absolute and fanatic Muslim considerations. He now thought only on a particular line. The battle cry against the Hindus came to Duriabad with the cuttings from the Dawn, the Awaz, the Sulah and the Subah. He was now a strong advocate of Muslim point of view, a stooge in the hands of the British, playing to their tune of divide and rule. In his secret meeting with Shafi, he very calculatingly tried to impress upon him the popular fear that in the absence of the British rule, the Muslims would have to live as the slaves of the Hindus and their lives, property and religion would be in danger in the face of the overwhelming majority of the Hindus. Jinnah's conversion into an orthodox Musalman, standing up for the safe land for the Muslims and vomiting hatred for the Hindus was exemplary for the Muslims.

Shafi's rejection of Hafiz's outburst in the name of fanaticism prompted the latter to remark: "'Fanatics! We have to turn fanatic in sheer self-defence...'" (90) made it clear to Shafi that the Hindus were a danger everywhere. The Muslims were second rate citizens in the Congress-dominated states. The inclusion of one or two Muslims in the government was a big farce. The Muslims were not safe in a Hindu nation, and hence they needed a separate safe state - - their own homeland. Hafiz voiced the general
Muslim view - - the inevitability of the partition of India for the welfare of the Muslims - - when he tried to dispel the feelings of national solidarity from the mind of Shafi Usman in a forceful religious fervour.

‘... One or two! Are we to be satisfied with crumbs? We who ruled the whole country? Have we now become dogs? And who are the one or two? Who - - I ask you? Stooges - - their own men. Muslims, who are members of the Congress, renegades. Don’t you know that the Congress will not have any one who is not a member? That is what will happen here too. You will find a Congress ministry, a Hindu ministry with a couple of Muslims who are obedient servants of the Congress. Even today, there are Congress administrators in eight of the eleven provinces. What is happening? They will not take any Muslim who will not join them. Jinnah had exposed them: ‘The Hindus have shown that Hindustan is for the Hindus.’ Now we Muslims have to look after ourselves. Organise ourselves before it is too late. Carve out our own country...’ (90)

The statement of Hafiz was a clear reflection of the mentality of the Muslim leaders and of their influence on the orthodox Muslim minds. He fanned hatred and ill will against the Hindus, who, he thought, by their hateful deeds in the provinces where they ruled, had paled Jallianwala tragedy into insignificance. The Hindus were to be dreaded far more than the British. The Hindu-dominated freedom was undesirable. He averred:
‘... We don’t want freedom if it means our living here as slaves of Hindus. If we succeed in driving out the British, it is the Hindus who will inherit power. Then what happens to us? We are heading for slavery far more degrading. Struggling for it. That’s what Jinnah is worried about. That’s what all of us are worried about.’ (91)

Shafi read the dangers of the Hindu-Muslim rift, knew it to be the mischievous doing of the British, and felt that the only way to free the nation from slavery lay in communal harmony. Rejecting Hafiz’s call for reorienting the organisation for a more sacred and indispensable fight against the Hindus, he remarked: “‘But this is just playing into the hands of the British. They want to keep the Hindus and the Muslims divided, so that they can go on ruling. Our only salvation lies in solidarity - -that is the only way to oust the British’.”(91) Hafiz railed at Shafi and wanted him to change the tactics to cope up with the newly cropped up dangers. He gave vent to the Muslim hatred at the time and stated that in the recent Dassera riots in the Congress-ruled state the police actually sided with the Hindus: “I saw policemen shooting down Muslims, picking them out.”(91) Shafi warned that such an action would lead the Hindus to retaliate. This, according to him, was a danger signal for civil war. Hafiz attempted to prepare him whole-heartedly for such a consequence. This, he asserted strongly was inevitable. It was bound to happen in the absence of the British rule. Infusing the bitter communal hatred in Shafi, he said:
'That is exactly what we have to prepare ourselves for a civil war. We have to think ahead, a year, two years from now, to a time when the British will leave this country, leaving our fate in the hands of the Hindus. Are we to sit back and take whatever indignities they have in store for us? We must hit back ten-fold. It is to that end that we must all work, must all recognise the new enemies: the Hindus.'(92)

Shafi, who had always striven for communal solidarity found it irreconcilable to prepare himself for civil war. He would prefer Gandhi's movement to a communal organisation. This made Hafiz condemn Gandhi as a hypocrite, concealing violence in the name of non-violence.

The conversion between Hafiz and Shafi is of immense significance in that it reflected the Muslim line of thought before the partition of the country. It voiced the eagerness of a school that worked hard for having a safe land for the Muslims. It expressed Muslim anxiety that they will be ruled by the Hindus in the absence of the British. It showed the conversion of the Muslims, who devoted themselves earlier to communal solidarity, into the fanatics propagating and working for the cause of the Muslims alone. Men like Sir Syed Ahmed Khan and Jinnah, who first worked for national solidarity and then became champions of the Muslims, were clearly ideal Muslims for Hafiz and Shafi Usman. Shafi's shifting to Muslim considerations alone displayed the peculiar Muslim character that was lamented by Maulana Shibli, the celebrated Professor of Persian at the Aligarh University. It reveals the unfortunate,
mean Muslim mentality of preferring slavery under the Britishers to minority in self-government. Usman studied the situation.

