Chapter IV

Fleeing into Eternity of Oblivion

Father, we are like flocks of birds
We shall fly away:
Our flight will be long,
We know not to which,
Region we will go.

(A Punjabi Folk Song, qtd. in Karuna Chananana 26)

Close to the heels of the Partition, millions of people (the exact figure is difficult to ascertain) migrated from the east to the west and from the west to the east. With that all that the people had cherished for long, their ancestral homes, the soil that they owned, the graveyards of their ancestors, the tradition and culture of their families and villages, their joys and sorrows had all been destroyed once for all. They were thus forced and faced with the challenge of rebuilding their lives and overcoming their terrible hardships.

In fact, much before the actual drawing of the Radcliffe line, there were communal disturbances all over Lahore, Rawalpindi, Bengal and Punjab. This was due to fanning of the communal disharmony by the notorious politicians for achieving their selfish motives. Seeing what was happening around them, the panic-stricken people ran for cover and a few thousands packed their belongings and started moving into refugee camps set up in 'safer places'. Still, a good number of rural folks, mostly farmers and artisans did not bring themselves to the idea of quitting. They were in a terrible dilemma. But when death and destruction closed in from all sides, they too hurriedly packed all that
they could lay their hands on and yoked their bullocks to the carts and started moving from one end to the other. This formed a very long caravan. They looked dazed because these unlettered people were not at all prepared to face this kind of earthquake-like calamitous displacement.

As the designers of the Pakistan state propagated that all the Muslims living in India could go to Pakistan without any sense of shame and live a decent life and practice Islam, “Muslims leaving India for Pakistan perceived themselves to be migrating to a place … which ‘belonged’ to them as ‘Pakistanis’ just as much as it did to the Muslims whom they found living there” (Ansari 92). The refugees went there as if it was their own place. It was quite true that they received some support initially. But very soon everything became topsy-turvy. The Pakistani authorities found themselves totally helpless to cope up with the situation because there was a terrible inflow of refugees from all over the northern India. Those who were already living there considered the refugees as “second hand”.

It was estimated that seven to eight million people were moving to opposite directions, and some sixteen million were approximately displaced. These truncated destitute people looked up from their respective governments not only material assistance but also psychological assistance and reassurance. Apart from the continuing communal tension arising out of issues like natives and outsiders, questions of transportation, issues concerning food, clothing and medical supplies and shelters became a big headache to the officials especially in Pakistan.

The vast majority of Muslims who migrated to Pakistan were East Punjabis who headed for the nearest border point that was into the West Punjab. These refugees were
composed of all types of people from the bureaucrats to the village artisans. Soon the focus of their destination changed. Now it was towards Karachi, Pakistan’s most important city, and capital then.

On September 21, 1947, the Pakistan Government promulgated The Sind Maintenance of Public Safety Ordinance. It was generally considered a drastic ordinance to control potential lawlessness. One of the clauses of the Ordinance was press censorship. Hindu-owned papers like the Daily Gazette and the Sind Observer had to suffer due to this. Another clause was to detain people without trial, and prohibit meetings. All these restrictive measures were viewed as serious threats by non-Muslims. So they started moving and besieged the shipping and airline offices in thousands. In September itself some fifty thousand people registered for aid in leaving Sind. However, as Sarah Ansari observes, “their departure from Karachi was initially limited to one thousand per day on the grounds that there were insufficient customs officials to check their baggage” (95). In the meantime, the Sindhi Muslims were terribly agitated and resented at seeing the torrential inflow of outsiders to take advantage of the commercial opportunities created by the extension of the irrigation system.

There was a serious outbreak of communal violence in Karachi in January 1948, when a group of Sikh refugees passing through Karachi was attacked. Karachi soon became heavily impregnated with Muslim refugees from places like Ajmir where non-Muslims had cruelly treated them. Simultaneously the exodus of non-Muslims from Karachi intensified. They were moving towards Bombay and Kathiawar and other destinations in India. Their trains were stopped at various stations and the Hindu travellers and refugees were evicted from trains and cruelly manhandled. Meanwhile, the
influx of refugees into Sind was unmanageable, the government of Sind clamped certain restrictions on the inflow and even proposed to remove a sizable number of refugees from Karachi. Prominent journals like the Dawn condemned this attitude of the Sindhi authorities towards refugees.

As a large number of refugees came into the Sindhi province day by day, antagonism increased between the Sindhi Muslim community and Muslim refugees. Ironically, the refugees numerically threatened to outweigh the local inhabitants of Karachi. Concomitantly there was tension and ill feeling and violent reaction. The Sindhi politicians complained loudly that Sind was being robbed and beleaguered on seeing the preponderant Punjabi influence in the Pakistani Government. To add fuel to the fire, Sind’s financial position steadily deteriorated during 1948. The mass exodus of Hindus had very enormous repercussions on its business life. In July 1947, according to Pakistan-Sind Joint Refugee Council, more than 700,000 Muslim refugees had entered Sind. The plight of these surplus refugees was unspeakable. By January 1948, there were still some nine hundred thousand refugees in camps in the Punjab, including nearly two hundred and fifty thousand refugees in the open air. According to the Provincial government in Sind, for every one Hindu that had left, two Muslims had come in. By April a severe outbreak of cholera in Lahore camps had increased tensions. Handling the refugee crisis went far beyond the capacity of the various provincial governments in Pakistan. Meanwhile, tension in the Punjabi camps was running dangerously high. On an average, six thousand refugees a day were despatched to Sind from the West Punjab camps. Their arrival sadly coincided with the serious floods that in turn rendered even the original many thousands of residents homeless. Moreover there was a great increase in malaria in
Upper Sind. When the feeling of jealousy of the residents was running high, harmony between the residents and the refugees seemed out of question and ‘refugee’ and ‘Punjabi’ were virtually synonymous then. In short, refugees then, to quote Sarah Ansari, “rural as well as urban faced an uncertain future” (100).

A popular Punjabi folk song describes the poignant situation of the refugees:

... we are like flocks of birds

We shall fly away;

Our flight will be long,

We know not to which,

Region we will go (Karuna Chanana 26).

The Punjabis had to undergo unspeakable suffering when Punjab was divided into East and West. Thousands of Punjabi families were thrown out of their homes on either side of the Radcliffe Line and had to seek shelter in a new land without any means to do. Men, women and children had to travel for days in caravans before they embarked upon some improvised refugee camps. Getting even a meal a day was very difficult then. For women, as B.S. Anand poignantly points out in his text, Cruel Interlude, “Parda lost its functional utility and symbolic value in this process. For them this continual living in the public gaze after the shattered life of their homes was most trying” (Karuna Chanana 28).

The mass exodus of people had widespread implications. Trains were overflowing with fleeing people. Existence to these unfortunate people was literally a hell. They witnessed gruesome murders and forcible abductions everyday. Sometimes, well before the caravan reached the border, there would be several deaths due to hunger, exhaustion, and all sorts of ailments. There was a terrible apprehension in the air that any time the rioters would
come and destroy life and property. Sometimes abducted women folks had to be bought back with gold and money. Karuna Chanana gives the tragic tale of a woman here:

My son was engaged to be married when the news of the Partition was announced, the riots started and we moved to the refugee camp. The girl who was engaged to my son was also in the same camp. Her parents were worried about protecting her in the insecure environs of the camp. Therefore, we decided to marry them there and then. We were absolutely broke. We could not even give a ‘chunni’ (scarf to cover the head) to the daughter-in-law. (27)

One pattern, which was common in all the riot-torn areas, whether in the north, west, or east was that when the news of the trouble began to spread, villagers and town folks locked up their houses quickly forsaking all their possessions and banded together in large groups and left for the nearby railroad. Some people left only with the clothes on their backs. Others took some money and jewels. Incidents of looting were very common then. In some cases, when the rioters smelt the fleeing migrants carrying away jewels and money, they were killed for the booty. Many people fleeing along the canal side saw corpse after corpse floating in the water. Quite obviously, the victims had been killed and thrown into the canals. There was horrendous slaughter everywhere. So in order to stay alive then, the minority had no other go but to flee with the little things they could grab. The majority meanwhile was standing behind the minority to push them off, kill them off, or drive them off so as to covet everything the minority had owned. This had a tremendous psychological impact on the minds of the migrants. Satya Rai notes it in his book *Punjab Since Partition* in the following manner:
Transplantation of the mass population from one country to the other takes place only after a certain amount of psychological, ideological and physical upheaval and disturbance. The conditions in the Punjab and the brutalities and humiliations that the peoples had to undergo brought the required psychological change to induce people to leave all that they held dear and to flee to the other side where their community was in a majority. It remained the only alternative in view of the fact that the agencies established to protect the minorities were themselves guilty of the crime.

(106-107)

Even Prime Minister Nehru in one of his letters dated 23rd July 1947 to his cabinet colleague John Matthai, voiced forth his tremendous concern of the impending migration of the non-Muslims of Lahore:

I have had deputations from the Hindu and Sikh workers from the railway workers in Lahore. I suppose you know all about this matter. These people are in a jittery condition on account of all manner of happenings. They are on the point of migrating to Delhi. What will happen to them here I do not know except that the Refugee Department will have to work harder than ever, when it has hardly started working. I suppose that the least we can do is to give them full protection. ... Selected Works of Jawaharlal Nehru. Vol. III, 172)

The communal explosion had long been apprehended. But its severity and the failure in several places to cope with it effectively came as a rude shock to many. Though the respective governments had earlier identified the communal storm centres, they were
unable to contain them. In some cases, the provincial governments blamed the British officers for their apathy to deal with the situation. It is true that in a number of places the handling of the trouble was irresolute. A specific reason attributed to this was the general reluctance of the Muslim police to take strong measures against Muslim mobs. For the most part they were half-hearted and occasionally even recalcitrant. This was not at all surprising, because the communal feeling was so high in the province that the police force would naturally be affected by it. The Muslim police force found it reluctant to break up riotous parties of their own co-religionists with rifles and lathis.

Another factor was the dwindling number of the service personnel by wartime demands and the grant of leave after the war. Col. Bellappa in a Letter to the editor of The Hindu confirms this fact: “Even before the killings started, the defence forces were on duty. They did their best, not only to stop such slaughter, but also to escort the refugees to safety. But they were too small in number” (10). Punjab thus had been left with insufficient number of British officials of first class quality to man all key posts. Many of them were too tired after long years of service without a break and demoralised rather at the prospect of quitting too abruptly. To quote Bellappa, “the rot set in when a battalion of the Baluchistan regiment came out of their barracks, shooting at the Hindus and Sikhs” (10). As Penderal Moon expresses, “The suppression of a communal riot calls for a good deal of determination and energy from those at the head of the forces of law and order. Tired and dispirited men were not able to rise to the occasion” (80).

Amritsar witnessed one of the worst failures of civil authorities. A generation earlier, when a wave of lawlessness was directed against the British, Brigadier-General Dyer had poured 1650 rounds into a mob in Amritsar, killing 600-700 and wounding over
1000. He stopped firing only when his ammunition was exhausted. It is a classic case of barbarous and excessive use of force by the British. General Dyer did it with a meagre force of ninety men (fifty armed with rifles and forty with kukris). The British had to defend their Raj and themselves. But when the situation rose to defend one Indian community against the other, they were content to stand idle and do nothing. The Amritsar district was to be the scene of fearful bloodshed later in the year. The complete breakdown of authority in the city at this time prepared the way for it. Gandhi’s advice had absolutely no impact in Punjab. At the same time Gandhi’s presence in Bengal had some effect. He was rather able to allay the passions that had been aroused. But he could perform no such miracle in the Punjab. As Penderal Moon points out, “With Muslims he had no influence and even with Sikhs not much, and his voice would not have been heeded. He rightly directed his attention to Bengal” (81).

None the less, the massacres of 1947 showed the Punjabis at their worst, the ensuing migrations brought out some of the best of their qualities. With very great fortitude they bore the sudden uprooting from their homes. “They showed” as has been rightly observed by Penderal Moon, “all the cheerful vitality of birds which, when robbed of their nest, will start immediately to build a fresh one” (247). The refugees were officially called then as ‘displaced persons’ and it was such a gigantic task for the respective governments to resettle them in some suitable place.

In the last days of August 1947 a big wave of refugees struck Bahawalpur from the Ferozepur district of East Punjab. At the same time most of the Muslim inhabitants of the adjoining State of Bikanir moved across into Bahawalpur by various routes. They were about fifty thousand in number and they had marched all the way from the Rohtak
and Hissar districts of southeast Punjab and were in a famished and exhausted condition. Penderal Moon who was in charge of the administration of the Behawalpur area says that some two thousand of them died within a few days of their arrival in Bhawalpur" (248).

