CHAPTER 6
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CONCLUSION

Independence brought with it the partition of this ancient land along the communal line. Because of the cunning diplomacy of the British Government and unreasonable attitude of the Muslim League and possibly also due to lack of understanding of the political scenario on the part of some leaders of the Congress the partition had to be accepted as a necessary condition for our independence. Those within the Congress who were opposed to partition, fell in utter minority and their word of caution fell into deaf ears. Those at the head of the freedom struggle and the government knew that the failure of the Cabinet Mission opened the floodgate of communal tension, and communal riots did take place at several places. In fact, communal disharmony was whipped up by unsocial elements. Seeds of suspicion, disbelief and contempt between the Hindu and the Muslim communities were deliberately allowed to sprout by the vested interest. There was a kind of fear psychosis all along. Leaders like Mahatma Gandhi, who still held their reason and calm, found themselves almost completely isolated and had therefore no significant role to play. Sanity became a strange word to a vast majority of people. Surprisingly, the government of British India, whose moral and legal responsibility it was to see that the transfer of power was affected in an atmosphere of peace and harmony, became oblivious of the impending danger, discernible warning signals notwithstanding. Everyone seemed to be in a hurry — the British
Government because of the mounting international pressure and its broken economy following the World War and possibly also the leaders of freedom struggle who seem to have got fed up with the rigid attitude of the Muslim League. So there seemed to be no alternative and partition was accepted.

Every artist has his own set of priorities and therefore differs from others in emphasis on certain aspects of the same incident or phenomenon. Though fiction is the expression of the most intimate social awareness of the society in which it is born, it does have the imprint of the artist's own personality. In fact, it is novelists' endeavour to relate themselves to the mainstream that their works are imbued with socio-economic and politico-cultural awareness. Such an endeavour is inescapable as people's hopes and fears, their joys and sufferings, aspirations and ambitions deeply influence the psyche of the novelist. Social awareness being the integral part of the artist's consciousness, no work of literary art can remain unaffected by important socio-economic or politico-cultural events. M.K. Bhatnagar writes:

Art is, and always has been, a social activity in reality. It is one aspect of the cultural superstructure which has its foundations in the economic, political, social, philosophic and religious patterns of the time. It throws into bold relief those multidimensional conscious and unconscious urges of society which are seeking gratification and realization in the world of actual reality.¹

Sensitive to the human reality, the artists present all socio-political happenings in a wider human framework. The fictional works under study should, therefore, be looked upon as creative outlets of the novelists' own

reaction to human miseries accompanying the partition. These works should also be regarded as the emotional responses of the novelists to that great human tragedy of unprecedented magnitude.

Literature not only mirrors the contemporary society but also projects various aberrations creeping into it circumstantially. Indian English fiction, therefore, apart from reflecting the socio-political events, creates a world inspiring people's faith in human dignity, a world in which there is still hope for humanity to survive. The novelists under study fulfil this aspect of their social responsibility. Their works bring into sharp focus instances of divine spirit of man, his compassion, spirit of sacrifice and service and his concern for his fellow beings. Out of a large number of fictional works dealing with the partition theme three novelists — Manohar Malgonkar, Khushwant Singh and Chaman Nahal — were chosen for an in-depth comparative study as they are probably the most representative insofar an exhaustive presentation of this theme is concerned. An analysis of their characteristic emphases on certain aspects of the theme, and their own projections of events form the subject matter of the present work.

With the partition of the country the common man in the entire subcontinent was in a state of shock and trauma, and was completely flabbergasted by what was happening. People at large found themselves utterly helpless. Human miseries brought about by communal riots were appalling and every thinking individual was shaken to his roots. But even during those dark days when reason and sanity had taken a back seat there were hearts in both the communities steeped in the milk of human
kindness — hearts full of piety, kindness, compassion, spirit of sacrifice and concern for fellow beings. There were examples of members of one community risking their own life to save the persons of other community. Amidst the grotesque and ghastly acts of violence there were also acts of human wisdom and dignity. Such instances were not lost sight of and the novels of Khushwant Singh, Chaman Nahal and Manohar Malgonkar are replete not only with ghastly incidents but also with such instances.