The betrayal of Debi by Shafi was a glaring example of the rift between two communities, Debi was arrested, tried, and sent to the Andamans. The young British police officer suspected the rift in the terrorists when he explained the movement to the captain of the ship sailing to the Andaman Island with Debi on it as a lifer. He said clearly:

"The terrorist? Oh, yes; they are all over the place... Once they know we’re on to them, they go underground. Take this particular going. We knew they were certainly more than thirty in it. But we, that is the police, seem to have bungled it, rather. They operated from their club, a sort of gymnasium. When our men raided the place, only seven were there. The others had fled it is rather funny; all seven were Hindu; not a single Muhammad in the lot; which makes us think that there was some kind of a rift among them..." (131)

In Debi, the national awareness was supreme. He hated his father and Shafi Usman who had betrayed him and his colleagues. He was keen to take revenge upon Singh showing clear signs of the rift between the two warring foes. Tekchand was also conscious of the Hindu-Muslim rivalry. He knew that the bitterness, existing between the two communities, would never permit them to live in harmony. He was one of those millions who felt that the presence of the British was necessary to keep the nation
quiet and away from the horrors of civil war. However, his fears of the feelings of bitterness among Hindus and Muslims came true. He knew that, “In the chaos that would follow the withdrawal of British authority, Hindus and Muslims would be at each other’s throats just as they had always been before the British came and established peace. Men like Churchill were not fools; the alternative to the British quitting India was civil war.”(246)

Debi returned to India with the help of the Japanese. The Quit India Movement had by now possessed the whole country by storm and acquired new dimensions. Debi-dayal came to Calcutta and met his old friend, Basu, who had been an active member of the terrorist movement at Duriabad. He was leading a miserable life in quivering poverty in a bustee with his mutilated wife and the two unkempt children. Basu, in his hearts, nursed a great desire to take revenge upon Shafi Usman the once solidarity leader, turned violently communist. Debi was keen to see Shafi. He has a score to settle. Basu, too, wanted to see Shafi’s face when Debi confronted him.

Basu’s attitude explained the great rift between the Hindus and the Muslims. Now the scene had completely and dramatically changed. The terrorists were made to fight among themselves. It was the triumph of the British; their shrewd game of ‘divide and rule’ bore fruit and succeeded in making the Hindus and Muslims the die-hard enemies of one another. Debi-dayal understood it and lamented this ugly suicidal development he regretted: “It is almost as though just when they are on the point of leaving the country, the British have succeeded in what they set out to do. Set the
Hindus and Muslims at each other’s throats. What a lovely sight!” (289) Basu suffered the humiliation of his wife’s lovely face mutilated by an electric bulb filled with sulphuric acid. It must have come certainly from the hand of a Muslim: “‘Who else? Who would attack a Hindu house? When a race riot starts, it is the time for settling private scores.’” (289) The electric bulb, filled with the sulphuric acid, was the standard weapon of the Hindu-Muslim riots. The disfiguring of his wife’s face was exactly “what has happened to the face of India – the mutilation of a race conflict.” (289)

The communal tension bred distrust. The Muslims stood with Jinnah and worked for the division of the country. The Congress was branded as a Hindu organisation and was hated by the Muslims. Before the actual partition, India was being disintegrated. Basu gave vent to the Hindu-Muslim attitude before the partition when he heatedly pointed out the developments from national solidarity to communal violence:

‘What had been aimed against the British, has turned against itself. And the ugliest thing it has bred is distrust. No Hindu can trust a Muslim any more, and no Muslim trusts a Hindu. The country is to be divided. That is what Jinnah wants; that is what the Muslims want. But before that division comes, every town, every village, is being torn apart. The Muslims don’t want freedom for India unless it means carving out of a separate state for themselves. They fear that Hindus will dominate them. They insist that when the Congress ruled, just
at the beginning of the war, they treated the Muslims as a subordinate race.'

(290)

Basu’s study of the situation reminded one of the arguments of Hafiz to win Shafi-Usman to the Muslim side. It expressed the popular Muslim notions of the time. The call of the Muslim League, with Jinnah as its spokesman, for a separate and independent state carved out of India was the burning subject of the day. It celebrated the triumph of the British in alienating the Muslims from the national stream and in turning them into blood-thirsty foes of the Hindus. Basu thought of the horrors and chaos that awaited the exit of British authority from the Indian subcontinent; the hardened attitudes would create anarchy and bloodshed. He anticipated the slaughter of hundred thousands, the rape, abduction and mutilation of a hundred thousand women, and the scene of complete rottenness. He envisaged this tragedy and remarked:

‘... The moment the British quit, there will be civil war in the country, a great slaughter. Every city, every village, every bustee, where the two communities live side by side, will be the scene of war. Both sides are preparing for it, the Hindus and the Muslims. The Muslim League and the Hindu Mahasabha are both militant...’(290)

Basu wanted the Hindus to prepare themselves against the Muslims. The Hindus, he feared, would perish, if they failed to return violence for violence. He pointed out Gandhi’s fears, and they quoted his words that form an epigraph to the
novel: “What if... ‘when the fury bursts, not a man, woman or child is safe and every man's hand is raised against his neighbour?’ ”(291) He warned the Hindus of the hazards of the doctrine of non-violence. He wanted them to rise, awake and strike. He defended the Hindu Mahasabha and affirmed that it was an answer to the wrong doings of the Congress.

The long Debi-Basu conversation pointed to the cruel ways that men in India were resorting to in the pre-independence days. The partition of the country looked imminent. The Muslims demand for a separate nation was at its highest pitch, and the violence was let loose among the Muslims and the Hindus and vice versa. Both the communities were determined and defiant, and hence civil war was at hand. The cities and towns were riot-torn. The game of divide and rule was in full swing and was to attain its logical culmination. Basu, a terrorist and the erstwhile member of the Hanuman Club, stressed the necessity of joining the rival camp in sheer self-defence. He had suffered and his sufferings, coming in the wake of Gandhi’s non-violent movement, made him despise the champion of non-violence: to him ‘an eye for an eye’ and ‘a tooth for a tooth’ looked the only answer to the situation.