It was not without truth that a good number of Hindus, in their bitterness at the Partition of the country, wilfully wanted all Muslims to be chucked out of India and maliciously hoped that in this way Pakistan would be choked to death even at its birth itself. As these sentiments spread fast, the Government of India found it helpless to prevent indiscriminate assaults on Muslim lives and property even in Delhi, its own capital.

When the authorities were battling with settling the displaced migrants in some place, the higher authorities would without warning dump thousands of refugees from some trouble-torn area. That would naturally be a great strain on the resources of the local authorities. Sometimes thousands, wearied of their journey and fear of attack, would be permanently halting by the wayside and become a liability to the local authorities. As Pakistan faced an acute shortage of coal, the trains from that country were not frequent to carry the refugees across the border. Sometimes as help did not come the refugees on time, irate mobs would stage minor demonstrations where cries like, 'Pakistan Murdabad', and 'Jinnah Murdabad'. As many had no proper shelter, when the cold wave struck, hundreds died of pneumonia. Thousands were seen huddled together, half dead or dying, in squalor, filth, and utter wretchedness and dumb despair. They squatted and defecated near the railway station and along the railway lines. There would be a few deaths everyday mostly old people and infants. As there was no one to clear it up, the mess and filth in the station premises became indescribable.
The emotional suffering of these refugees was immeasurable. Many of them seemed so stunned when caught unawares in this nasty situation. They had to undergo meaningless and measureless suffering for no sin of their own. Sometimes like animals they would be looking at each other in lugubrious silence. Not a word was exchanged then and the sense of enveloping misery was overpowering. It was absurdly ironical to note that all these migrants had been driven out of their hearths not by the exigencies of war but of freedom.

\[ \text{History is always interesting while recounting situations and events—but it is just that if not adorned with feelings and emotions, which only narratives and screenplays can do. Litterateurs have come up with some truly touching stories dealing with the sufferings of the tens of thousands of displaced persons in those riot-torn days. They have tried to recreate a time when ordinary people lived through extraordinary circumstances—fictional of course—but as attribute to those who may have gone through similar situations and emotions. There could have been husbands killed, dreams shattered for families, daughters abducted and cruelly raped, sons maimed, cosy homes burnt—tragedies that alter the course of the survived and relationships—but also serving as reminders that rising from the ashes and going on to triumph is indeed possible.} \]

Having experienced the worst situation in her family, (her daughter was abducted on her way to college, and her husband searching for the abducted daughter was stabbed till he died), Haseena’s mother in A River with Three Banks, wanted to migrate to Pakistan with her other daughter for she saw “no future in India”(193). Though it was a very dangerous expedition, Gautam offered to take them to the border with his friends like Berry and William Thornton. In the riot-ridden Allahabad and Delhi, there was
madness everywhere. Refugees who have recently come from the Pakistan side were roaming about the capital looking for Muslims to settle scores with them—"now that their British protectors are not there" (A River 200). Even Gandhi's message went in deaf ears. These refugees were shouting in the highest pitch, "...our temples in Pakistan are used as urinals.... We have no shelter now.... I have lost my entire property in Peshawar.... My younger sister was taken away by the Muslim goons, in Lahore..." (A River 199).

Haseena's mother and her sister got into a refugee special at Allahabad bound for Delhi and of course from there to Wagah near Amritsar, the terminal side on the Indian side of the international border. As the trains were running only twice a week, between Delhi and Amritsar, there was a terrible crowd in the train and also on the platform. Hordes of violent Hindu raiders were prowling about the platforms on these days, looking out for the Muslim migrants migrating for Pakistan. In spite of the police force in the platforms, "these assaulters would somehow succeed in stabbing an unwary man, or whisking away a young girl" (A River 203). As far as possible, the Muslims from a particular place were accommodated in the same compartment so that they might have a sense of collective security. Authorities had made arrangements to dole out packets of food to these helpless creatures, for they would never get down in stations, as it was very risky. In Delhi, as the refugee special was about to chug into motion, there was a sudden outburst of shouting: "Death to all Pakistanis! Pakistan 'murdabad'! Kill the bloody Muslims!" (A River 205). The armed policemen had a tough time to deal with these violent gladiators.
Gautam had given Hindu names to Haseena's people as he was escorting them. There were some Sikhs with their 'kirpans'. They looked very wild. Having engaged into a conversation with Gautam, the Sardarji said caressing his weapon, "We'd have travelled much lighter with a hundred Muslims wiped out" (A River 206). In the weird silence of the deepening darkness, the irate man added, "Haven't we reasons enough? What are those bastards doing to Hindus and Sikhs in Pakistan?" (A River 207). Gautam and his party were awfully afraid. They were "mute and frozen with fright" (A River 207). To give Gautam further creeps, the man was "leering at Hassena and Saima" (A River 207). Gautam was praying for this helpless Muslim family.

On the way the train came to a grinding halt in darkness and there was a raid. The lights went off and there were loud cries. The panic-stricken Gautam saw "Muslims jumping out of the train, screaming, running helter-skelter, pursued by the raiders who brandished their 'kirpans', knives and sticks. Gautam understood that some gang had ambushed the train in the pitch of darkness "to massacre all the Muslims on board." The nocturnal raiders had tied a buffalo in the middle of the track. The engine driver had to brake the train in order to avoid a major accident. No sooner had the train stopped, than a group of raiders charged into the compartment. Seeing them, Haseena's mother fainted. A dangerous looking stocky man asked them whether there was any Muslim there. A Sikh mother replied that there was none. Not satisfied with that reply, the stranger wanted to verify Gautam's credentials. Gautam protested that he was a Hindu. But he was pulled out. Terror-stricken, he allowed himself to be taken out. They led him deep into a maize field. In the meantime, the other members of the gangsters were mercilessly attacking the Muslims. There were only some twenty policemen; but the raiders were about hundred.
So the officer-in-charge ordered his men to bring machine guns and start firing. Only then the raiders started fleeing.

The dazed Gautam was taken behind a bush and ordered to undress. As Gautam hesitated, the stocky man ordered his companions “to rip off his clothes if he doesn’t cooperate” (A River 211). With blood mounting to his face, Gautam began to undress. He felt so sick that he nearly threw up. He felt that it was “the desecration of his body and soul. He wished he’d been killed instead” (A River 211). As he stood stark naked, like a pale sacrifice offered to some demon, “a flashlight probed his groin—then a rough hand probed him between his thighs” (A River 211).

Gautam limped back into the compartment. He felt relieved to see the women folks safe there. An eerie silence descended upon the place. There was an unending line of migrants at the Amritsar immigration check post trudging close upon each other’s heels. Shiv K. Kumar observes,

Some of them were carrying only a handbag or a small suitcase, their sole movable property to be carried across the border. Famished and wrinkled faces stared blankly into space. Occasionally, a child whimpered for food or drink, only to be shouted down by his or her parents. As the line moved forward, at a snail’s pace, some started up a conversation with the others, sharing memories of what they were leaving behind—their ancestral homes, their friends and relatives. They were not certain what awaited them in the new country. It was a journey into the unknown. (A River 213)

After obtaining the requisite clearance, Gautam ushered them across the border. Nobody spoke anything. They heard only the buzzing of their thoughts, “like bats
flapping their scaly wings in the dark” (A River 213). Right or wrong, the dice had been cast, and there was no chance for going back. Haseena stood mute. Tears were flowing from her eyes. Her lips and hands quivered. Amidst cries, the mother blessed her, “‘Khuda Hafiz!’ God be with you!” (A River 213). They were gone, “as though sucked into some whirlpool” (A River 214).

As Nonica Datta says in her review of the text, Translating Partition, that “the emotional and aesthetic effect of partition literature is immutable, but it cannot replace the social and political histories of the event. It can only supplement them” (XII). Texts like A River with Three Banks bring with it a readiness to confront important issues like abduction of young women and forcible immigration that many professional historians purposely failed to address.

Immigrants migrated thus out of some compulsion were not very sure whether they would ever come back and meet their kith and kin. The images of horror that they had undergone on their route to the ‘freedom’ are etched permanently in the albums of their mind. How so ever they try, these images refuse to leave. They struggle to come out for an occasional outburst from the formidable forts of their resolute breasts. Also, there is a hidden element of exasperation, a sense of helplessness in the victims even after many years of partaking the volcanic eruption. They are naturally at a loss to understand the meaning of existence. Jyotirmoyee has beautifully captured all these in her novel, The River Churning.

It may not be an exaggeration to say that the real experience of the displaced women at the time of the communal earthquake could not successfully be presented by
anyone. No doubt truth is too terrible to bear as Jasodhara Bagchi points out in her Introduction to the novel, The River Churning:

We know we tell lies

Because you cannot stand the truth. (xxv)

In her novel, Jyotirmoyee Devi makes an attempt to grapple with the issue of exodus of a Hindu girl after experiencing the trauma of intimidation, rape, murder of her family members and religious terror. The adolescent girl Sutara, not only has to experience dispossession of her native place but also has to experience kicking out from one relative to the other for no sin of her own. Her own people have marginalized her. Her sexuality is the great “unspoken” aspect in the novel. As Jasodhara Bagchi angrily says that Sutara’s life is in stake “in the sinister game in which the community teams up with nationhood, in order to keep alive the caste-class ‘entente’ of the hegemonic group in independent India” (xxvii).

In a flashback we are transported to a terrible night in 1946, when a sudden blaze of communal frenzy destroyed the peace of a neighbourhood in a little hamlet in East Bengal. Within a few hours hell let loose and there were murders, arson and looting. Many were abducted and molested. It looked as though the rioters had targeted only women. Sutara’s family too paid a heavy price in that night. Sutara was gang-raped and left dead. Her Muslim neighbours nursed her back to health. The trials of Sutara did not end there, but just began. Her brother living in Calcutta did not show any undue haste to get his marooned sister back to the family fold. In the Bible, when the prodigal son came back, his father was extremely happy. There was a big feast in his honour. But the father figure in Sutara’s family expressed just an enigmatic behaviour. It was Tamij Sahib’s
wife who, as a woman understood the dynamics of this social situation. She wanted Sutara to stay with them because she thought that her people would never accept Sutara as she ‘tainted’ herself by living in a Muslim family for six months.

However, Sanat, her brother did come to take her back. He took her to his in-law’s home. From day one onwards she was a refugee here. Sanat’s mother-in-law stepped back when Sutara tried to touch her feet. She was made to stand at the door for many hours. Nobody asked her to come in. She “stood alone, shy and embarrassed” (The River 31). All she could do was to cry aloud. Even then the senior woman in the family refused to admit the refugee in. In sharp tones she admonished Subha her daughter (who had sympathy for Sutara), “Are you out of your mind? Her clothes have been polluted by the touch of a Muslim household. Why did you have to go and take her in your arms?” (The River 31). Pressed further to show some sympathy to Sutara and to provide her with some temporary asylum, the old orthodox woman finally relented but with one condition, that she had to be taken to the bathroom and be bathed first, lest she would “pollute everything” (The River 32). Sutara overheard everything.

Amulya Chandra Basu, Sanat’s father-in-law was very much struck by Sutara’s dejected and frightened look and the trace of panic that still lingered. He thought that it might be a hangover of the disaster that had struck her physically and mentally. Though he was compassionate to her, he could not do much to alleviate her suffering.

There was no end to Sutara’s problems. Everyday something or other happened to add to her confusion. Though her elder brother and his wife were nice to her, “they treated her like an outsider” (The River 35). She was barred away from household work, as she would be “polluting everything” (The River 36). She was treated as “a low caste
hadi or Bagdi”(36). She had no proper clothes to wear. What she wore “belonged to Sakina” (The River 38). She pleaded with Amulya Babu to put her in a school. To him, “Sutara seemed like the bloody symbol of the mother figure we call our country” (The River 38). The poor, unwanted orphan girl was just one of the innumerable number of the mute masses of the two countries—“exiled, without a homeland, people who had lost their all”( The River 39).

The multifarious Hindu codes of the orthodox Brahmin family did not allow such ‘tainted’ girls as Sutara into the family. She was not even allowed to touch the pots and pans in the kitchen. The women folks of the household felt that it would have been much better if she had stayed where she was. It was due to her bad luck that she was brought back. They asked among themselves, “Who will dare to bring them (such ‘tainted’ girls) home to pollute his own family... The parents are gone. Now she has become a burden on the brother” (The River 44). As the target of attack had always been Sutara, the brother and sister were filled with an unspoken sadness. The problem of Sutara thus had become such an inextricable web that the family could find no means to untangle it. Even Amulya Babu began to feel that the women folks were somewhat right in trying to disown the girl. He felt that.