Manohar Malgonkar belonging to Maharashtra, the state which did not witness much of human miseries associated with the partition, deals with the subject in a rather dispassionate manner. He is deeply rooted in Indian tradition. He said: "I keep writing in India because I feel no author should write outside his own living circumstances." Most of the novels of Manohar Malgonkar derive material from Indian history and politics. A keen observer and a ruthless critic, he very scathingly exposes flaws of political and historical events and voices his dissatisfaction through his works. As Shankar Bhattacharya writes, "Malgonkar's novels reveal a sound historical sense. History as the theme of creative fiction seems to exercise a special fascination for him." "In Malgonkar's novels", he adds, "there is a happy fusion of the political and the social aspects. Though actively involved with politics, Malgonkar has refrained from putting his fiction in the service of overt political propaganda." Three of his major novels — A Bend in the Ganges, Distant Drum and The Princes — deal with the politico-historical

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4 Ibid., p. 27.
event of partition. *A Bend in the Ganges* is regarded by E.M. Forster as one of the three best novels of 1964.

During the 1940s Indian social values underwent a tremendous change, and political atmosphere was charged with suspicion and misgivings, which resulted from a number of traumatic and catastrophic national and international events like World War II, Japanese aggression, communal holocaust and the partition of India. The story of *A Bend in the Ganges* runs against the backdrop of these unusual events. In the novel Malgonkar discusses Indian nationalism, religious fanaticism and British colonialism in great detail. "*A Bend in the Ganges* is an indispensable artistic interpretation of the collaboration and confabulation of historical forces into [the] final phase of freedom struggle."

Malgonkar neither eulogises Gandhian principles nor treats the period as a Renaissance. According to him, Gandhism was a strategy manoeuvred to obtain freedom. In the wake of the partitioned freedom people forgot the teachings of Gandhiji and succumbed to violence. He maintains that only lip-service to non-violence cannot check barbarous instincts of human beings. He remarks in the preface to *A Bend in the Ganges*: "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." But the

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revolutionaries, who defied Gandhian ideology failed to maintain the spirit of brotherhood. Their fight and protest were directed not only against the British tyranny but also against communalism. However, slowly nationalist terrorism degenerated into communalism. The fundamental question raised in *A Bend in the Ganges* is: "Who had won, Gandhi or the British?" ... Or had they both lost through not having allowed for structural flaws in the human material they were dealing with."^6

Manohar Malgonkar is one of the most autobiographical authors among Indian English writers. He himself admits: "I feel that having started writing more or less at very mature stage, I don't have to do much research about life because I fall back on experience ... "^7 His *Distant Drum* and *The Princes* exhibit excellent fusion of autobiographical and historical perspectives in fictional terms. In *Distant Drum* the novelist turns to military life from the freedom struggle. It portrays the catastrophic consequences that newly won Independence brought with it. Malgonkar not only gives a vivid picture of Delhi riots and the Kashmir problem but also expresses his dissatisfaction with the present style of corrupt politics that blossomed in the post-independence India. In this novel he shows the triumph of army 'code' over religious and other considerations.

*The Princes* evokes the mental trauma that was experienced by the princes in the wake of the merger of their states in the Indian Union. The

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and argues he had seen. As he himself has admitted, "the partition theme through his characters depicts his own concern for those whose suffering witnessed the diabolic cruelty. His delineation of the theme of the partition fiction prize a versatile novelist, a journalist and a diplomat. Singh himself Krushna Kant Singh’s Train to Pakistan won him Grove Press India knowledge that he possessed in respect of India and its history.

... is the amalgam they articulate this personal experiences and intimate.

The strong point of Malhotra’s novels is their exploration of the partition writers’ author’s life has a direct bearing on what the action in the employed were his own. Generally, in research, he employed what he was used and the Victors and the materials he used are particular vision of the Malhotra’s novels are united statement about life and they present a united whole, constitute a consistent and perception and conception. Malhotra’s novels towards historical, social and political problems and also show clarity of his their selfish approach. All the three novels exhibit Malhotra’s awareness dark side of the Indians of the British and relentlessly criticise them for attitudes of corrupt and unscrupulous politicians. He does not bypass the values in post-independence India. The novels thus tried to expose immoral Distant Drum and The Princess show the shattering of moral and social independence. It expresses the author’s agony over the partition, whereas A Bend in the Ganges is a novel dealing with the struggle for leading India towards the onset of democratic process. princes failed in their battle with history as the forces of history were
was born out of sense of guilt that I had done nothing to save the lives of innocent people and behaved like a coward.\textsuperscript{9} And probably it is this sense of guilt that inspired his creative faculty to create a character like Juggut Singh who very bravely sacrifices his life to save the passengers of the ill-fated train bound to Pakistan.