Shafi was at peace with himself. He was “aware of a sense of purpose and direction. He had changed, almost inevitably, as the whole of India had changed.”(294) He now felt convinced that the Hindus and the Muslims were traditional enemies, and there was no possibility of their living together. The spell of provincial government had demonstrated it fully. Shafi nursed the popular Muslim notions that
they were the superior race and that in the absence of the British authority they would become second rate citizens in the face of the overwhelming majority of the Hindus. He detested the Sikhs more than the Hindus. He felt it absurd to go about as a Sikh as he once did.

Like many Muslims, Shafi detested the Congress. Freedom through the Congress did not mean anything to him; it was unacceptable. Shafi believed along with the millions of other Muslims:

The Congress had been desperate to grab power and create an India ruled only by Hindus so that they could ride roughshod over the Muslims who once ruled them. It was the vengeance of sheep. The Muslims would never agree. To them independence was worth nothing unless it also ensured freedom from the domination of the Hindus. They would never live in an India where they were only tolerated minority. (295)

For Shafi and innumerable Muslims the demand of a safe homeland for their community was a great necessity. The absurd conception of a separate nation that Hafiz had given to him six years earlier appeared a reality: “the resolution of the Muslim League in which Jinnah demanded the creation of a separate state carved out of India, had crystallised the issues.”(295) The Hindus were now to be eliminated: “Now the fight was no longer against the British, but against the Hindus who were
aspiring to rule over them. It was *Jehad*, a war sanctioned by religion; a sacred duty of every true believer.”(295)

Jinnah had shown the way, and so Shafi, Hafiz and others did not believe in disciplined constitutional means to achieve their goal. They believed in creating terror - the only way the Hindus would be forced to yield. The Hindus “would never concede their demands with grace. It was essential to draw blood, to shed blood, confront their adversaries with fire and steel, the prick of the spear.”(295) The Muslims were active in achieving their objective in Rawalpindi and Multan and Bhagalpur. The Hindus were compelled to leave the districts. They were to ensure that no Hindu remained in the part of India that was going to be theirs. The work as long as the British did not show their back, was to be done secretly. Shafi was waiting for plunging into war with the Hindus at the right moment. He thought that the Hindus were also planning to do the same. But he knew well that the Hindus would never be a match to the Muslims in civil war. Assessing the Hindus, he felt that they “were pacifists at heart, their leaders fond of extolling secularism. They were soft and shrank from bloodshed. They would never be a match for the Muslims in civil war - - not even the Mahasabhaite... with all their talk of a pure India which was nothing but a retort to their own demand for a pure Pakistan. Even their militancy was a false imitation of the creed of the League.”(296). Shafi only regretted the want of money among the Muslims. He remembered the days when “the Muslims ruled the entire country, and were not struggling for just a portion of it.”(296)
In their bid to take revenge upon Shafi for his ugly betrayal, Debi-dayal and Basu came to Lahore. Basu felt, like Shafi, that the proper time to settle score would roll in after the exit of the British. He asked Debi, who went into ‘out of bounds’ zone to meet Shafi, not to pick a row with him right away. Basu feared Shafi’s concealed designs, and hated his erstwhile leader; but Debi did not feel any real hate for Shafi the moment he met him. He took Shafi sincerely and felt that the latter had an inclination to be friendly with him.

Basu saw things in their right perspective, and suspected Shafi. He burnt in the fire of revenge. Debi felt that Usman was genuinely repentant, but Basu thought otherwise; he knew very well how things had changed in the country during the last six years. The Hindus and the Muslims no more stood united; they nursed hatred for each other. While Debi was willing to believe every word Shafi uttered, Basu found different meanings in him. His fears came true: the police was informed that ‘a runaway convict and a paroled terrorist are living in Sehgal Lodge.’ ”(301) The police raided the house, but Basu’s watchful care saved them from the hands of the police. Shafi’s attempt to get Debi-dayal and Basu arrested by the police proved abortive and he stood exposed. Debi-dayal was disillusioned, and he decided to pay Shafi back. Basu thought that a letter to the police about Shafi’s whereabouts was enough to take revenge. But that was not the way of Debi’s paying the enemy back. He went to the brothel and took away Shafi’s mistress. Mumtaz. It brought him indirect confrontation with Shafi Usman. Shafi hurled at Mumtaz a broken electric bulb filled with sulphuric acid, but
Debi caught it in mid-air and hurled it back harmlessly into the shadows where Shafi had stood.

The Debi-Shafi affair fully revealed how things had changed. Shafi concluded that friendly relationship between Hindus and the Muslims was impossibility. Debi, on the other hand, still thought of recapturing the warmth of the old days, of the possibility of the Hindus and the Muslims working together and of regaining the lost leader. But he was very soon disillusioned. This disillusionment was the tragedy of the nation. The British game of dividing people of India into warring camps bore fruits. The demand of a pure state for Muslims – viz., Pakistan became persistent and fruitful. The division was complete, and the communal hatred showed signs of a gruesome tragedy.

Debi's decision to accept the snatched Muslim girl, Mumtaz, as his bride pointed to his emotional blindness. But it clearly demonstrated the caste-free conscience of the two lovers. Debi was duped and deceived by his erstwhile leader Shafi, who plunged himself whole-heartedly into the communal fire that swept the country before and after the independence and the partition. But Shafi's betrayal did not make him hate the whole Muslim race. He stayed secular amid the sounds of guns and slogans and accepted Mumtaz as his wife.