... lost girl was never taken back, even her parents would shut their door on her. Society had a rigid stand; it was never moved by tales of woe of abducted and displaced women. Perhaps Sutara’s own parents would have disowned her. This has been going on since the time of Amba of the Mahabharata and Sita of the Ramayana. (The River 47)
Sutara was put in a boarding school. In fact it was an exile to her. Many in that boarding school were orphans and “victims of Partition, discarded by society” (The River 52). When the summer vacation came, many children went home. Sutara too was looking forward to going home, to being with her brothers and brothers-in-law and the other relatives. But nobody came to the hostel to take her home. She was terribly disappointed. Fortunately the boarding house was kept open for some orphaned girls who were exiles, fugitives with no place to go to. Such rejected and exiled children of the hostel “had blank, expressionless faces, and they hardly talked” (The River 57). Many of them did not even come out to play.

When she passed her Matriculation with good marks, her brothers sent her to college. She stayed in the hostel. When Subha’s wedding day was fixed, Sutara received a card. It bore just her name and not her brother’s who was now her natural guardian. This meant that “she now had no one, that she would be known by her own name” (The River 58). Sutara attended the wedding. She did not have a good sari to wear. All her garments were “destroyed in the fire” (The River 59) on that fateful day. Excepting the girls of her own age, all the others in the family were not amused at her presence. They felt that she, “a refugee from Pakistan, was creating complications” (The River 59). There were whisperings and all sorts of discrete remarks on Sutara. Enquiries like “That girl... Where was she in Pakistan? With whom did she stay?”... Why was she left in Pakistan—what happened? (The River 61), were asked even in the presence of Sutara. The answer was also given discretely—“she was abducted, most probably” (The River 61). Every one looked at her curiously. The poor girl “turned pale with embarrassment and sat with her eyes fixed on the floor” (The River 62). Sutara was asked to sit for a meal hurriedly and
separately before she was unceremoniously packed off. Sutara, not yet out of her teens, was completely taken aback. The males in the family knew why Sutara had been kept away from the community dinner. They were helpless and lowered their eyes. Amulya Babu stood by quietly watching “the unacceptable girl” (The River 64). She drank some water, nibbled at the food, and withdrew.

Sutara, though rejected by all, spat and humiliated, became a postgraduate in History. She became a lecturer in Yajnaseni College, Delhi. And she charted a lonely course for her. As a History teacher, she knew that there were numerous Draupadis disrobed and humiliated like her. After all, as the novelist sarcastically avers, “The easiest way to show off one’s manhood is at the cost of helpless women like Sita, Draupadi and the others” (The River 68). Sutara became part of the history of all time—Satya, Treta, Dwapar and Kali Yuga—of what had gone before. It was as though “she represented all women who have been insulted, tortured, neglected, deserted, through history” (The River 69). She tried to ascertain the actual age of her body in her conscious, unconscious and subconscious minds. The answer eluded her.

In the college, Sutara came into contact with quite a good number of refugees like her. They were from the very old lands of Kekaya, Gandhara, (lands of Kaikeyi, and Gandhari). Many of them had the same kind of humiliation. They had left their own people behind, including the abducted, and helpless women. They had most obviously experienced a similar trauma like her. She wondered whether the land they had left behind had a similar upheaval like Bengal. She also met some of her students’ parents and families. Most of them were refugees, victims of Partition. As the saying goes, ‘A little grief upsets one but great grief turns one to stone’, Sutara was fast becoming stony
strong. Her misfortunes could not be definable. She shared very little with others. In fact, her most intense humiliation and suffering were beyond description. They couldn’t be expressed. However, she felt a kind of unspoken sympathy and a bond of kinship with the people from Punjab, for “they, too, had lost their homes, their pride, their land, like the Bengalis” (The River 74).

In the teaching faculty, Sutara had a bosom companion. Her name was Kaushalyavati. She used to address Sutara as ‘Bibiji’. It was from her that Sutara understood that the Muslim women too had to face the same trauma. Not only that, she also learnt stories of atrocities committed by Hindus on their own women folks. Learning that all this has been going on since eternity because of men’s barbarity, “an immense sadness filled her” (The River 86).

Even when she undertook a pilgrimage to the holy shrines in the Himalayas and felt a kind of kinship with the mythic women who had travelled the same route earlier in their exile, she felt that she had been “exiled for ever” (The River 116). Hers was a peculiar situation. She was neither a widow nor married. She became a wretched member of a community of destitute refugees living in “the darkness of the underground” (The River 118), a veritable “living hell” (The River 118). She became a new avatar of Sita, Amba, Mary Magdelene and countless other women refugees who were ostracised for no sin of their own.

In Muhammad Umar Memon’s collections of short narratives too, the trauma that the refugees underwent on the eve of Partition was faithfully brought out. In Saadat Hasan Manto’s “Sahae” Mumtaz, a close friend of Juggal and Braj Mohan and the narrator, leaves for Pakistan from Bombay with a heavy heart as a refugee. His deep
anguish over the dislocation is shown on his face. His friends (all of them were Hindus) went to the port to see him off. They were talking about the communal riots in the Pakistan side and the Indian side. Mumtaz's decision to leave for Karachi was taken because he felt terribly insecure even in his friends group. To shatter his morale, his own friend Juggal said that if communal riots broke out in his area, he would even kill Mumtaz. When he said this in all seriousness, Mumtaz was terribly unnerved.

The port was over-crowded with refuges. They were mostly poor, "a crush of people" (An Epic 07) who were was leaving. With these hordes of people, Mumtaz was leaving, "leaving ... for a place he had never even seen before, a place which, no matter how hard he tried to get used to it, would still remain unfamiliar" (An Epic 07).

Juggal had an uncanny feeling that Mumtaz was leaving just because of his venomous words. When Juggal asked him whether it was due to this that he was migrating, the latter was filled with emotional excess and made Juggal see the futility of communal killings. He continued, "If you ask me ask me, the victims died the miserable death of a pie dog, and their killers killed in vain, utterly in vain" (An Epic 08). He wanted Juggal to remember that by killing a Muslim Islam could not be wiped out, and by killing a Hindu, Hinduism could not be decimated. 'Dharm', faith and belief, which were common to all men, were found not in a man's body, but in a man's soul and "they couldn't be annihilated by cleavers, knives, and bullets..." (An Epic 09).

Rajinder Singh Bedi in his story "Lajwanti" presents not only the trauma of the refugee abducted women but also shows how much one has to work to exert pressure to make the people to take back the abducted women. The story is presented in the context of the historical and socio-political discourse. In the Mulla Shakur neighbourhood, there
was an organised move to rehabilitate the abducted refugees. It was from this village, Lajwanti, a slender and agile village girl, the wife of Babu Sunder Lal, was abducted and taken to Pakistan. Sunder Lal had been hoping against hope that he would get back his wife one day and on that day, he would very happily take her back. With this decision, having got a whiff of an exchange of refugees at the Border, he waited for her with a great trepidation in his heart. He felt so angry with the abductors of the, “the cold-blooded people who traded in human merchandise, in human flesh” (An Epic 24). However, when he sighted his wife, he embraced her and “installed the golden image of Laju in the temple of his heart and diligently stood guard at its doorway” (An Epic 27). The queen of his heart had returned and the widening emptiness of his heart had been reoccupied.

Jamila Hashimi’s story “Banished” (Alok Bhalla has titled it “Exile”) portrays vividly the mood of uncertainty, alienation and hypersensitiveness of an abducted refugee young woman who was forced to live with her abductor. In the story, the narrator tells her own story of abduction, rape and marriage. The narrator uses the story of Sita’s exile, rescue and final rejection in order to understand her own predicament, as well as to draw attention to the fact that “a society”, as Alok Bhalla points out, “whose epic celebrates the defeat of evil every year has succumbed to evil” (xxiv). Laju in the story “Lajwanti” is quite lucky in a way because her husband turned out to be a doting one and wanted sincerely to restore herself to him. But though the young unmarried Muslim woman, in “Banished”, had plenty of relatives in Pakistan, felt awfully lonely because, the moment she was abducted, her people ‘banished’ her not only physically but emotionally as well. But to her, and for all for that matter, “Banishment is a hard thing to endure” (An Epic
87). Her ordeal became the ordeal of Sita who in the bygone era, had to undergo cruel separation and “gruelling banishment” (An Epic 87) for no sin of her own. Perhaps it is this divine dispensation and crucible that sustained her throughout to undergo the ordeal.

Gurpal, her Sikh abductor had carried her away after a bloodbath of her kith and kin, and presented her to his mother and said, “She is your maid. She will do whatever you tell her to do—grind grain, fetch water, anything you want. I won’t meddle” (An Epic 89). Gurpal was not the only man who brought such women in to the village Sangraon. In fact, many such ‘brides were forcibly brought in there without the customary fanfare: “No festive music, no racy songs to the beat of drums, no comic antics or spins or hip-thrusts of nautch girls” (An Epic 89). The narrator-heroine sadly recalls, “No one oiled my dust-coated hair. No ‘na’in’ was sent for to make me up. I became a bride without a single piece of jewellery, without any ‘sindur’ for the parting of my hair” (An Epic 89). Neither Gurpal’s mother nor his grand mother accepted her. They looked at the refugee as if she “were some kind of calamity” (An Epic 89) that Gurpal had “picked up from the street” (An Epic 89). She felt panicky at her separation from her people. She had lost all hope of seeing her beloved one’s faces; faces for which one would be willing to sacrifice everything. Her Sikh husband urged her to forget her past and also her brothers in Pakistan who refused to come to her rescue. Her separation stood like a wall between her and her people “who meant a world to each other once” (An Epic 90). She had reached a spot from where she could never backtrack to her good old days. She remembered what her Bhaiyya said once to her, “Bibi, you must know that every moment past is erased. It turns to dust” (An Epic 90). In the dizzying business called life, she stood like a blasted lonely tree that would neither blossom nor bear fruit. Her heart was
empty. She felt that she had reached the final point of her destination. She had nowhere to go. She asked herself, "Where can I go—with my wounded heart, my darkened fate?" (An Epic 95). She had nothing to hope for. Though she knew that despair is the greatest sin, she fell into fathomless despair. She thought, "Only darkness is left for me" (An Epic 97). Her private world was trampled in the dust "under the marauding bands of thugs" (An Epic 99) at the time of Partition. All that was bright in her life had stayed behind.

Her lot was to live forever in exile. She saw herself as a modern day Sita. It is significant that though she was a Muslim, she drew upon the mythic traditions of the Hindus and so pointed to the fact these myths were the common heritage of both the communities.

Upender Nath Ashk’s story “Tableland” attempts to present the sufferings of the displaced people in refugee camps and also the good work done by some considerate people. The people who spent all their time and energy for the unfortunate victims of Partition were themselves refugees once. The afflicted people were mostly Hindus from Lahore and West Punjab. Dina Nath, once a prominent resident of Lahore had left everything in Lahore at the time of the communal whirlwind. His brother went to Delhi as a refugee and Dina Nath to Bombay to a T.B. sanatorium as he was suffering from consumption. It was here that he began his good work for the rehabilitation of the refugees. He went about collecting donations for buying blankets for the afflicted. In the beginning his service was restricted to the Hindus alone. He accepted donations only from the Hindus. However, very soon, he realised that not the Hindus and the Sikhs alone were affected, but the Muslims too. His eyes were open when he met a middle-aged Muslim refugee to get his donation. The latter with his sunken, shallow cheeks and the shadow of fear in his eyes told him how
... his young sons and a daughter and her husband had first been tortured and then made a prey to the fires of revenge. His younger son had somehow managed to escape to Pakistan. The man had himself been overtaken by the events while in Delhi with his wife and their littlest daughter, where he had come to consult a hakim about his illness. When the riots broke out even there, they somehow made it to Bombay, with nothing but the clothes on their backs. (An Epic 124-125)

Dina Nath was very much moved by the calamity of this sad Muslim refugee. He gave away all his collections to him, although he had collected the donation for the relief of the suffering refugees in Punjab. The poor Muslim refugee too was a refugee from Punjab, and no less suffering.