Khushwant Singh is highly sensitive to the socio-political realities of his times. That is why he has succeeded in capturing the trauma of partition in its right perspective. Khushwant Singh was born in 1915 at Hadali in Punjab (now in Pakistan). The gruesome events of 1947 threw him across the new border. The ghastly events that took place before and after the partition shook the roots of humanity. The carnage that broke out in 1947 brought crisis of values, which made sensitive persons like Singh suffer deep mental agony:

The beliefs that I had cherished all my life were shattered. I had believed in the innate goodness of the common man. But the division of India had been accompanied by the most savage massacres known in the history of the country. . . . I had believed that we Indians were peace loving and non-violent; that we were more concerned with matters of the spirit, while the rest of the world was involved in the pursuit of material things. After the experience of autumn of 1947, I could no longer subscribe to these views, I became. . . an angry middle-aged man, who wanted to shout his disenchantment with the world. . . . I decided to try my hand at writing.\textsuperscript{10}


\textsuperscript{10} From the transcript of Khushwant Singh's talk for the Australian Broadcasting Commission's "Guest of Honour" Programme. The talk was broadcast on 5 April 1964.
The action of the novel *Train to Pakistan* spans over a period of some weeks of August and September in 1947 in Mano Majra. Khushwant Singh's Mano Majra represents the traditional structure of the Punjabi society in the pre-partition India. Common culture, language, custom and a sense of belonging to the village was part and parcel of their Punjabi identity. But the partition shattered the traditional moral and social standards of society and proved to be a great destabilising factor. The Mano Majrans lacked political consciousness as feudal consciousness was deeply in-built in their mental make-up. Therefore, they had no choice but to submit to the avalanche passively. The inherent fellow feeling of the Punjabi society was ruptured as communal disharmony was whipped up by unsocial elements.

*Train to Pakistan* is a great piece of art not because it gives a true picture of horrifying and venomous incidents of 1947 but because its tone is optimistic and affirmative. It shows faith in human values in the face of barbarism. Juggut Singh in the novel is an embodiment of both good and evil. But good in him inspired him to sacrifice his life. Khushwant Singh writes about the character of Juggut Singh:

I thought it was time one exploded this myth of the innate goodness in man. There is innate evil in man. And so I just wrote about it, and I did create one character whom I stuffed with the so-called innate goodness of man, and he is the only character which is entirely fiction.\(^1\)

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\(^1\) From the transcript of *Indian Accent* by John Thompson, a programme of interviews with Indian writers broadcast by the Canadian Broadcasting Commission in 1961.
In his novels Singh fuses historical facts with creative art, which lends universal dimension to his work.

The historical setting of Indo-Anglian fiction is important because it is an integral part of its cultural ethos and vision. Khushwant Singh's novel demonstrate this process of a historical reality and a cultural ethos finding expression in the art of fiction and thereby endeavouring to present the united vision of man and his milieu.\(^2\)

Khushwant Singh has been highly influenced by the "Punjab countryside; urban Indo-Anglian Delhi; and the liberal, sophisticated city of London . . . ."\(^3\) He is nevertheless a writer of Indian milieu. Khushwant Singh's another historical novel, Delhi, extends over a period of six hundred years. Beginning with the Mughal period it describes many important events of pre-independence and post-independence India. Khushwant Singh's creative art, writes V.A. Shahane.

. . . stems from a search of identity. His creative explorations as novelist, short story writer, historian and essayist have been the gradual achievements of selfexpression and an innate, continuous quest for identity. Khushwant Singh's mind and personality have been moulded by western education and culture, but he is at heart a Sikh and an Indian. His art is deeply rooted in the soil. Deriving vitality from the vigorous energy that characterizes a Punjabi. Khushwant Singh's art and mind are permeated by a genuine Punjabi consciousness.\(^4\)

Khushwant Singh's treatment of the theme of the partition has a particular intensity and forcefully records his own disenchantment.