These developments and the exposition of the guilt in Gian assumed significance when during the post-independence communal violence Gian redeemed himself at Duriabad by saving Sundari from being raped and murdered and helped her to come
out of Pakistan. The scene of Duriabad at the time of partition, like those at many towns was one of complete chaos and anarchy. Sporadic disturbances between the Hindus and Muslims were a common feature. They had almost become an inevitable part of a festival. These regular disturbances were always sternly dealt with by the authorities. But the riots, preceding the partition, were different. They were the 'anatomy of the partition', and were the direct consequence of the unfortunate division: "A vast landscape packed with people was now being partitioned according to religious minorities: the Muslims in Pakistan, the Hindus in India." (331) The nature of the present riots was peculiar. Everyone was a participant in the furious drama of the blaze of hatred of the civil war. The atmosphere was one of utter disbelief, and, "no one could be trusted to be impartial." (331)

There could be no looker on: "When men and women of your own religion were being subjected to atrocities, you could not expect to remain friendly with adherents of the religion of the oppressor (331). The administration, the police, even the armed forces were caught up in this fire of ill will and hatred. Religious civil war was waged all over the country. It was a shameful, tragic sight. Every village, town and city that was peopled with the two communities turned into a battlefield. Terrible happenings were occasioned by the partition:

Tens of millions of people had to flee, leaving everything behind; Muslims from India, Hindus and Sikhs from the land that was soon to become Pakistan: two great rivers of humanity flowing in opposite directions along the pitifully
inadequate roads and railways, jamming, clashing, colliding head-on, leaving their dead and dying littering the landscape. (332)

The communal hatred, which resulted in the massive exchange of population, the mad killings, rapes and abductions, presented the cruelest and the most barbaric scenes. Animality in man became dominant, and all values suddenly collapsed:

The most barbaric cruelties of primitive man prevailed over all other human attributes. The administration had collapsed, the railways had stopped functioning because the officials and technicians had themselves joined the mass migrations. Mobs ruled the streets, burning, looting, killing, dishonouring women and mutilating children; even animals sacred to the other communities became the legitimate targets of reprisals. Gandhi’s fears had come true. The long awaited freedom brought only misery to millions of people. The pre-independence scene was, indeed ghastly: “The entire land was being spattered by the blood of its citizens, blistered and disfigured with the fires of religious hatred; its roads were glutted with enough dead bodies to satisfy the ghouls of a major war.” (332)

The escape from Duriabad was not possible. There was the danger of being cut to pieces on the road by people mad with hatred. Tek Chand could never visualise such things in the twentieth century world. Gandhi became ineffective and irrelevant. The moment the British grip on India loosened, the people of the country discarded non-
violence and "were now spending themselves on orgies of violence which seem to fulfil some basic urge." (333)

Tek Chand regretted for not having accepted his wife's suggestion of pulling out of the troubled town a fortnight ago. He needed a car to drive out, but his chauffeur, Dhan Singh, who had gone out in the car to bring his family to live with them, did not come back. He could not dare tell his wife what had happened to Dhan Singh and his family - - how they were brutally butchered. Dhan Singh's "wife and two children were dragged out. They stoned the children to death in front of their parents, then poured petrol over Dhan Singh's hair and beard and burned him alive. After that they had taken his wife away."(334) The tragedy befalling the family of Dhan Singh was not an isolated affair. It was the destiny of millions of people shaped by the partition. The car had been turned into a burnt out shell. The servants of the house were assiduously instructed by the master not to say anything about this misfortune to Radha - - the lady of the house.

The stream of men, crossing the border, presented a pathetic sight on the eve of Independence. Everything was in a bad shape. Sleepless nights presented fearful sight of fire, arson, wailing, weeping and roaring. Duriabad had turned into a peculiar riot torn town. Human cries became a familiar sight for Tek Chand and the members of his family: "Even from their bedroom window, they could see the red glow in the sky, like a winter sunset, the glow caused by the houses burning in the city, and now and then they could hear the roar of the mob, like the din of migrating swarm of bees, punctured
by shrieks, catcalls and the occasional report of firearms.” (334) The town was running without milk. All the Saiwal cows were killed “just because they belonged to the *gowalas.*” (335)

Suddenly life had become absolutely unsafe and insecure. Normal life was completely paralysed. No bank was functioning. The thought of the convoy, escorted by the army right upto the border on their way to Jullundur, was the only consoling feature of the whole drama. The expected convoy was not to be had easily. Already it was delayed by two days and there was still no sign of it. Tekchand was in great pain to see and imagine ghastly things. He faced a psychological crisis. The city was his, as it was of others. His family, like those of some Muslims, had contributed a great deal to beautify this town. But the changed circumstances had brought about unexpected ruin. It made him utter angrily to his daughter, Sundari:

“‘That it should have come to this!’ ... ‘After a life time spent in this part of India, in this town, and giving one self to it and taking from it; letting one’s roots sink deeper and deeper. There is a street named after my father, a library after me, a maternity home and a girls’ school after your mother. This is my city, as much as that of its most respected Muslim families - -the Abbases, the Hussains, the Chinais. I, my family, have done as much as any of them to make it prosperous and beautiful. And what are they doing? Burning it down! And look at us waiting for police protection because its citizens want to finish us off.’ (337)
The emotional separation caused by the partition was one of the most unfortunate developments in the history of mankind. Tek Chand never wanted to be separated from the town of his ancestors. His attachment with the things at Duraibad made him scorn his wife’s fear. He was now feeling a sense of guilt in misplacing his trust in the people of the town. His outburst, analysing why could not pull out of the disturbed city at the suggestion of his wife was enlightening. He confessed to Sundari in this connection: ‘Because I wanted to keep all this, all that my family and I myself have built. One of the best houses in town, a name honoured in the whole province, the best private collection of Indian bronzes in the whole country. And suddenly someone had decided that this land which is mine should be foreign territory - - just like that! And merely because some hooligans take it into their heads to drive all the Hindus away from their land, I have to leave everything and go, pulled out by the roots, abandoning everything that has become a part of me.’” (337-38)

Sundari reminds her Abaji of his being luckier than millions of others who had to find shelter and work, for he could have money and house in Delhi. This made Tek Chand realise that money could not make up for emotional attachment. This very thought of abandoning the place, he belonged to, was unbearable. He in a moment of utter depression, cried out to Sundari, flinging his hands in disdain: "‘Money’ ... Do you suppose all the money in the world would make up for this? My house, my bronzes... I could spend hours just looking at them, over and over again, feeling an inner peace, a religious exaltation almost, to be in the midst of all that beauty. True art
that lived a thousand years ago and still lives and breathes...’ ” (338) This agonising experience of a sensitive man told the tale of the horrid partition.