Ahmad Nadim Qasimi's narrative "Parmeshar Singh" presents the trauma of a child refugee and the meaningless death of his saviour Parmeshwar Singh. Akhtar, a boy of five, while chasing butterflies, got suddenly separated from his mother going in a caravan to Pakistan. The boy, Akhtar is presented as a brave and innocent representative of the Muslims going towards their new homeland. They were fleeing refugees from the Indian side to Pakistan. The mother wept bitterly at the loss of her son and her cry soon died down like soapsuds. She consoled herself with the thought that Akhtar, being a smart boy, would certainly emerge on the other side of the border. She would then make a thorough search for the boy. The boy in the mean time was seen crying inconsolably, some fifteen miles away from the border. He saw a party of irate Sikh youths coming in his direction. One of them was Parmeshar Singh, a compassionate Sardharji. The other Sikhs closed in on the boy with the intention of killing him. Parmeshar pleaded with them
to spare the boy’s life as, “the same Vahguruji made this child as he made you and your children” (An Epic 128). He then broke down in tears. Seeing this his companions were absolutely stunned. To Parmeshar, the boy looked exactly like his missing son Kartar. Noticing Parmeshar’s tender feelings towards the boy, he was allowed to take the boy for him: “Here, Parmeshar, take him. Let him grow his ‘kes’, make him your Kartar. Here, take him!” (An Epic 129). Parmeshar was jubilant.

Parmeshar himself was a refugee like the boy. He had lost all his possessions in his native Lahore and come over to Amritsar. The villagers had allotted his present house that was originally possessed by a Muslim. Ever since he came into this house, he had an uncanny feeling, that “Something’s reciting the Quran in this place. I hear it” (An Epic 130). His wife had told the village authorities that from the very day he lost his son, Kartar Singh, her husband was no longer his usual self. When he took the boy back home, Parmeshar’s wife barked at him:

Look at the big hero... He went out to rob. And what does he bring back? This brat, barely a handful! Why couldn’t you kidnap a girl? At least she’d have fetched a couple hundred rupees. We could have bought a few things for this decrepit house. Oh, you’ve gone off your rocker! Didn’t you see this is a Musalla boy? (An Epic 133).

The boy in the mean time understood that his foster father was a Sikh and he wanted to run away from him. He shouted at the highest pitch, “You are a Sikh! I’m not going anywhere near a Sikh! I want to go back to my mother!” (An Epic 135). At this Parmeshar broke down in tears, screaming so loud and pleaded with the boy:
I swear by God, I am your friend. If you try to go back alone, somebody will kill you on the way. And then your mother will come after me from Pakistan and kill me too. Listen, I myself will take you back to Pakistan. Ok? If you run into a boy there named Kartar, promise that you will bring him back here. You will, won’t you? (An Epic 135)

Days rolled by fast. Akhtar recalled his mother only rarely now. He began to acclimatize himself to the Sikh household. Whenever Parmeshar Singh brought home a little grain or a piece of cloth from the Panchayat that had been set up for the relief of the refugees, Akhtar would run over to him, wrap himself around his legs and say between sobs, “Tie me a turban! Make my hair grow fast! Buy me a comb!” (An Epic 138). Parmeshar would hug him tightly at this. But Parmeshar’s wife Amar Kaur hated the boy twice as much.

Before long, the boy’s longing for his mother returned again. Parmeshar felt that he could not postpone it any longer. So he took the boy to the border to help him cross the border so that he would go into Pakistan and join his mother. No sooner had the boy crossed the border, than a soldier stationed at the border shot at the Sikh and killed him.

Alok Bhalla in his introductory remarks to his compilation of Stories About the Partition of India attacks Qasimi’s story as “graceless”(xv), because it is a “communal narrative” (xv), where the author claims holiness to only the Muslim religion. Members of the Muslim community are presented, as unsuspecting victims of atrocities without mentioning what their own communities did during those “hooligan days” (Bhalla xv). This story cannot be rated as a great story because it suppresses historical facts. Instead of upholding the basic ethical principle that correct remembrance alone can be the basis of a
just society in the future, such stories “perpetuate codes of fraud” (Bhalla xv). Qasimi’s story thus is not only a bit disingenuous, but is also cynically manipulative. He not only wants to evoke sublime paths for the Muslims as victims of an unthinking faith, but he also wants to conceal certain unpleasant facts. As Alok Bhalla avers,

Qasimi refuses to acknowledge that in the 1930’s and 40’s inhumanity wasn’t the exclusive right of any one community. He should know this well, since he was the first editor of the progressive Urdu journal Savera and had written angry editorials against the Partition. Immediately after the Partition he changed his stance and wrote a poem entitled ‘Battle Cry of the Kashmiri Freedom Fighter’ (xvi)

Qasimi conveniently has forgotten that the landscape from Rawalpindi to Lahore was littered with corpses and mangled human carcases and the air was filled with smoke. Muslim hordes were equally responsible for the heinous crimes committed in those days. Such stories instead of creating a salutary effect in the reader shatter his morale. They disturb the narrative continuity of the traditions of the nation in which the Hindus, the Sikhs and the Muslims had defined their individual and communal identities. The reader is also tempted to think that it would never again be possible for anyone to imagine a community in which serious moral and political choices that are valid for all can be made.

Intizar Hussain’s “An Epic Unwritten” presents the tragic catastrophe that fell upon a very popular Jat village called Qadirpur where, not only at the time of the Mahabharath, but also at the time of the Partition, a terrible battle was fought between rival communities that resulted in rivulets of bloodshed. Local Muslim leaders who
wielded tremendous power were taken-a-back when the Partition was announced, for
Quadirpur, quite contrary to their expectations, stayed with India and the violent Muslims
like Pichwa, a veritable Arjun had to leave for Pakistan, 'the promised land.' People like
Pichwa, and Naim Miyan were "terribly confused and started to avoid even the mention
of the Muslim League and Pakistan" (An Epic 163). But as he was worldly wise, he told
his companions that he was going to Delhi, but in reality, he migrated to Pakistan. He
wrote a letter to Subedar Sahib saying,

Brother, all the higher-ups I met in Delhi told me that the lives and
fortunes of Muslims are no longer safe in India, and that we must go to
Pakistan. We had a very hard time getting here, but, thanks be to God, we
reached our country safe and sound. Azhar Miyan got a job in the
Rehabilitation Department. God willing, Owais Miyan will also find a job
soon. There's nothing left there now in Qadirpur. You should try to come
too. (An Epic 163)

When Pichwa heard the contents of the letter, he cursed Naim Miyan. Panic broke out in
Qadirpur as a result of Naim Miyan's letter. When their community leader thus deserted
them ignominiously, the terrified Muslims started packing up to leave for Pakistan. But
as the lives of the insignificant people were worth not more than two pennies, they got
lost, the moment they landed in Pakistan. Before many days passed by, even the
communally inspired Pichwa migrated to Pakistan. After wandering there for many days,
he met the big shot Naim Miyan who used to be scared of Pichwa before their migration.
The same Pichwa said to Nain Miyan, "Miyan, get me some kind of work. I have no
damned place even to put my feet in. Babu, if I can't get any work, at least have a house
allotted for me” (An Epic 167). Naim Miyan was very much astonished to hear those words from Pichwa’s mouth. He was once living like a twentieth century Tipu Sultan, but now wandering as a poor refugee, wanted “a place to put his feet and something to fill his belly…” (167). All the height and grandeur of his character were destroyed in Pakistan. He was a paper tiger there. Clearly Pakistan was Naim Miyan’s home and not Pichwa’s.

Pichwa kept on meeting Naim Miyan and pleaded for a little bit of Mand. He would work hard and change it into a very fine mango grove. Calling him a “day-dreaming fool” (An Epic 168), Naim Mian said, “This land doesn’t belong to you or me—it belongs to the zamindars” (An Epic 168). The author comments, “The Arjuna of this Mahabharata is now the picture of failure and he wanders around the streets and lanes of Pakistan looking for a house and a job. He doesn’t get these two things and he continues falling from his true place” (An Epic 169). Pichwa was made to see that Pakistan was full to the rafters with the refugees and it had no place for the new migrants. To infuriate him further, the Pakistan government had decreed that any refugee that had come over to Pakistan could jolly well go back to India. Day by day, Pichwa’s personality was ebbing away. He no longer looked like a person at all. He seemed more like a chess piece. He crossed the borders of both Pakistan and India and entered the no man’s land where countless refugees arrived everyday. In a couple of day’s time, his body was dangling on a peepul tree.

In Ismat Chughtai’s story “Roots”, the writer narrates how a mother deeply attached to the soil of her birth, Ajmer, refuses to go with her children and grand children when they opted to the other side of the Radcliffe Line as refugees. Even in the place of the mother’s residence there was a refugee camp which was overflowing with the
refugees from Punjab. As the place had no capacity to hold those unending number of refugees, the whole place was rotting. There was filth and poverty aplenty in the camp. To make matters worse, "the heaps of filth were being raked with rapidity and, creeping slowly, the stench was now approaching the clean, well-kept streets" (An Epic 189-190). The mother was very well aware of such an existence in the refugee camps. She was terribly upset when her children opted for Pakistan where she and her loved ones had to be in a refugee camp for a considerable time. Her children threatened her by asking, "Do you want us to stay here and be killed?" (197).

The atmosphere in the house became very sombre. The sons of the woman started packing their paraphernalia. Their well-organised house now took on the semblance of varying bundles of different shapes and sizes. However nobody touched Amma's trunk. Amma remained firm. She was asking herself, "Who will kill me, and when?" (An Epic 197). She wondered, how could a place where she would stay for four days be her country when a place where she had been living for many years was not. She was not interested in the game of destroying and founding a new country. When the caravan came along to bear her children and the luggage, her heart was broken. Entrusting her life to Allah's care, she stood all alone in the courtyard. She felt terribly desolate. She now had no one to call her own. She became a refugee left to the care of God. Standing there for long she was praying for the safety of her children going in the caravan. In her anxiety, she had entertained all sorts of thoughts in her mind:

Will all of them be killed along the way? Not just one or two, all the trains were being attacked and their passengers cut down. The crop that she had irrigated with her blood for fifty years had gone into exile today,
staggering and falling as it went in search of a new field. Who knew if the new field would prove fertile for these plants? Her youngest daughter-in-law, by God’s grace, was close to term. Who knew in what jungle she would deliver? They had left their home, jobs, their business, everything.

(An Epic 201)

She had regained her peace of mind only when their family doctor Roopchandji stopped her “good-for-nothing sons” (An Epic 202), “the scoundrels” (An Epic 202) from going as refugees into Pakistan and brought them home.

Syed Mohammad Ashraf’s story “Separated from the Flock” symbolically presents how a couple of men and a couple of women presently in Pakistan live as refugees in spite of some of life’s comforts. They are like the estranged birds separated from the flock may be due to fate or due to some immature and thoughtless decision. The story takes place in Pakistan a few kilometres away from Lahore. A police officer is going for duck hunting in a jeep. He is the narrator of the story. Gulam Ali drives the jeep. The officer wants to reach the lake where there are plenty of ducks before sunset. He will also rest for a while at Gualm Ali’s house on the way. Gulam Ali’s wife has a request to make to her husband’s boss. She wants a permit to visit India her birthplace. Gulam Ali has been dodging her, for he has not gone to Pakistan as a refugee like his wife or the officer. She too migrated from Hardoi district of U.P. like the officer. At the time of the officer’s migration, he was emotional, instinctive and not at all mature. He was not even eighteen at the time of his exit from there. Obviously he feels sad for his decision. He says that those who came and settled there “were all cowards” (SAP I 03). He adds that he too was a coward, “but a minor coward…” (SAP I 03). He feels hopeless
and despairing and frenzied like a convict who hears that he has been sentenced to death. He has been wrestled with the feelings of visiting India for many years.