\(^{13}\) Ibid., p. 19.
\(^{14}\) Ibid., p. 18.
Chaman Nahal treats the theme of partition in the manner of an academician. He has very comprehensively portrayed the mental trauma experienced by the members of the minority community. The story of the novel opens on 3 June 1947 and ends on 30 January 1948 with the assassination of Gandhiji. His novel Azadi marks a significant development on Malgonkar's novels:

Chaman Nahal's Azadi begins where A Bend in the Ganges virtually ends. Azadi is not only a comprehensive reflection upon the savagery and atrocities of the partition; it is also an interpretative probe into the variables that precipitated the tragedy. Azadi synthesises the portrayal of dilemmas of innocent victims by forces beyond their control (as in Khushwant Singh's Train to Pakistan), and the emotional impact felt by the divided communities.\textsuperscript{15}

Born in 1927 at Sialkot (Pakistan), Nahal, too, had been rendered refugee (like Khushwant Singh) and belonged to a state which was worst affected by communal frenzy. In Azadi, which received Sahitya Akademi Award in 1977, he deals with the horrors of the partition elaborately. He writes:

One of the themes that I had come to be occupied with after the partition of India was that of forced exile .... I have always rejected the two-nation theory; the creation of Pakistan in no way solved the problem of the minorities. And till this day, I pine for the city in which I was born and raised. I see this as the typical yearning of all voluntary exiles. Hence I wrote Azadi as a hymn to one's land of birth rather than a realistic novel of the partition.\textsuperscript{16}

\textsuperscript{15} Kaushik, Politics, Aesthetics and Culture: A Study of Indo-Anglian Political Novel, p. 67.

\textsuperscript{16} Chaman Nahal, "Writing a Historical Novel", in Dhwan (ed.), Three Contemporary Novellists, p. 40.
Nahal deals with the contemporary history very brilliantly. He has a "... broad-based historic sense in that he gives a sufficient wide canvas of the period that he is treating." But he does not treat history as a mere chronicle of facts. He uses it to develop the theme of his story. He himself writes: "History, thus, become for me the new myth — or a metaphor, which is my understanding of a myth." He believes that historical fiction moves at two levels — realistic and metamorphical.

In Azadi, beginning with the genesis of the tragedy, as a historian would, Nahal poses the fundamental question as to how it could happen. The novel "closes with the affirmation that a nation, resolved to persist with her quest for identity, outlives even annihilating tragedies." Nahal writes in great detail about the psychological trauma caused by the partition — particularly the insecurity felt by the minority community before and after the announcement of the partition. The minds of people were dismembered by the magnitude of the mishap. He caustically criticises the political leaders who failed to keep their promise. The venomous two-nation theory gripped the mind of innocent people while the fanatic leaders played with the emotions of the masses and fanned communal hatred. The displaced and dejected minorities were desperately searching for new identity. The alienated beings lost communication with each other. The inhuman crimes committed by fanatics shook one's faith in humanity. Chaman Nahal treats the theme of the partition differently and shows that though people had to

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face inhuman crimes and severe mental pressure, yet the cases of positive transformation of character were not altogether absent. Commenting on the novel Azadi, Saros Cowasjee says: "Human Kindness, as it wades through blood, is the theme of the novel. It is also man's only hope of survival."\textsuperscript{20} Even the nihilistic experience like the partition brings about regeneration of characters. Lala Kanshi Ram feels ". . . that the tragedy of partition with all its holocaust will eliminate all the barriers of caste and class that alienate man from man and turn them enemies of one another."\textsuperscript{21}

The cruel vivisection of India was a result of the political imprudence of the political leaders. It was also a betrayal of the people of India. Nahal's politico-historical novel deals in great detail with the disintegration of the Punjabi culture into obnoxious communalist groups. However,

Chaman Nahal is not a rebel against life or one who believes that it means nothing. He is a determined and sturdy affirmationist whose novels reveal a sound commitment to moral values, to right action, to life itself. The background may be domestic, inter-cultural or the movement of history, but they are all irradiated with the emotional and spiritual luminosity of man, the potentiality of his being. His novels are celebrations of life and of those of its qualities which give it meaning and significance.\textsuperscript{22}

Nahal's wealth of details, his ruthless realism and unshakeable optimism are the distinguishing qualities of Nahal's treatment of the partition.

Though all the three writers — Malgonkar, Khushwant Singh and Nahal — have depicted the same theme, i.e. partition, their creative mind reacted to this historical event differently. Malgonkar feels that the geographical division of the country led to degeneration of composite Indian culture. He has used the Ganges as the symbol of ancient Indian culture, which has been continuous and perpetual. Centuries after centuries it has remained dynamic and has successfully assimilated various cultures and life-styles coming from other countries. Therefore, the division of India was a very tragic blow to this culture. The partition of India started the process of fission instead of fusion. This tragic turn in the Indian culture deeply affected Malgonkar and very thoughtfully he gave the title *A Bend in the Ganges* to his novel. Khushwant Singh’s *Train to Pakistan* has used the trains not only as a symbol of movement and flux but also of death and destruction. The small village Mano Majra being nearly estranged from the outer world, its only connecting links are the trains crossing Mano Majra everyday. Nahal’s *Azadi* opens at the time when the desire to be free from the bands of alien rule was the dominant passion of the Indians. Though he believes that partition of the country was historically, morally, ethically and politically wrong, yet to him the freedom from the foreign subjugation was no mean achievement.