Tek Chand went to the museum and found relief in the company of gods and goddesses who were like living creatures to him “more alive than many people he knew.” (339) The gods in the museum held a message for him, The psychic crisis in him was glaring. He was surprised at the beastly way the people had suddenly resorted to; religion and community had caused barriers among men and turned them into foes of one another. Better sense might one day drive people to realise their grave mistake of fighting among themselves. He felt that he was among his own people and the vicious and dangerous days of hatred would soon end. He thought of sending away his wife and daughter with the convoy and of his staying behind with “his men and women and half-beasts and half-gods of metal.” (339) He felt sure of his plan: “He would like that; somehow he would be able to manage. It was his land, his town; its people were his people. They would come to their senses, as soon as this wave of hatred had passed; they would realise he was one of themselves and not to be spurned.” (339)

However, the moment did not last long. He knew his wife would never go away leaving him behind. He remembered his son Debi who could have dealt with this situation in an appropriate and convincing way. He knew his duty now. He contacted the police inspector by telephone and inquired about the convoy. The delay was disturbing. The police waited for the convoy of the Muslims from Delhi to arrange a convoy of the Hindus from Duriabad. The Hindus were now almost being treated as
hostages to see that the authorities on the other side sent out the Muslims safely. The news of the killing of Muslims on the other side of the border was disgusting. Violence bred violence, hatred, suspicion and confusion. Men had turned into brutes. Inhuman deeds became the order of the day. The Inspector made it emphatically clear to Tek Chand that violence would be returned with violence when he gruffly said to him on telephone: "Everything depends upon how they treat our people on the other side. I hear a train was attacked in Patiala by the Sikhs; a convoy butchered in Amritsar. If that sort of thing is allowed to happen, how can we protect the Sikhs here from the mobs? ..." (340) A telephonic call from Sardar Avtar Singh, inviting them to his house, gave a great sense of relief to Tek Chand. The second call by Sardar Avtar Singh a few minutes later was horrifying. The house was put on fire and the telephone line was dead.

Debi's attempt at reaching Duriabad along with his wife unfolded the scenes of train-disasters that preceded and followed the partition. The trains, consisting of a hotchpotch of passenger carriages, cattle wagons and timber flats and packed to maximum capacity, protected by military jawans, presented a pathetic sight. The train in which Debi travelled to Pakistan looked "like an enormous dead snake with myriads of ants clinging to its body." (354) Men, women and children were squeezed in windows and doors. These unfortunate people were going away from the land of their birth to a place unknown to them. Tragedy had befallen them: "A week ago, they had all been citizens, of India; men and women jubilant at the advent of the long-awaited,
long fought-for freedom. Today, they were just a small section of a seething movement of humanity.” (354)

Everything had changed. The partition and freedom brought misery and misfortune to millions of people on both sides of the border. Malgonkar very powerfully shows the plight of the displaced when he describes the people being carried away to Pakistan in the train in which Debi was travelling. “Here, they were the Muslims, the counterparts of the ‘displaced persons’ on the other side, who were Hindus and Sikhs, both sides making for a border that was yet to be officially demarcated. They were, at the moment, stateless citizens, hounded out from the land of their birth as much by collective fear of racial massacres as by the actual outrages perpetrated upon them by their erstwhile fellow-citizens.” (354)

The poor people had fallen victim to the whims of the politicians. Communal hatred, suspicion, the fear to be ruled by the majority, and the careful propaganda not to be ruled by people who once were slaves led the partition and brought about the mass movement of population. It brought untold misery to the millions of people for no fault of their own; their plight was simply horrible:

Political expediency had suddenly transformed them into refugees fleeing from their own land as though it had been invaded by an enemy. They left behind everything they possessed; their lands, houses, cattle, their household goods. They also left behind scores of thousands of dead and dying, sacrificial offerings
to freedom. They fled without caring for the weak or the lame who had fallen by the way side, unable to withstand the rigours of the migration. (354-355)

Tired, hungry, thirsty and sleepy people travelled in the train. These people were on their way to Pakistan — the land that most of them had never seen, the land that promised relief to them, and the place that cut them off” from their environment as effectively as by a surgical operation.” (355). The brutal violence reminded Debi-dayal of the often repeated words of Shafi Usman the terrorist leader: “‘A million shall die.’” (355)

Independence was only three days away, but the tide of violence, rape, abduction that swept the country destroyed thousands before the sun of freedom dawned upon the land. It puzzled as how the people, proclaiming brotherhood earlier had come to this state of affairs; and how the centuries-old ties of fraternity were suddenly shattered leading to this upheaval. It was the failure of Gandhi and the success of the shrewdly propagated British policy of divide and rule. Manohar Malgonkar raises certain important questions about this unprecedented event leading to the mass massacre of people in the name of religion:

After living as brothers over so many generations, how had they suddenly been infected by such a virulent hatred for each other? Who had won, Gandhi or the British? For the British at least had foreseen such a development. Or had they lost through not having allowed for structural flaws in the human material they
were dealing with? Had Gandhi ever envisaged a freedom that would be accompanied by so much suffering and release so much hatred? Had he realised it might impose transfers of population unparalleled throughout history? (355-56)

These thought-provoking problems show the hollowness of communal rage and frenzy. In India the Muslims were searched: “Gangs of hooligans went patrolling the streets, making house-to-house searches for the Muslims.” (356) The whole land was torn to pieces as a result of gigantic convulsion. An unimaginable chaos had overwhelmed the country. The train services were seriously disrupted and paralysed. All workers had run away for the safety of their lives. The movement of refugees was very slow. There was complete panic: “All Muslim railway servants had fled from posts as the Hindus had fled from their posts on the other side: The station masters, signalmen, engine drivers, fire men, ticket-punchers, clerks, guards everyone was gone. The Hindu staff too had panicked and run away.” (358)

Mumtaz and Debi had to camp out at the Kernal railway station in order to catch the train. It was an awful thing to catch the train; many perished in the attempt. The journey of Debi from Kernal to Pakistan presented the terrible sight of general massacre. There was scene after scene of carnage. The previous night a whole trainload of refugees was massacred. The scene presented a gruesome sight; it was “a scene of massacre, transformed by some trick of the morning light into a mirage. The large patches of red which had resembled saris left out to dry, shrank and shrivelled and faded before their eyes, leaving only pools of dried blood. The vultures, the dogs and
the jackals emerged, strutting disdainfully.” (359) Debi was travelling in the guise of a Muslim. It was his Punjab, but it presented a deserted sight. There was complete devastation. The ownerless cattle wandered in the group looking for food: “The land of the five rivers had become the land of carrion. The vultures and jackals and crows and rats wandered about, pecking, gnawing, tearing, gluttoned, staring boldly at their train.” (360) The journey to Duriabad seemed to be an unending process. It showed the great change between the past and the present. The heart-rending sights continuously reminded Debi of Shafi’s warning: “‘A million shall die’” (360)

Debi-dayal always loved this native province, the Punjab in all its mood. But this time it was in quite a different mood; it presented a scene of destruction on both sides as though by “denuded swarms of locusts or by invading armies.” 63 The train stopped for hours on a station without showing any signs of moving forward. The emptiness of the station and the silence deepened the atmosphere of horror. The brutal picking up of the people for killing was sad and scientific. Appearance was not to be trusted: “They made you take off your trousers to make sure that you were circumcised.” (360) This was an unmistakable process of identification. Debi felt safe in the Indian territory, but things took a violent turn the moment he crossed the border.

It was now the dawn of the fifteenth of August -- the dawn of freedom when the train came to a halt in Pakistan territory. In his heart Debi felt elated to greet the sun of liberty that was his dream. But his blood congealed to see the cruel acts of impending violence. The Hindus, travelling in elaborate disguises with the Muslims, were found
out and killed: “They were denounced by their fellow-passengers and the men were ceremoniously emasculated before being abandoned to the vengeance of the crowd, and the women carried away.” (367) Even children could not escape the wrath of communal frenzy. Debi, too, in the process was suspected and detected. All the protests and pronouncements of Mumtaz, his Muslim wife, who had forcibly accompanied him, proved abortive. He was stripped naked, blinded and killed. His wife was snatched away from him. He could only “see her being carried away, naked and struggling at the top of her voice.” (368) The last thing Debi saw was “the rising sun on the land of the five rivers on the day of their freedom.” (369) He, then, succumbed to pain and died listening to the cries of his dear wife and her determination to go with him wherever he went.

Shafi and his friends raided the house of Tek Chand. Shafi’s intentions were clear. He wanted to snatch away Sundari in a spirit of revenge. They spitted insult on the gods in the museum. Tek Chand implored Shafi not to touch ladies and insult gods. The gods were sacred to them: “Sacred, don’t you see, just as your own god is sacred to you. And these women are my wife and daughter. They should be like sisters to you. I implore you, in the name of all that is sacred to you, your prophet Mohammed himself, not to touch them, your sisters...” (377) This utterance of Tek Chand elicited Shafi’s strong feelings of revenge. He tried to settle the score - - the atrocities Muslim women were put to in India must be avenged. He took exception to the word ‘sister’. Shafi turned on him viciously: “ ‘Is that how you Hindus treated our women? Like sisters and mothers! They were raped in front of their own men; in Nabha, Patiala; in Delhi itself.
Raped, mutilated -- they weren't sisters then!’ (377) There followed a violent struggle. Shafi caught hold of Sundari, but was unsuccessful in his mission. Radha, Sundari's mother, was killed. Gian and Sundari killed Shafi with the image of Shiva that was once hidden in the little house at Konshet and that was later sold by Gian to Tekchand. Sundari, Tek Chand and Gian joined the convoy to pull out of Pakistan, but on the way, Tek Chand dropped out. He had great sense of emotional involvement in what was left behind. He was lost on the way, and Gian and Sundari returned to India.

Obviously, the novelist reveals a sound historical sense; the unfortunate facts of our national tragedy have been artistically painted. The horrible consequences of the partition are frankly stated. Millions of people became homeless, lost their belongings, fell victims to violence and insult, faced a new challenge and had to start all over again. This was how “the sunrise of our freedom” found millions mutilated and insulted and tens of millions dispossessed of all they had owned and cherished and brutally thrown away on the other side of the artificial border between India and Pakistan.