On the way to the lake for duck shooting, the officer meets an old friend by chance. They exchange tales about their boyhood days in a village in U.P. and fondly recall old friendships, courtships, dreams, fields, lanes and songs. Transformed by their emotions, they lower their guns in a gesture of renunciation of violence. However, another hunter shoots down some ducks. Salimullah who has done it, collects the birds and holds them up before the officer and his friend. Their wings are broken. Their innocent eyes reflect the dreams that they have. The officer who is highly sensitive sees in their eyes which are going to be closed for ever shortly, are searching far away for a vision. The officer says to them in enormous sadness, “Farewell, innocent ones, farewell—forget your friends and companions, forget all those whom you loved once—stop grieving for those you will leave behind—those eggs buried in snow—forget everything—your wings are broken, you’ll never, never be able to fly again—never return—never...” (SAP 1 15). Jameela’s plight is exactly like those of the birds whose wings are broken. In his heart of hearts, he wishes her farewell:

Good-bye, sister. You’ll never again see that land where you grew into consciousness—hear its songs, swing from its trees on rainy days, play hide-and-seek in its chicken coops, dye your dupatta there in rainbow colours, collect flowers with your childhood friends—never again will you see the place where you gathered tenderness in your hands and pressed it against your heart—Forget that place, sister. Don’t grieve for it anymore. Let the tears you just shed be the last. There are others who share your
sorrow. Don't waste your tears anymore—Why thrash your wings about in vain, a hunter hidden in the shadows of the lake broke them a long time ago—there is nothing left now. (SAP I 18)

Salil Choudhary's "The Dressing Table" besides highlighting the communal violence in Bengal, presents the issues of refugees too. Using the technique of a few letters, the author makes us aware of the sorrows and sufferings of the minority community in and around the Bengal province at the time of the Partition. The communal disturbances are a sequel to Jinnah's call to Direct Action. With this war cry everything went awry in Bengal. The little semblance of communal harmony was torn asunder. Unable to pull on for long the minority community which felt insecure in a province began to shift to a safer place. Thus people became refugees overnight. A letter found in the second hand dressing table which the narrator of the story presented to his wife, reads as follows,

I reached Amal's house today. On my way I saw people fleeing from this place (Bagerhat), deserting their homes. The whole town is as silent as a graveyard. People are even scared to talk loudly. You can well imagine my condition. I find myself quite unexpectedly, in a place where things have taken a bad turn. Before I could even understand what was going on, Amal (his friend) told me that he had resigned his job. His wife and he are busy packing their belongings and will leave for Calcutta in a day or two.

They plan to go to Pakistan from there. (SAP I: 31)

People then were forced to take a quick decision—either with Hindustan or with Pakistan. Amal's wife's sad words express this, "Things have changed. Now the Muslims belong
to Pakistan and the Hindus to Hindustan” (SAP I 32). Pessimistic people, to abet this sentiment still further spread rumours everywhere. Newspapers also publish news in an irresponsibly senseless manner. Ordinary folks “are becoming suspicious of each other, losing faith in each other’s integrity” (SAP I 34). In such an overcharged vicious situation, if anyone tries to infuse reason into anyone in a place like Dhaka where the Muslims are in the majority, he or she “is condemned as an enemy of Pakistan” (SAP I 34). Another letter found in the dressing table also speaks volumes about the plight of the helpless people and how they become refugees. It goes as follows:

I am sure that I will lose my mind. I haven’t slept a wink over the last seven days. I wander about in the town like a mad man. People seem to have lost even the last drop of humanity. Bestiality, in its most terrifying form, has been unleashed upon the town. The entire town is filled with screams, wails and fiendish laughter. (SAP I 35)

The saddest part of the story is that the man (who was an artist) who had written these letters to his beloved wife (she herself was killed in the communal clash) was arrested in Calcutta as “a Pakistani spy” (SAP I 38).

Intizar Husain’s “A Letter from India” brings out the plight of the refugees from a very popular Muslim family. The members had been scattered in different directions as refugees at the time of the Partition. Kurban Ali is the narrator of the story. He brings before our eyes how his family had been lost in the form of a letter. He wrote the letter to his brother’s son Kamaran in Pakistan. Kurban Ali lists out the members of his family and ruefully says that they have been lost now. In the garden of his family, “over the last twenty-seven years so many trees have fallen, and with them so many memories have
been buried, that one should now consider the garden to be an extension of the graveyard. The few trees that still remain in it are like tombstones on the graves of days long dead" (I: 81). He wants his brother's son to live in anonymity in Pakistan for he says, "your safety lies in your not being recognized" (SAP I 81).

A sad thing happened to Imran Miyan, one of the sons of Kurban Ali. When his mother saw him she hugged him and wept. She asked him why did he not bring his family with him. He suddenly turned pale. The question unnerved him. Quite obviously he had lost them in the holocaust. He had spent the night in the family graveyard and the next day, he begged Kurban Ali for permission to leave. The latter asked him where he would go. To this he replied, "Wherever my feet carry me" (SAP I 81). Kurban Ali recited a prayer for his safety. He was also asked to inform the family as soon as he crossed the border. Kurban Ali says, "Since that day, however, I haven't heard from him" (SAP I 81). Kurban Ali's family which had lived in one place and whose dead had been buried under the same soil had been now scattered across three different lands Hindustan, Pakistan and Bangladesh. His family had been afflicted by misfortunes. With enormous sadness he writes, "Now we have neither a place which is our own nor a history to remember. We are the victims of a time when everything has fallen apart" (SAP I 83).

Remembering the pioneers of his family he says that they originally came from Isphahan. They came to India "after wandering like haunted fugitives across dusty lands" (SAP I 85). They found India a hospitable place and decided to build a home on its soil. The Indian soil nurtured the family at its bosom, and watched it grow and prosper like a jealous mother who hugs all her children in her embrace and does not let them out of her sight. All this was only till the Partition. And then fate willed it differently. The members
of his family have left a lot of blank spaces. Sadly he observes, "A family which has once broken apart can never be united again" (SAP I 88). He wonders whether all the families in Pakistan have lost their families. He has no idea, for he has spent all his time in India, and he has heard that Pakistan is a strange and a peculiar country. He concludes: "Our family tree has been lost and our lineage has been sullied forever. How will our family be recognized as a distinctive one in the future? Indeed, I feel that our family members are like the falling leaves of a tree, which are scattered by the wind and crumbled, into dust. (SAP I 88)

Umm-e-Ummara’s "More Sinned Against Than Sinning" is a tragic tale of a refugee Muslim family's pathetic end. The decision to move from the Indian side to Dakha was taken by the Baba in that family. When Amma smelt the Baba’s decision she lost her nerve. She was in a flood of tears. Baba convinced her that India no longer belonged to her as they were Muslims and it was time that they moved to Dakha. Baba added, "This earth no longer belongs to us, we are aliens in this country. I can no longer live here" (SAP I 102). Amma who used to worship her husband felt an enormous sadness and started packing her things. She couldn't understand why Baba thought, "his own home was a place of exile" (SAP I 103). The narrator, Munni Bitiya one of the children in the family, wondered, "How a world which was so familiar had suddenly become a world of strangers" (SAP I 103).

Their new house was a bungalow in the new country. The members of the household were learning to speak Bangla. They did their best to acclimatise to the new surroundings. They tried to be happy and started forgetting English and Urdu for they were "a memorial of our enslavement" (SAP I 107). The narrator however felt suffocated
in the new house though it was larger than the previous one. Before long Baba realised
the foolishness of decision. He told his son that even if they lived for long and strengthen
their roots in the new soil, they would always be considered aliens and “transplants”
(SAP I 111). Wisdom dawned on him late and he said, “A grafted tree can never be
regarded as anything else” (SAP I 111). The younger brother of MunnI Bitiya cornered
his father and said, “But, Baba, you don’t have the right to talk like that…. We pleaded
with you not to bring us here. It was your decision. You betrayed your traditions…. You
uprooted a flourishing tree and tried to replant it here. Why do you now feel so alienated
from this place?” (SAP I 111). To make matters worse, Amma started hating the house.
She heard voices arising from every nook and corner” (SAP I 113). Very shortly
everything became topsy-turvy. Evil strangled good. Things fell apart. And uncontrolled
anarchy was loosed upon their place. One by one all the members of the household had to
meet with a very tragic end. They didn’t even have a decent burial. Baba watched with
horror Amma’s grave “slowly fill with water and the body of the woman with whom he
had spent a life-time, float on it. Horror-stricken, the father-refugee prayed to Allah that
his body should not be buried under the earth in that place. God granted him his wish for
the body of Abba was neither enclosed in a coffin nor buried beneath the earth there, for
he was reduced to ash with a couple of other members of his family. Having seen all
these, the narrator-refugee had no courage to die. She says, “I drank the poison of life”
(SAP I 117).

In those days of tension, unrest, uncertainty and all sorts of violence, there were
also a few good Samaritans. S.H. Vatsayan Ajneya’s “Getting Even” presents such a
welcome sight amidst widespread chaos. An old Sikh refugee from Punjab is the Good
Samaritan who rescued and escorted helpless women belonging to different religions from Punjab to Aligarh. It meant even death to him but he wouldn’t mind it.

In Ajneya’s story a refugee woman by name Suraiya was travelling with her daughter Zubeida and her small boy Abid from Punjab to Aligarh. Both the Muslim women looked terrified. They wrapped themselves in blankets and sat in the far corner of the compartment. Most of the other passengers were either Hindus or Sikhs. To their horror the women noticed something inhuman in their pitiless, inhuman eyes. The old Sikh refugee was beginning a conversation with Suraiya. With great trepidation she was answering the Sikh. She thought that “he might very well kill her and throw her out of the train after a couple of stops…” (SAP I 119). In her heart of hearts she was sizing up the Sikh and felt that he was calculating how much time he would need to kill her. Quite contrary to her expectations, the Sikh was trying to dissipate her fear of other potential killers: “Stay where you are. You have nothing to fear here. You are like a sister to me, and these children are as my own. I will see you safely up to Aligarh. There is little danger beyond that point, and anyway some of your own people will also be entertaining there” (SAP I 121).

From the Sikh’s conversation, the fellow travellers understood the traumatic experience of the Sikh and his family before his exit from West Punjab. He had lost all his near and dear ones besides his entire property. Though the perpetrators of the crime in his case were the Muslims, he made it a point to escort the fellow refugees irrespective of their religions. A refugee alone knew the pangs of the fellow refugee and his service to the helpless people. He had no place to call it his own. Hence he made the moving railway compartment as his home. If any one stabbed him on the moving train, he would
only go and join up with the other members of his family. For him it mattered little whether the killer was a Muslim or a Hindu. With a terrible emotion, he says, “My only aim is that no one—Hindu, Sikh, or Muslim—no one should ever have to see what I have seen. And whatever befell my family members before they died, may it not be the fate of anyone’s wives and daughters ever to have to behold!” (SAP I 124).

Lalithambika Antharjanam’s story takes place in a refugee camp on the Indian side. Jyotirmoyi Devpal was a Sikh woman from a rich family. She was a highly educated intelligent girl. Quite obviously she was a pet of her loved ones. She was also a woman who refused to veil her face and spurned the proposal from a Zamindar. She was quite independent. But now she was in a pathetic condition. Her belly was swollen; only a few people in the camp knew her secret; she was pregnant and unmarried, and had been reclaimed by the camp. She had to bear her pain and her humiliation all by herself.

There were many like her in the camp. She was watching them. Some of them were weeping aloud. When a volunteer brought some bread for her, she exploded, “Damn your crumbs of bread; I want a gun. Or a dagger. Wouldn’t mind a little poison either. It’s that I want...first and last...” (SAP I 137). The volunteer stood aghast. She thought that the young woman was gone mad. She had seen many such deranged cases.

Day by day the crowd in the refugee camp was growing in leaps and bounds. Men, women and children of different regions and speaking different languages were there huddling together with their little bundles and baggage. The number went on swelling. They brought in different stories. In that unmanageable crowd, Jyoti was just a speck. No one bothered about her much. But she was watching everything. She “witnessed many births in the camp. More deaths than births” (SAP I 140). When her
child was born, she didn’t allow the scavenger to drag it away. Though this refugee was the most emaciated and the most outraged of all the reclaimed women from western Punjab, she felt that “One must carry one’s cross oneself” (SAP I 145).