All the three writers have woven their story around a historical event and are exact about historical facts. They all show how the stupendous drama of partition affected not only the lives of individuals but also the fate of the two newly emerging nations. The protracted freedom struggle had
given Indians a unified identity. But the division of the country along communal lines shattered the bonds of unified identity and this disintegration generated anxiety and bewilderment because now the main problem faced by the Indians was self-definition and adherence to new loyalties. The Indian people were dubious about their role in the new nation that was free but was shaken to its roots. The collapse of human values in the wake of the partition raised several naughtly questions like: what does freedom mean to a crumbling society? Splitting of old relations? Or, facing displacement? Or, threat to life? All the three writers believe that the Hindu-Muslim conflict was not religious in nature; only certain orthodox people, with vested interests, made it appear so. Nor was it an economic crises, but was given that colour because there had been some riots on that ground. It was not even cultural, for the two communities had lived together in peace for centuries. In fact, the two communities were not sure of their differences or oneness. It was a foreign power which gave new colours to their thoughts and made it difficult for them to do sober thinking and started a process of new identity formation based along communal lines. Malgonkar believes that the pernicious phenomenon of communalism, which raised its head during the 1940s, was mainly responsible for the division of India. Khushwant Singh blames Indian political leaders for the tragedy. And Chaman Nahal maintains that the devious two-nation theory propagated by Jinnah and the 'Divide and rule' policy of the British led to the bloodiest holocaust of Indian history.
The three writers maintain that debate over India's unity was not a bilateral problem and that the third party, i.e. the British Government, too, contributed to bedevil the problem. These writers have nevertheless criticised Indian leaders for the role played by them in precipitating the tragedy but they have exempted the last Viceroy, Lord Mountbatten, who advanced the date of the transfer of power, which exacerbated the communal problem. The haste with which the partition was precipitated did not give Indians sufficient time to acclimatise themselves with the cultural, social and political transformations that were quickly taking place. The sudden eruption of long suppressed feelings of despise, indignation and retaliation led to unforeseen consequences. Masses had no time to adjust with this swift upsurge. Communities that were living together amiably for long fell upon each other in an orgy of hate. The inherent moral worth and spiritual equality of each individual, the dignity of human personality, the autonomy of the individual will and essential rationality of men were all swept away by this spate. It was nothing less than a convulsion, a sudden collapse of human values. The people felt that their leaders had beguiled them to pave their way to the crown. The sudden rude shock befuddled the common man and this begot hatred and hatred procreated violence. These writers have shown in great detail the effects of the partition on the Hindus, the Sikhs and the Muslims. The trauma felt by minority communities like Anglo-Indians, Indian Christians, Parsis, etc. have not received sufficient attention. These minorities were at the receiving end and were total prisoners of circumstances.
India became independent in the year 1947. But it was not the independence for which hundreds and thousands of her ablest sons sacrificed their lives. The idea of independence was overwhelming because they had envisaged a sort of Renaissance. But when the deceitful nature of this mirage came before their eyes they were left dazed and bewildered. What the partition brought in its wake was a senseless genocide. About a million perished and many more millions became destitutes, orphans, disabled and homeless. Women were the most vulnerable targets — they were abducted, molested, and paraded naked. Loot, arson, pillaging, carnage became the order of the day. Never had this ancient land, since her hoary past, witnessed this kind of senseless bloodshed. It was a national disaster and the communal riots affected all the places where the two communities had been living together peacefully for generations. Certainly the Punjab, Sind ; Bengal and Bihar were the worst affected. All the three writers have set their stories against the background of the Punjab and have avoided other states which also witnessed similar ghoulish enormities. They have written about a tragedy but, instead of taking a nihilistic approach, they sing of code of heroism that sustains one's faith in humanity at the hour of crisis. Malgonkar's characters follow an ideal code of the British-Indian army and old Indian aristocracy. Khushwant Singh's heroes are deeply rooted in Sikh traditions and follow the Punjabi moral code. Nahal's heroes take a tolerant view of life and believe in the code of universal brotherhood.
Both Khushwant Singh and Manohar Malgonkar are obsessed with the idea of martial virtues. But, unlike Khushwant Singh, Malgonkar does not expose his readers to the bloody events that came with the partition. He is more concerned with the reasons that precipitated this tragedy. Khushwant Singh writes in great detail about the retributory killings in the Punjab in the wake of the partition whereas Chaman Nahal is more concerned with the mental trauma experienced by dislodged people. The perception of this event varies from author to author as they have tried to treat the tragedy according to their notions and understanding of the calamity. But one thing is quite striking that while dealing with the theme they all have maintained a remarkable impartiality.