A Bend in the Ganges portrays, in a powerful way, the freedom struggle of the Indian nationalists, the mad and misleading communal frenzy, the Japanese invasion of the British territories in Asia, the bitterness brought about by the partition, the massive exchange of population and the cruel and shameful acts caused by communal hatred. The atmosphere of the country became vicious and hell was let loose. The novel dramatically depicts, in great detail, what is stated briefly in the “Author’s note”: 
What was achieved through non-violence, brought with it one of the bloodiest upheavals of history: twelve million people had to flee, leaving their homes; nearly half a million were killed; over a hundred thousand women, young and old were abducted, raped and mutilated. (6)

The bloody communal ‘vivisection’, which swept the country during the early days of our Independence, is excellently presented in Distant Drum. The novel highlights the consequences of the partition, the division of the army, the fighting of friends and fellows joining the opposite camps, the Kashmir war that followed Independence and the bitter communal riots in Delhi. The partition of the country divided the army. The reference to it occurs quite early in the story when the novelist writes about Lieutenant-Colonel Ayub Mulla: “Ayub Mulla, with his hawklike features and insolent gimlet eyes which, although his family had lived for five generations around Lucknow, bore testimony to his Pathan ancestry, was one of the few Muslim officers who had stayed on with his regiment in India when the army was divided at the partition of the country.” (‘Distant Drum’, 13)

Kiran’s friendship with Abdul Jamal and the latter’s finally going away to Pakistan are the other important incidents in the novel. Kiran and Jamal had been together at the military academy at Dehradun. They were together in active service in Burma during the World War II. Jamal, an excellent swimmer, was seriously wounded in the war and Kiran had almost taken him to be lost. Significantly, it was Abdul Jamal who first succeeded in Mrs. Medley’s affairs. He was almost a torchbearer to Kiran in
that matter. Kiran and Jamal had faced the riots of 1947, preceded by the partition, at Delhi for three whole days. Abdul had saved Kiran by keeping the latter's name away from the court of inquiry that looked into the causes leading Mrs. Medley to commit suicide. Then Jamal went to Pakistan, became a high-ranking officer there, and ironically faced Kiran in Kashmir. The two friends were put in opposite camps by the partition. Kiran was sad to tell Bertie Howard, once a British Satpura officer in Delhi, that Abdul Jamal had gone to Pakistan and was on the other side. The partition had brought about this separation, and the Kashmir affair was very tragic. Jamal had saved Kiran’s life in the Delhi riots just after the partition and now Jamal was in Pakistan. The breaking up of the old team into enemies was the unfortunate consequence of the partition. Bertie rightly remarked: “Pity the old team had to be broken up like that and now fighting each other in Kashmir.” (147)

The novel narrates the riots in Delhi, in great detail, and shows the unfortunate developments caused by the partition. Jamal was in Delhi during those days and Kiran had come to stay with him for a few days and had engulfed into the communal riots. It was in September of 1947 “when the army was in the process of being divided and Abdul was to leave in a few days for Pakistan…” (217) Those were the horrible days as Kiran said to himself: “Horrible days, those days of the Delhi riots!” (217) Riots were tragic and inhuman; they were barbarous and brutal, far more shocking than anything that Kiran had known in the war: “For two weeks, there was a reign of terror, when man’s most barbarous instincts prevailed without check. Both Hindus and Muslims spent themselves in ghoulish enormities unknown to primitive
man, allegedly in retaliation to each other’s doings -- all in the name of religion, even in the name of God!” (218)

The riots showed man to be a ferocious animal, thirsty for the blood of his own fellow beings. There was a negation of all human values. People raged wildly in the cities and towns. There was fire everywhere, and the flames also engulfed Delhi, perhaps, not so terribly as they looked at other places: “The riots were not confined to Delhi, every fair-sized town and village had its own, private, fight-to-the-finish civil war. The riots in Delhi were but a cross-section of the mass killings in the other towns, and perhaps they were a little less brutal than in other places: in Lahore and Ludhiana, or Rawalpindi or Patiala. But they were enough to shake your faith in humanity.” (218)

Kiran had come to participate in the festivities organised to give farewell to the officers who were going to Pakistan, but the riots disturbed the whole show. The partition had changed the whole atmosphere. The prevalent feeling was one of doubt and distrust. The Hindus and Muslims had drifted poles apart. Man’s faith was widely shaken. The horrible consequences of the cries for a separate safe state were clearly and widely visible and felt: “The country was being torn asunder, the army was being divided; the prevailing mood was one of shock and suspicion. The partition had always created a barrier; lifelong ties between Muslims and others -- Hindus as well as the British who were there in large numbers -- were already broken.” (218-19) New Delhi looked almost free from any sign of disturbance, but the billows of smoke could be seen
over old Delhi. Fires were a common sight, and people lived in terror in their homes. The curfew-bound city wore a deserted look.

Kiran’s short stay in Delhi with Abdul revealed the dangerous days of communal riots, ill will and antagonism, followed by the partition. The city was placed under curfew, but Kiran and Abdul could move about freely because the curfew did not “apply to people in uniform.” (219) This enabled them to have a first hand knowledge edge of what was happening in the riot torn city. The first day, chasing the smoke, they could go on their bicycles only upto Connaught Circus that “looked like a Hollywood ghost city, eerie and deserted. On the interactions of the road, there were groups of sentries, standing in clusters as though they found comfort in each other’s company and were reluctant to venture singly into unlit alleys.” (219)