Bhisham Sahni’s “The Train Has Reached Amritsar” treats as its subject the tension, the pain and the agony of the fleeing helpless poor refugees at the time of the Partition. In the bogies people distrusted each other. The other person was always considered with suspicion. In the story a few people were travelling from the Pakistan side to Amritsar. Most of them “had abandoned their homes and run away...” (SAP I 148). In one station, when the train stopped there was a large crowd. The commotion at the door increased. A poor man was among them and he was pulling in an enormous black trunk. A thin frayed woman and a young, dark girl of about sixteen followed him. The man continued to pull the trunk in, while his wife and daughter stood against the toilet door. The man was breathless and his clothes were soaked through his sweat. Nobody helped this fleeing refugee. A Pathan got angry with the refugee, tried to kick him. But the kick landed on his wife’s stomach. She screamed with pain and collapsed on the floor. With this an ominous silence descended on the compartment. The Pathan blind with rage threw the man’s trunk out of the door of the compartment. It fell at the feet of a coolie. No one interfered. The poor man screamed when the train moved for his luggage was thrown outside. The man’s wife and daughter were trembling with fear. Before the train picked up speed, the man and his family got out. There was an uneasy silence in the compartment. No one had any guts to defy the Pathans. Only a woman in the compartment protested, “You are cruel, pitiless people, you pushed them out” (SAP I 151).
Kulwant Singh Virk in his story “Weeds” tells us how the refugees started settling down once the dust storm subsided. He compares them sarcastically to weeds, which after being pulled out and thrown away, strangely starts sprouting again. The refugees on the Pakistan side did the same. The whole of Pakistan seemed desolate soon after the Partition. There were millions of refugees all over the place. They “had been uprooted from their own homes elsewhere (SAP I 203). They often sat at the doors of their new houses and looked out at the world with despair and sorrow in their eyes and when they walked, they placed their feet upon alien soil with fear and apprehension. Virk observes,

The refugees, who had been uprooted and thrown out of their native lands, were forced to move from one place to another. When they were pushed out of the big refugee camp at Vaghey, near the border, they had to drag themselves from zilla to zilla, crawl from village to village, till they could find a hovel somewhere, which would give them shelter. (SAP I 203)

The displaced migrants began to settle down in the available land there. Though life in every village and town had been turned upside down, the refugees were trying hard to discover some old rhythm of life and were trying to rebuild their life once again. Though there was devastation all around, and no matter how grim the tragedy might be, the human spirit could never be extinguished.

In his story “The Refugee” S. H. Vatsayan Ajneya deals with the plight of a refugee who was once a flourishing Hindu gentleman in Lahore. Devenderlal never dreamt that he would be a refugee in his own city, and he never ever imagined that he had to quit his own home secretly like a thief. But when he decided to make his quick exit, his Muslim friend and neighbour Rafiquddin offered to protect him from all possible
dangers. He gave him asylum in his own house and looked after him for some time. In the mean time Devenderlal’s Hindu neighbours disappeared one by one.

Devenderlal and Rafiquddin were very close friends. Everyday they discussed the departure of every family. In no time the city wore a ghostly look. There were widespread arson and looting. Even good Samaritans were distrusted and put to all sorts of harassment. A railway employee had given shelter to many refugees who had been rendered homeless and had lost everything. He informed the police that he had given refugee to some refugees in his house and requested the police to protect them.

Ironically, as Ajneya points out,

The police arrested not only him and the refugees, but also the women of the house. In his absence, his house was looted and set on fire. His family and he were released after three days, and two armed guards were provided for their security. Fifty steps away from the police station, the armed guards suddenly opened fire on the family. The man and three women were killed. His mother and wife lay wounded on the street....

(SAP II 75)

Rafiquddin and Devenderlal knew that such madness was the order of the day. However, before long, Rafiquddin came to feel tremendous pressure from his Muslim friends and relatives. He felt that he could not withstand the communal frenzy any longer. But he was not ready to openly acknowledge his defeat. When he met his friend that day, he felt exhaustion, sorrow, and detachment, defeat and shame. He had also to put up with humiliation. Before any untoward incident happened, Rafiquddin put Devenderlal in his
garage for safety. It was very narrow and dark. Ajneya describes the poignant situation of the refugee:

Devenderlal stood like statue for a while once his trunk and bedding had been put in a corner of the room and the front gate had been locked. Freedom! If earlier a foreign government had put our people behind bars because they wanted to be free, now, after independence, our own brothers imprison us because they want to save us from being killed! (SAP II 77-78)

Devenderlal’s plight was worse than that of a jailbird, for in a gaol the prisoners could sing and shout, but in his present gaol, the refugee-prisoner had to be silent. This was not the end of his suffering. In a day or two, he was stunned when he knew that an attempt was made to poison him. Only a small note kept hidden in the food saved him. The surprising thing was it was not sent by his trusted friend but by Zaibu, a young girl whom Devenderlal loved very much.

Ibrahim Jalees’s “A Grave Turned Inside-Out” is a horrifying tale of a Migrant woman who had lost everything and everyone that she loved at regular intervals and finally her life too in a very pathetic situation. Ayesha the Muslim woman migrated twice in her brief lifetime. Firstly, she flew for her life in a crowded train from Bihar to East Pakistan. Of course, her husband was with her then. It was a consolation for her. But then in Bengal when the Biharis were treated as aliens and when violence erupted against them, she had lost her husband in mafia shoot-out. Her beloved daughter Razia (just thirteen) was abducted for sexual abuse by a local goon. Ayesha rushed to the local leader Qazi Kabiruddin’s house seeking justice and to request him to trace her daughter. Dakha
was in a terrible turmoil then. The feeble, tender cry of a widowed, daughterless, hungry and sick woman was sidelined by the full-throated, frenzied slogans of millions and millions of men for the creation of Bangladesh. Ayesha was made to believe that her daughter was sent to Karachi with Qazi Basheeruddin’s family for safety. Ayesha believed it and wanted to join her daughter in Karachi. Nurul, a man whom her husband had been in friends with, came forward to help her migrate. He was in fact a wolf in a sheep’s skin. He was like a pig for as Ibrahim Jalees observes, “a pig is an animal which has neither modesty nor sexual shame” (SAP II 146).

Without knowing anything about the evil intentions of Nurul, the helpless victim of Partition, Ayesha was migrating for the second time. Earlier in Dakha she was denied statehood precisely because she was not the daughter of the soil. Now sitting in the airplane she was suddenly gripped by fear of the present and the future. She “started screaming loudly with terror. Two airhostesses rushed towards her and tried to calm her down...(SAP II 141). This poor migrant was one of those millions and millions lost, helpless, oppressed people of this earth who are disgusted with life and at the same time afraid to die.

In the aeroplane Nurul had been feeding Ayesha with dreams to dissipate her terror and despair: "Don’t worry, Ayesha, as soon as you reach Karachi, you will meet Razia and begin a new life. Quad-I-Azam had said that in Pakistan there will be no poor Muslims. In Karachi we will have our own house and no goonda will be able to throw us out..." (SAP II 148).

As soon as they reached Karachi, Nurul and Ayesha walked towards the Country Club’s graveyard. Ayesha’s eyes fell on a slogan written on a wall: “Biharis... go back”
(SAP II 150). Terribly uncertain about their future, they both stood before Qaid-i-Azam's tomb and admired its beauty for a long time. When they started moving, they felt as if the tomb of Qaid-i-Azam was following them and did not want to let them out of its sight.

Next to the wall of the Country Club graveyard, a good number of poor Bengali refugees had put up their huts. The huts were so close to the graveyard that the dead didn’t have to be carried from their huts to their graves. They need to be toppled out of one grave into another. It is here—in the Bengali settlement—the graves turned inside out. There was still some space left for a grave. That day evening before they settled down, some roughs dragged Nurul to the nearby police station. One of them raped Ayesha “for illegally grabbing Government land...” (SAP II 151). She screamed aloud for help, but nobody came forward to rescue her. When everything was over, the slum dwellers peeped in her hut and to their shell shock, they found her naked body lying on the floor.

Kamleshwar’s “How Many Pakistanis?” is a tragic tale of a Hindu boy and his Muslim lady love who had to migrate to different places and undergo untold suffering to keep themselves alive at the time of the creation of Pakistan. For them Pakistan meant separation and suffering. Pakistan had done havoc on millions and millions of innocent people. The narrator, the Hindu boy, after many months of the communal flare up recalls sadly how he and his Bano courted on the banks of the Ganga before the separation. Even Bano’s father, a drillmaster showed a green signal to the lovers’ courtship. They had been living in a dreamland. But all came to dust when the violence struck their village. As a sad sequel to the disturbing events, the narrator had to leave (rather forced to leave) his village. He was strictly debarred from visiting his beloved Bano. He recalls now, “I had
never imagined I would be driven out of my own house like this. No one who has been humiliated and driven out of his own village, can ever be at peace again” (SAP II 178).

Chinar had been destroyed. The narrator thought that for the creation of Pakistan, many villages like Chinar had to be sacrificed. Before the destruction, the air in the village had been poisoned—“it was as if a snake had bitten each of its members” (SAP II 177).

Bano’s father was a good poet too. He was writing Bhartri Namaha, the life of a Hindu saint-poet. The Hindu saint like the refugees had to leave everything when he took to the streets like a fakir:

Why have you become a mendicant
And given up friends, soldiers and courtiers?
Why have you adopted a life of poverty
And left behind both narcissus and poppy?
Why have you worn robes of saffron
And taken off expensive shawls of silk?
Why do you wander from door to door,
Singing god’s name,
And have gone far from Kamroop, Dhaka and Bengal?
Why have you left us in your madness
And abandoned your kingship? (SAP II 177-178)

Such a fine biographer “had been exiled by history…” (SAP II 182). He wandered from place to place. He became depressed seeing rivulets of blood and unimaginable violence. Before long, he “had gone mad” (188). Months later, when the narrator went to Bombay
to visit a friend, he saw Banu rather accidentally in a disrespect place under dubious circumstances. His Banu had become a permanent refugee in a brothel. When she saw the narrator, there was a contemptuous, venomous smile on her lips. It was as if she had taken vengeance on him. The narrator was dumb-founded. Terror-stricken, he asks: “Where should I hide?” (SAP II 190).

Syed Waliullah’s “The Story of the Tulsi Plant” presents the plight of the refugees in the eastern sector at the time of the holocaust. Stunned and dismayed, the members of some Hindu family had flown away to some unknown place. The bungalow that they had inhabited for years earlier was left desolate. Some Muslim refugees, displaced from their original abodes due to communal riots saw the deserted bungalow and greedily occupied it. They had rather “seized the house…. Having come into the city in the aftermath of the Partition, they had been searching frantically for shelter and had come upon that house quite by chance one day” (SAP II 192). It was as if they had suddenly come across some treasure. They had surged forward wild with excitement. They had broken the lock and entered the house, driven by thoughtless frenzy.

Partition turmoil and upheaval brought thousands into Calcutta—“all in search of a roof over their heads” (SAP II 192). The refugees who occupied the bungalow were all clerks. Each of them “shuddered at the memory of the nightmarish days” (SAP II 194) in their lanes.

In a couple of days, they noticed a tulsi plant by the side of the kitchen. As the present occupants were Muslims, they could not tolerate any signs of Hinduism. They felt that the plant had a story to tell. They imagined that at dusk every evening, the mistress of the Household, “the grihakartri, lit the lamp at the base of the tulsi” (SAP II 195). The
moment this though crossed their minds, they began to think, "Where was the mistress of the house now...? Why had she left? Where had she gone?" (SAP II 195). Wherever she was, her eyes would be brimming with tears at the memory of the deserted tulsi plant. So they did not disturb the tulsi plant. They even began to tend it with enormous care.

In the meanwhile, the government came to know that some refugees had unlawfully occupied a vacant house. The government wanted them to vacate. Their blood boiled for several days at seeing the vacate notice. They decided that they would not quit the house under any circumstances. But when the Government threatened them with dire consequences, they budged. One day they left with a bang. They disturbed everything in the house. But they did not disturb the tulsi. It was left to be insured by its own powers of self-protection.

Lalithambika Antharjanam’s “The Mother of Dhirendu Muzumdar”, presents the plight of the mother of some patriotic children (who all sacrificed their precious, bubbling life for the freedom struggle) in the eastern region. She belonged to a Zamindari family, in a rich village where the river Padma flows eastwards into the sea. Shanti Muzumdar was her name and she was ninety years old. With uncontrollable sadness, she says that she sacrificed five of her children for India and four for Pakistan for their existence. This illustrious mother from an illustrious family led a very comfortable life till the announcement of the Partition. Even the high ranking British officers of the erstwhile British Raj would visit her home for parties. Shanti Muzumdar’s husband was a high profile officer in the government. However when the country was partitioned, her family came to ruins. She was rooted out of East Bengal and was thrown on the Indian side. She had quietly undergone this humiliation.
Lying in a corner of a refugee camp uncared for, she was asking for a little water; her throat was parched. She says, “After all, I am now just an outsider, who has come here as a refugee begging for your mercy” (SAP II 203). This old mother emphatically believed that in Bengal there were no Hindus and Muslims, but only Bengalis. And she was dead against separation. She felt, “We are one. If the head and the body are separated, then like rahu and ketu they will play a very destructive game. Both the sun and the moon will come under total eclipse. Mark my words!” (SAP II 203). Quite obviously her words came true.

Though she had been a highly respected person in the eastern side of the Bengal, a time came when she could no longer stay there. The soldiers of Mukti Fauj whom she had considered her children finally brought her to India. And here Shanti Mutassi, the mother who belonged to the land of Tagore, Sarat Chandra, C.R.Das and Netaji was an outcast and she was “supposedly a refugee! Supposedly a beggar woman! Supposedly an outsider!” (SAP II 204).