Malgonkar seems to suggest that the battle between imperialism and nationalism had theoretically ceased at the beginning of 1946, though a new kind of strife took its place which was between the Hindus and the Muslims. The imaginary fears and false notions of an aggressive posture of Hindu nationalism bred an attitude of suspicion and hatred among the Muslim community. Chaman Nahal, referring to the political situation of the 1940s, maintains that the Congress leaders were unable to judge the situation in right perspective. They were unable to comprehend that the communalism of the 1940s was not like that of the 1920s or 1930s. This communalism definitely intended to create a new Muslim nation. The Muslims of the Punjab were of the conviction that the Hindus and the Sikhs must disappear from their land, leaving their material possessions behind. Khushwant Singh's rural characters lack political consciousness, but his bureaucratic
characters in *Train to Pakistan* felt that the enormity of the avalanche could have been diminished if some genuine effort were made by the national leaders to appease the frantic mob. He is critical of politicians seeking benefit from the partition.

The novels written by these authors broadly fall into two categories — the novels which present a picture of political protest against the foreign subjugation, and the novels which not only raise voice against alien rule but also against internal misrule. Malgonkar's *A Bend in the Ganges* is the novel of the first category. It shows people of various castes and creeds protesting against the imperial rule. The characters of the novel anxiously awaited for freedom and sought a kind of Renaissance in it. The novels like *Distant Drum* and *The Princes* by Malgonkar, *Train to Pakistan* and *Delhi* by Khushwant Singh and *Azadi* by Chaman Nahal fall into the second category. These novels were written in the 1960s, by which time the euphoria of Gandhism and the Renaissance sought in freedom had lost its freshness and appeal. The mutilated nation felt duped in ugly bargain. Moreover, the corrupt politicians and bureaucrats were defying the ideals and norms of ethical and moral values. While depicting the drama of human degradation these authors do not forget that any literature based on hatred could not be a great piece of art. Therefore, they have created characters like Debi-dayal (*A Bend in the Ganges*), Kanshi Ram and Barkat Ali (*Azadi*), and Juggut Singh (*Train to Pakistan*), who are the torch bearers of humanity. The barbarous incidents had a humanising effect on even the morally weak characters who,
under the pressure of time, metamorphosed into compassionate human beings.

Taking into consideration the great Indian heritage these writers seem to feel that the partition of India was like a Greek tragic play, full of accidental elements, where noble characters are thrown out of the main stream of drama or are even for that matter physically annihilated, not for their own evil but by the conspiracy of villains and unpredictable course of destiny. While dealing with pluralistic and divisive trends of sub-nationalistic loyalties they do not sound bitter as India's past heritage provides them the necessary foundation, firmness and faith.

Krishna sobti, a refugee from Pakistan and an eminent Hindi writer once said that partition was difficult to forget but dangerous to remember. Her words are echoed by Urvashi Butalia in summing up her recent book, The Other Side of Silence: Voices from the Partition of India (Viking Penguin India, 1998). She writes: "Silence and speech. Memory and forgetting. Pain and healing. These are at the heart of my book."

The communal map of the subcontinent was confused unprecedentedly. After the partition the confusion became worse confounded. The Other Side of Silence opens up millions of wounds that have healed with time. Can we put off this greatest tragedy in which a million people lost their lives and over ten million were uprooted from their homes?

The heavy price we had to pay for our independence and the partition and its aftermath, so ably dealt with in the novels of Manohar Malgonkar, Khushwant Singh, Chaman Nahal and others, would act as a warning to all
those people who talk of breaking the country further, and a grimmer warning to those rabble-rousers who take delight in creating hatred between communities through their acts, agendas, programmes and propagandas.