The sounds and yelling of a disturbed city, which was in fire and civil war, did not permit them to have a quiet sleep; Kiran and Abdul went together to the riot-hit streets of Delhi in the truck, watching the destruction brought about by the communal frenzy. It was not an easy drive: “Near the corner of Darya Ganj, they had to stop the truck because a tonga which had overturned was lying right in the middle of the road. The pony was still harnessed to it and was flailing the road with its legs in an effort to get up. There was a gaping dark hole in its stomach through which the guts trailed out in a tangled, blood-soaked mess.” (222) The sight of the suffering pony made Kiran empty all his six bullets into its head. Even Abdul, who always looked brave, was shaken for the first time that day on seeing a wounded horse. Near Kashmiri Gate the
inhuman deeds were more pronounced. The victims were carelessly thrown away to be eaten by vultures: “In a triangular yard surrounded by a low brickwall, were a hundred or so corpses, thrown anyhow, piled in grotesque postures one upon another. A few ugly vultures with bare featherless necks were busy tearing at the bodies.” (222) The inside of a house wore a stinking look. It was a pathetic sight: “The whole place was reeking with the smell of festering wounds.” (223) Two or three hundred people were crowded inside, huddled and moaning: “More than half of them were lying prone on the floor, groaning in pain; they were some of the wounded and dying victims of the riots. A corner was set aside for the silent dead.” (223)

Abdul and Kiran decided to take the wounded to the hospital, but this too was an arduous task. The people were unwilling to be separated from their relatives. Even the badly injured ones did not like to go away to hospital for fear of leaving their young ones unprotected in their absence: “There was a man with two soft bullets lodged in his leg, for instance, who begged to be allowed to stay where he was because otherwise his five-year-old daughter would be left without anyone in the world to look after her. Anyone could see that his leg needed immediate treatment, perhaps an amputation. It was blue and it had swollen to a frightening size and lay twisted in a horribly unnatural position.” (223) Abdul rang for the fire brigade, but was told that there were about fifty fires blazing furiously at Delhi at the moment and that no fire engine was available then. Kiran heard the piercing scream of a woman being chased by two men: “The top half of her body was bare and she was clutching with both hands the loose folds of her falling sari.” (225) Kiran intervened and saved the woman from the clutches of those
men. Kiran walked to the place of riot-torn victims and met the President of the Vegetable Merchants Association on the way, who had “come to complain to Kiran about the plight of nearly thirty thousand Muslim refugees who were said to be taking shelter in a nearby mosque.” (227) They were said to be living without anything to eat for the last two days. Kiran expressed his disbelief at the report that thirty thousand people were staying in the mosque. The man asked Kiran to see it for himself. As he was climbing up the mosque, Abdul came back with the truck, enquired what the matter was, and warned Kiran not to play foolish in such matters. Abdul himself went into the mosque to see things, and Kiran was asked to stay outside. When Abdul did not come out of the mosque for a considerably long time, Kiran went into the mosque to see what Abdul was doing for such a long time. He found a man who had drawn a knife at him, telling people that Kiran was the Military Officer who had killed his brother - - Sadat. It was at this critical moment that Abdul did his best to save him, though he was jeered for siding a Hindu and a Kafir and for standing with one who was reported to have killed a true believer that very morning. Surprisingly, during those days of communal hatred and riots he was saved from a Muslim mob by a Muslim Satpura Officer. It spoke of the code of the regiment and of the unbiased, harmonious relation of Kiran and Abdul. Very soon Abdul Jamal was to cross over to the other side of the border only to meet Kiran in Kashmir as a high officer of the enemy forces. But he saved Kiran from what looked a certain death in the mosque on the face of a hundred Muslims burning with the desire of killing a Hindu, an infidel.
For two more days Kiran and Abdul worked voluntarily in the vicinity of Subzimandi until the troops had taken control of the riot-torn city. Those days at Delhi were full of amazing and bewildering incidents. Violence was the common sight. Bloodthirsty people searched for their victims in the curfew-bound city: “Those three days were crammed with incidents such as other men do not see in a lifetime. Time and again, the frenzied mob had broken the curfew and had come rampaging out into the open, drunk with hatred and fear and madness.” (230) The chaos of mass migration played havoc with the lives of people. The one consoling factor was the working together of Abdul and Kiran. There was perfect harmony between them, and none of them could have thought about the things the partition had in store for them at that time: “Neither he nor Abdul had been conscious of the fact that they belonged to the opposing factions in the riots -- that one was a Hindu, the other a Muslim on the verge of setting out for a world of new values. What stood out magnificently secure in that holocaust was the fact that although they belonged to the two opposing communities crazed with vengeance and thirsting for blood, he and Abdul had been able to work together in the closet accord, their loyalties to each other absolutely unruptured by that incessant strain.” (230)

The story is told through a series of flashbacks. Kiran in Kashmir, facing the forces of Abdul Jamal thought of the days of Delhi-riots where he had worked with Jamal in perfect harmony. Now the unfortunate developments of the partition had put them into opposite camps. Kiran was warned of being cautious about Abdul: “It was unfortunate that he and Abdul now faced each other as commanders of opposing
battalions.” (230) Kiran was very clear in his mind about the duty of the professional soldier. His old association with Abdul had now nothing to do. He was determined to “defend his position as best he could, and when it came to the question of attack, he would lead his men into it with no other thought in his mind except the thought of winning.” (230) There was no question of divided loyalties. The two former friends and fellow-officers of 4 Satpura were now locked in a war against each other brought about by partition. After the partition they found themselves fighting against each other in Kashmir. Kiran met Abdul under the Bushy-Tapped Tree. It was a meeting that defied superior officers. Kiran took a great risk and ran his whole career into danger, but the impulsive meeting took place, which brought a new awareness of poignant realities. It fully revealed the misfortunes, caused by the partition: “It had left a new emptiness, it had given a raw edge to old memories, it had brought on a painful awareness of new realities. A soldier could not remain friendly with someone who had now become an enemy. His relationship had to be subjected to new values, confined to narrow and contorted limitations. The very essence of friendship, frankness, had been completely drained off.” 91 The Partition shattered old ties. Relationship with Jamal was broken. Patently, the novel fully brings out the terrible consequences of the partition.