Vishnu Prabhakar’s “I Shall Live” is a sad tale of a couple of refugees from Lahore who had to undergo a lot of emotional upheaval from day one of their escape from the holocaust. Their problems did not seem to end in the near future for there was some mix up due to some understanding or misunderstanding. The story takes place in Mussourie, a distant mountain town. Pran was living with Raj with a small boy called Dilip. Their life was full of tension. Very often Raj would stare at emptiness. And sometimes her eyes would be filled with tears and she would weep. Both knew that their life was very uncertain. Though they were living together, they were not husband and
wife. Pran hadn’t kept her by force there. They were refugees from Lahore and now they were refugees of life. Their souls were in turmoil.

Very soon the reader understands that the boy was not their child. Raj had found him “while she was fleeing with a group from Lahore” (SAP II 210). She had seen him abandoned in a train near Lahore. When the communal groups targeted each other in Lahore, people were fleeing to save their skin. Those who escaped witnessed a lot of senseless killing on the way. Raj too escaped from being abducted and humiliated. She was in a refugee train. When the refugee special was attacked, the refugees ran in all directions. She too took her bag and baggage and flew. She had lost everything, but had found a baby boy sleeping soundly in the compartment. Thanking god she fled towards India. On the way there were times when she had to risk her life to save that foundling. The pity is that she had to part with even that child when the boy’s parents scented his whereabouts. She promptly put the child in his mother’s lap.

Raj was pained beyond measure. Sometimes she would even faint at the very mention of a baby. Pran took her to many cities before they reached Mussourie. Day by day, “she was despondent about the past and sceptical about the future” (SAP II 213). One day as they were sitting in a hotel, a man was staring at her and Pran. In a couple of day’s time, he came home to claim even Raj for Raj was his wife. That man openly felt ashamed for not saving his wife in the crisis. Pran felt as Job had felt, “I hoped for happiness and light, but trouble and darkness came in stead. I am torn apart by worry and pain; day after day brings more suffering. I go about in gloom, without any sunshine; I stand up in public and plead for help. My voice is as sad and lonely as the cries of a jackal or an ostrich (Job 30:27-29).
Pran relived his past for a moment. While he was trying to escape with his wife and children, except Pran everybody else was swept away by the flood. He was the only one as Job's servant “who escaped to tell you” (Job 1:15).

Masood Ashar's “A Very Old Story” is concerned about an unwanted refugee boy who kept on clinging to some railway commuter or other for want of a place to go to. A couple of friends travelling in a train noticed the boy sitting so close to them and playing innocent tricks with them in the train. When they got out of the train they noticed, to their surprise, that the boy was following them. They looked at each other and said, “How will that boy come now? Why should he come? In fact, we had abandoned him. The truth is we had got rid of him. No one wanted to take him along. How could we have accompanied him everywhere?” (SAP II 235).

In those days of terrible tension, such unwanted, unclaimed children were quite common. Nobody asked him who he was. They thought that it was not necessary. They looked at the innocent and simple child who had a broad smile on his lips and was gazing at them with his clear eyes. He had no bedding of his own. In fact, “he possessed nothing. He was empty handed” (SAP II 236). Masood Ashar, the author was also in the group. He observed everything that went on there. The boy was watching him with “helpless and piteous eyes” (SAP II 237).

Masood understood shortly where they were all heading. They were hurrying towards the border. Almost all of them were refugees like the boy. They had to reach the border before it was closed. Masood observed their faces and said, “They were terrified of the border being closed. If the border had been sealed, how could they have reached the place they were fated to reach?”(SAP II 238).
When they crossed the border of the choice of their nation, once again they talked about the boy. Without a guardian, they felt that “It is only the earth-worm which can travel like that!” (SAP II 239). Soon they felt that in the new nation the boy would be certainly useful. They could use him to stand in the queue to get ration for them. If the grown-ups stood for ration for the second time, they would be easily recognised; but if the boy stood there nobody would bother much. However there was one man who was standing alone. He looked anxious and afraid. He stood on tiptoe and watched the boy. Soon he was filled with feelings of shame and regret. Quite obviously he had fathered the child. And the child would have been an illegitimate child. Or he might have been born out of his raping of some innocent refugee. Anyway the more he looked at the boy, the more “he felt numb” (SAP II 341).

Mulk Raj Anand’s “The Parrot in the Cage” presents the plight of a helpless refugee woman by name Rukmani whose only possession in the world was a parrot. She was a migrant from Lahore. Whatever she had was burnt down in the hellish fire of the communal holocaust.

When the story opens the old woman was standing in front of the office of the Deputy Collector looking for some dole from him. She was hungry, so too her parrot. She sat crouching on the road, not far off from the Amritsar court. Every moment her restless glances were riveted towards the officer. Little rivulets of sweat trickled through the deep fissures of old age that lined her face and shaded her eyes. Her contracted, toothless mouth was open and a couple of flies came from the direction in which she looked and settled on the corners of her lips. As time went by, “she felt a panic seize her belly” (SAP III 86).
The poor woman didn’t know where she was. She would have lost her life in Lahore if a Muslim woman had not given her burqah to escape with. Back in India she was waiting in front of the Deputy Collector’s office day in and day out to make her plea reach the officer’s ears. She had hoped that the Congress government would give back what people like her had lost in Lahore. As she was losing hope, she moaned to herself, and with tears she looked upon heaven and said, “Oh, why did I leave home to wander like this from door to door... Oh why did you have to turn me out of my room in my old age, God...” (SAP III 87).

In no time a number of refugees filed past the Deputy Collector’s office. Old Rukmani struggled hard to go to the officer and fall prostrate before him with her plea. But some able-bodied men brushed her aside. As the crowd became restive, a posse of policemen charged the refugees with lathis. Rukmani’s sighs and her parrot’s cries had been silenced with it. She reeled and fell down.

In those demented times many could not avoid disasters and tragedies. Those who escaped the calamity mostly found themselves in refugee camps. With a sense of horror and disbelief they tried hard to adjust themselves for they were led to believe that it was part of the human condition and therefore inevitable. Many of them felt stricken and unable to go on. S. H. Vatsayan Ajneya’s story “Post-Box” opens in a refugee camp after the communal ‘storm’. The author who was the narrator as well found that there was no member of his family in the refugee camp with him. He did not know what happened to them. He says, “A man can endure the greatest of calamities if he can say, ‘No one dear to me suffered’ (SAP III 105). There was a post-box on the way to the camp and the author went on sending letters to all those whom he had known to ascertain the fate of
them. A small boy in the camp was watching this. The author did not pay any particular attention to this though the boy reminded him of his own boyhood.

The boy wanted to know where the letters in the box would go. The author answered that that they would go to all places. The boy had a crumbled post-card in his hand. There was nothing written on it and it had no address. On further questioning the boy answered with tears in his eyes that he wanted to send the letter to his father. But he didn’t know the address. With his trembling lips he added that his father and he were living in Shekhpura. It was the place that witnessed very violent incidents. Even the little boy who was hardly five had many dry wounds on his bare legs. His feet were swollen. He wore an old shirt and a torn coat. He “seemed to be full of suffering” (SAP III 106).

The author by and by learned the pathetic story of the small boy. His name was Roshan. He had fled his home with his mother and Chacha for Lahore. His father had escorted them up to Shekhpura, and then had left for another village to fetch Roshan’s Bua and Phupha. Both of them were old and had no children of their own who were still alive. Their two sons had been killed in the Eastern front during the war with the Japanese. His father had promised to meet them in Lahore. But the untoward incident happened on the way. As the author says, “As they were travelling, some people had opened fire on their group and killed a number of them. Roshan’s Chacha had also been killed. The mindless killing continued even on the second day. The perpetrators of violence had smashed a number of them so cruelly. The violent mob consisted of a large number of men armed with lathis and axes. Plenty of women had also been abducted. Roshan’s mother was dragged away and beaten to death. A few days later Roshan had
managed to reach Jullunder. He was taken straight to a refugee camp. The boy was weeping as he was narrating the story to the author. The narrator comforted the boy and the card from him saying that he would hand over the card to the boy’s father. This had brought confidence into the boy and his tears stopped flowing from his eyes.

Bhisham Sahni’s “Pali” is the story of a small refugee boy like the small boy Roshan of Vatsyan’s “Post-Box”. Pali was a boy of four and his father was Manohar Lal. The family of Manohar Lal had behind Pakistan for India. Manohar Lal and his wife believed “that a calamity had at last passed over their heads. That the knots that had formed in their lives had been disentangled” (SAP III 119). With the little items that they could carry, they joined

...the caravan of the countless uprooted people heading for India. The dust raised by their feet hung like a haze in the atmosphere. Like a big river forming into many channels on its onward sweep towards the sea, this vast concourse of unfortunate humanity also proceeded towards the boundary line demarcating the two countries. (SAP III 119)

The two children of Manohar Lal—Pali, a boy of four and a little girl younger to Pali were their only valuable treasure in the world. Refugees that they were, they trudged along the makeshift path carrying their bundles over their heads, with their weary eyes searching their way through the haze. After staying in the refugee camp for a couple of days, Manohar Lal and his wife Kausalya with their little children were frantically throwing their things into the waiting lorries to go to the border. Having gone into the lorry, Manohar Lal realised that Pali was no longer holding his hand. Everybody was pushing forward madly from behind. They must cross the border before nightfall.
Manohar Lal got out of the lorry and cried his son's name aloud. He got no response. The lorry in which his wife was standing with her suckling child was jam-packed. It was ready to start. Manohar Lal’s throat had gone dry shouting his son’s name. His legs shook and his head reeled. Such was “the irony of the situation for this homeless man—he was shouting for his son on a road crowded with people, and yet it appeared as if he were shouting in a desert” (SAP III 120). When the lorry moved, Kaushalya started wailing. Her husband disappeared from her view. She was horrified. She breathed heavily and her chest was working like bellows. She burst out crying. Her plight was “like that of a bird whose nest was being destroyed before its very eyes” (SAP III 121). However, not before long, she spotted her husband running behind the lorry. The lorry was stopped and Manohar Lal got in but his son was missing. They could not keep the lorry there for long for it was dangerous to linger there. So many lives were at stake. The hearts of the refugees had dried of all sentiments.

Kaushalya was not the only one who was crying. All the refugees in the lorry had some sad tale to tell. So they were all weeping. The mental anguish of the refugees suddenly turned into heart-rending cries. Kaushalya’s empty eyes were still glued to the road. It was felt at that time that “there was nothing strange about losing a child under these circumstances. There was no sense in creating such a hubbub over it” (SAP III 122). The uprooted passengers reached the border and then they were transferred to other lorries that took them towards Amritsar. The refugees sat in the lorries staring at nothing. Kaushalya looked dazed. The onlookers thought that she was going to be mad.

Shakur, a seller of chinaware, found Pali in the mean time. His wife Zenab tended him like her own son. Pali’s sobs slowly dissolved in a sea of affection. The Muslim
family adopted Pali and brought him up as their son. The local moulvi stood before Zenab one day and reprimanded her: “You give a kafir’s polluted child a place in your lap. You give him your breast to suckle. Do you want to nurture a snake?” (SAP III 127). But Zenab found nothing polluted about the boy nor did he look like the young one of a serpent. However in deference to the moulvi, the circumcision was performed the very next morning. Little Pali was terribly frightened at seeing the razor and clung to Zenab’s legs. The boy of Manohar Lal was renamed Altaf Husain. Carrying him in her lap, Zenab went about distributing sweets in her mohalla. Very shortly, Altaf Husain became a very popular child in that locality. Altaf went to school and also to the mosque. He started memorizing the Koran. Zenab and Shakur’s lives started revolving round a new orbit with Altaf as its focal point. Two years passed joyfully in this manner. Then came court summons like a bombshell. The real father of the child moved the court of law to claim the child. Zenab trembled from head to foot.

Manohar Lal and Kaushalya’s grief did not end with losing Pali. On their way to Amritsar, their convoy was attacked by a religiously charged violent mob rising war cries. Looking dangerous, “they wore masks and brandished swords and spears and shouted filthy abuse” (SAP III 130). Many were butchered in cold blood. Manohar Lal was lying crushed under a heap of dead bodies. He feared that “if he could not extricate himself from under this heap, he would die under the weight of these dead bodies (SAP III 130). Kaushalya was lying in a pool of blood. Even in Delhi all was not well for the couple. Kaushalya was moaning day in and day out and was on the verge of insanity.

When the government of India set up a committee to trace the abducted children and women, the officials made frequent visits to Pakistan. It took two years for them to
trace Pali. As the dice seemed to be loaded very much against him, Manohar Lal had to go from post to pillar before he could get Pali. The child was sent with an assurance that he would be sent to his Muslim foster parents during Id for one month. Manohar Lal gave his word saying, “I’ll remain indebted to you all my life” (SAP III 137). In Manohar Lal’s lane, which had been a resettlement of refugees, news spread that Manohar Lal had got back his missing son. The boy was reconverted to Hinduism. He was given a sacred thread and was asked to repeat his name Pali five times.

Sultan Jamil Nasim’s tale “I Am Game” is also a sad tale of a refugee woman who had to partake everything (it includes her honour too) in order to make both ends meet in the land of her choice—Pakistan. Afroze’s mother was a decent woman. The volcanic eruption of the communal lava shattered her life to pieces. Explosion after explosion reduced the four walls of her life to rubble and “she felt entombed in the sprawling rubble of her own existence” (SAP III 143). She felt herself in a tomb where there was pitch darkness and utter loneliness. She had never experienced anything like that before. She felt as if “she was eternally grouping in the dark to find a way out” (SAP III 143). Afroze, her beloved daughter was a teen-aged school-going girl. East Pakistan, the birthplace of Afroze’s mother became Bangladesh and due to quirks of fate, she had become an alien in her own land. With all support gone, she moved into a refugee camp where she found herself face to face with starvation. She had seen women in that camp trading their bodies to make both ends meet.

She was in a straight jacket when Majid, her aunt’s son met her. He posed himself as doing some humanitarian work in those troubled times. She knew him as a wayward youth of shady character and reckless ways. Shuttling between Dhaka and Karachi, he
had pulled many hapless girls out of chaos and found asylum for them in Pakistan. Along with fifteen other girls, he had escorted Afroze and her mother from Dhaka to Karachi. He bought a small house for Afroze's mother in Karachi and deposited the other girls to the care of a 'humanitarian agency'.

Afroze was growing up fast. With the help of Majid the mother put the girl in a school. But quite unexpectedly, one day Majid showed his true colours. He wanted Afroze to share the bed of a rich man for a day. He would get any amount from the rich man. Majid's words came as red-hot lava for the mother. Her heart sank and "the world seemed to have crashed around her" (SAP III 148). She felt darkness creeping upon her. She flew into a rage. She called him a snake in the grass. Her whole body seemed to be afire. She had seen in a refugee camp in Dhaka outstretched feminine hands greedily grabbing crumpled notes. She looked upon heavenward and said, "Oh, God, one is punished for one's crimes. But why punish one for one's helplessness?" (SAP III 149). She felt terribly helpless and a sudden fear seized her. She went in search of Majid and offered herself for sale. She would never allow her daughter to sell herself. The mother had to do it to protect her daughter. If she had been alone, she would rather have taken her life than have offered herself for sale.

Gurumukh Singh Musafir's story "The Abandoned Child" presents the plight of the fleeing refugees leaving everything, sometimes even their loved ones. The story centres on a Muslim family who flew from India for Pakistan leaving even their only daughter most probably to save their skin. Qasim the husband and Zeenat his wife stole out of the back door of their house and ran into the wheat field. They looked anxious and pale with terror. Every now and then they stopped to hear the shouts of people from the other side
of the village. Qasim's father Hashim Ali, the Zaildar of the village had left the village with a caravan of the villagers a few hours ago. There had been rumours that the neighbouring village had been ransacked and the marauders were heading towards Qasim's village. People did not want to take any risk then. So they decided to move as refugees to some safer place. Naturally, "there was a lot of screaming and moaning. People wept as they gathered their luggage together in bundles" (SAP III 181). Old men wept uncontrollably when they left their houses. The people, who left their village in caravans, left their country behind; their homes and wells behind and their fruit trees. Suddenly all that was familiar vanished from their eyes and their eyes were now glued on the other side of the border. As Zeenat was too weak to go in the caravan with Mubina her baby, she stayed back till a better convoy came in. However when firing was heard in the village, Zeenat, unable to carry her and run, had left Mubina in the house to the care of Allah and ran through the crops. Zeenat was terrified. The night was ominous and awfully frightening. The fleeing refugees in the meantime got into a boat and flew to the other side.

When the raider walked in, they saw a strange sight. They went from house to house and looted to their hearts' content. They saw Mubina and recognised her as Qasim's daughter. A woman by name Moula took the baby home.

Zeenat in the meantime was delirious. No doctor could cure her. She was wailing, "I am not a mother. I am a demon" (SAP III 188). As soon as the Qasim's family reached Lahore, they contacted the officials to trace the baby. Moula herself took the baby to Zeenat and handed it over to her. Zeenat found the woman as an angel. She requested
Moula and her family to live with Zeenat’s family under the same roof. The woman put her arms around Zeenat and their tears mingled.

Gulam Abbas’s “Avtar: A Hindu Myth” is the sad tale of some Muslim refugees who had undergone untold sufferings in the hands of some fanatic Hindus at the time of the country’s Partition in the Sambhal village which is an old town in Moradabad District. As the darkness of sin and evil had spread over the world as in the days of Sodom and Gomorrah, Lord Vishnu had to take an avatar as a human being to save the hapless people.

Before the Partition of India, the population of Sambhal comprised of both the Hindus and the Muslims. But during the days of the Partition, storms of violence raged through this town also. Hindus formed the majority there. Armed gangs of them attacked Muslim localities and burnt down their hamlets. They butchered countless men, women and children. A few Muslim families, who had survived the carnage, sought shelter in a deserted valley outside the Sambhal. Most of those who reached that valley were women and children. For days on end they survived only on leaves and grass. There was an ironsmith among the Muslims, and his name was Ibrahim. Having smelt that some Muslims had set up a colony for themselves in the Sambhal Valley, a group of Hindus attacked them and killed most of them. Ibrahim’s father, and a few other male members were butchered. Ibrahim was badly wounded. The women members of his family were “paralysed with fear and sorrow” (SAP III 195). So all those who survived the attack fled to another place and set up their huts. Quite often the Hindus sneaked in and set fire to their huts. The Muslim refugees then built a mud wall around their colony to protect themselves from the mischief-makers. A majority of the women in the colony had lost
their husbands in the massacres. So in order to eke out their livelihood, the womenfolk had come out of their purdah and labour along with the men folk.

In the meantime, Ibrahim's wife begot a lovely male child. Ibrahim christened the boy as Hamzah. The child grew to be a healthy child. To protect him from the evil eye, Amina, the boy's mother used to cover his head with a black cloth. Hamzah was a very intelligent chap. Before he was eight, he had read through the Holy Koran. He excelled all the others in all sports and studies. At the age of eighteen, Hamzah was a very handsome and well-built young man. He had heard horror-packed stories about the cruelties inflicted on the hapless Muslims by the Hindus. The more he heard and thought about these things, the more perturbed he became. He began to brood and withdrew into himself. He stopped eating. Even Sara who loved him deeply couldn't do any thing to mitigate his sorrow. Within a few days he went away unmindful of his loved ones' pleas. For about six months there was no news about Hamzah. A year after he had left home, he suddenly reappeared one day. He was very much changed. He had grown thin like a thorn. There was neither a smile on his lips nor a glow in his eyes. The next morning he mysteriously disappeared.

Things did not go well for the Muslim refugees even in their isolated colony. Quite unexpectedly one day a large Hindu crowd attacked them with all sorts of weapons. The women were molested in the most abominable manner possible. Many Muslims fell victims as martyrs while defending their women. The Hindus then made a big pyre before their temple to roast the infidel Muslims in it. They picked up Ibrahim and threw him into the fire. Just then there was a deafening burst of thunder in the sky. The earth shook and the fire extinguished. A spectacular comet appeared in the sky. The Hindus were terrified.
They saw to their amazement a handsome young man standing in their midst. He rode a white horse and carried a long burning sword in his right hand. He and his vehicle were gorgeously adorned with precious stones. He looked at the Hindus with his angry eyes and repudiated them in the strongest expression possible. Introducing himself as the tenth avtar of Lord Vishnu who would appear at the end of Kalyuga, he asked, “What crime had your victims committed? That they believed in a different form of worship than yours? That their style of life was different? Is that such a big crime that they could be exterminated?” (SAP III 204). He introduced himself as Vishnu and continued that he had come to the earth to protect the helpless and the poor. He reminded them that “truth, honesty, decency are not granted to one community only. Gods protect the entire universe. It is to prove this, I have decided not to be born as a Hindu this time, but the son of a poor iron monger” (SAP III 205).

Krishan Chander’s “The Peshawar Express” presents the plight of a trainload of refugees fleeing from various places of Pakistan for some safe haven across the border. The train is the narrator here. The helpless refugees looked fear-stricken, “anxious to get away from the land where their families had lived for countless generations. Today the same land had forsaken them. They were bidding good-bye to their homeland Pakistan with heavy hearts and conjuring up visions of a new home. Some of them were very unable to believe their eyes for they were alive and their womenfolk had escaped molestation.

On its way to the Indian side the train had to stop at various stations to accommodate the refugees. When the train stopped at Hasan Abdal, a large number of Sikh refugees were waiting for this train. Their faces were tense with fear and their
women and children looked around apprehensively. The houses of some of them had been burnt down. The train got stranded at the Taxila station. A good number of Hindu refugees were supposed to board the train there. But the train had to witness a gruesome sight. There was a violent Muslim procession. Every Muslim in the procession was carrying the corpse of a Hindu on his shoulder. They had been caught while trying to escape. In all, there were two hundred corpses. The Muslims entrusted the corpses to the care of the Baluchi guards. They then picked up some two hundred Hindu refugees from the train and entrusted them to the care of the waiting mob. The leader of the mob ordered the ‘kafirs’ to line up and then the Baluchi soldiers pumped out their bullets at these refugees. It was here Lord Buddha preached the gospel of non-violence. The cry Allah-O-Akbar reached up to heaven. The railway platform had turned red with the blood of the victims and the train’s wheels seemed to be slipping from the rails. The train even feared that she would derail “bringing disaster to those who were hiding in the carriages” (SAP III 209). Death had stalked through all the compartments. The train stopped at the Rawalpindi railway station. No refugees got in to the train there. When the train was on her way to Gujarat, some one pulled the alarm chain and stopped the train. And then it was hell let loose for some time. Miscreants carried many women away. Young Muslim men knifed many Hindus and Sikhs to death. Many in the train were flummoxed about what was happening. Terrorists had in fact haunted them earlier. Now they witnessed it by paying a heavy price. They did not know how to shield them from this kind of reality.

When the train reached Wazirabad, she had seen the entire platform “littered with corpses” (SAP III 210). It was in this town where the Hindus and the Muslims had for centuries celebrated Baisakhi together. In fact in a few minutes the station witnessed a
savage act of vandalism. Concourses of naked women ranging from old grannies to young virgins were paraded in front of ogling men. They were Hindu and Sikh women and Muslim men and they were celebrating “the most gruesome Baisakhi” (SAP III 211). The naked women were then led into the compartments and made to sit with the other refugees. A few women jumped out of the speeding train.

The refugee special then reached Amritsar. Another train came to a halt from the Indian side. She was carrying Muslim refugees from India. Violent Muslim men ransacked the compartments and abducted some fifty women. They then butchered 400 Hindus on the platform. A deadly paralysing terror spread among the victims. Many screamed and struggled to save them. It was a nauseating sight to the train. She felt “utterly polluted as if I had been thrown out of Hell” (SAP III 212). When she reached Amritsar, the excited cries of the Hindus and Sikhs welcomed her. Countless corpses of the Muslims were piled high there. Muslims who posed as Brahmins had to undergo trouser test and if they failed, they were stabbed on the chest with spears. A Jat impaled the body of an infant on his spear and jubilantly flung it in the air. In Jullundur “the marauders hastily improvised temporary brothels under the peepal and rosewood trees. Here fifty women were made to serve five hundred ravishers.... That day Punjab died” (SAP III 213). The train was struck dumb with terror. She became lifeless—“a structure of wood and steel, devoid of feelings” (SAP III 215).

Those who escaped the orgy of violence either stayed back or crossed the border to begin their life anew. They bore with them their memories of sweet and bitter experiences. They become part of their past. Whenever they are alone, like it or not, their
memory banks open and they nostalgically relive their past. This is the thrust of the following chapter.