Chapter VII

Conclusion: Love Is Far Stronger Than Hatred

Called by diverse names
Bhagwan or Allah
You are the same O Lord!
Give every human being
Sanity to perceive this
(A River 198).

History is always interesting while recounting situations and incidents both tragic and comic, but it is just that if not adorned with some feelings and emotions, which perhaps only literature can do. It is believed that fiction is basically "a meeting ground of opposites, of contraries—a space large enough to accommodate competing versions of truth, unlike the real world where each of these versions must necessarily collide with the other, overpower and, preferably, annihilate it" (Muhammad Umar Memon xii). Narratives normally do not moralise. But they do not fail to impart a kind of wisdom to the reader. It is invariably felt deep inside which is "something like a visionary flash" (Memon vxii). Lessons, sometimes very vital lessons are learnt in this quiet space. Authors do not use fiction to write the history of a society, but the history of the individual. Indeed, "it articulates the existential situation of the individual"(Memon xii)—as, for instance, in the character of Dauji in
Upender Nath Ashk's "Tableland" or Pichwa in Intizar Husain's "An Unwritten Epic".

Works of literature should not be taken as blue prints for reforming the society. As the narrator in Intizar Husain's "An Unwritten Epic" points out that "Appreciation of literature comes from concern for humanity" (An Epic 177). Human beings will start caring for human beings only when they are purged of the hatred that lies deeply embedded in their minds. Hatred is an infection, which is worse than the AIDS. And hatred comes from fear. Love and fear are the two basic emotions of human beings, the yin and the yang of emotional life. Communal amity is the business of the people and not the government. Neither the leader of a nation, (howsoever powerful he may be), nor the army can bring in communal peace. People should also know the real purpose of religion in their life. The maxim of every religion is to make its followers good human beings. No religion anywhere in the world and anytime has taught its followers to be bad.

The various authors of the stories dealt with here had the first-hand experience of the trauma of Partition. Some visualized what ordinary the people had gone through in those moments of terror and devastation. Their minds facilitated them to produce some truly touching stories. No doubt they are fictional yet they are true and so we should take them as a rich tribute to those who might have gone through similar situations. There were wives abducted, raped and mutilated, sisters stripped naked,
children left stranded or forcibly circumcised, helpless men hacked to
death, husbands killed, dreams shattered for families, sons maimed, cosy
homes burnt down—tragedies that altered the course of lives and
relationships for generations to come; yet these stories serve as reminders
that rising from the ashes and going on to triumph is indeed possible.

Reacting to the burning of many towns and cities in the cauldron of
communal carnage in the various parts of the Gujarat state in the
aftermath of the gruesome Godhra train attack, the Indian Prime Minister
A. B. Vajpayee described it as a “black mark on the nation’s forehead”
(and it) "had lowered India's prestige in the world" (The Hindu 03 March
2002). One wonders what would be Vajpayee’s reaction to what happened
fifty-five years ago which was hundred times worse than the present
mindless violence in almost the same regions of the erstwhile India. As
now, then too there was a virtual collapse of Governmental authority. It
showed the singularly inept and slow response to the scenes of
destruction. There was no one to control the rampaging mobs that went
about doing their business at their own will and pleasure. But what was
shocking is the law enforcing authorities’ blatant failure to intervene even
in cases where such outrageous attacks were taking place in their very
presence.

Nonetheless, men and women, as some of these stories show, had to
overnight drop all queasiness and deal with death and burning flesh. No
doubt some of these stories do reflect the bitterness of the authors; quite
obviously they have been very angry. Some even take sides. A good number of stories are full of nostalgia for the good old days. A few of them have been an interesting mixture of nostalgia, anger and prejudice. Some even carry political histories of those troubled times that deal with developments that led to Partition.

It is strange that some of these writers do not have a good word even for Mahatma Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru. Such writers are very virulent who are virtually soaked in anger and hatred. Some give an exaggerated picture of the difficulties faced by the refugees in the refugee camps and refugee special trains.

In addition to these writers, there is another group of writers who want to see India and Pakistan come together as they had a common culture and language once.

An over-all picture one gets from these narratives is that levelheaded people on either side are increasingly becoming tired of the hate campaigns.

One salutary effect that these stories had on the present generation is that they help us understand the present through the past. Many agree on the fact that though a great deal has been written on the subject of Partition, it is by far, not enough, or even in proportion to the scale of events. In the collaborative history published under the title Modern South Asia, the Indian historian Sugata Bose and her Pakistani counterpart Ayesha Jalal, aver with documentary evidence that there were
17 million displaced people in both countries during the Partition and about five million people died on either side. Though Partition has received academic attention, one can count the number of novels in English about it on the fingers of one hand. Commenting on this, the sensational moviemaker, and the director of the Partition movie 1947, Deepa Mehta says, “We are in such a hurry to go forward that we never want to go back into history, unless it glorifies us” (Sonia Trikha 05).

Some writers do certainly need some distance to engage the question of our communal past. This means that those who talk about it are sometimes the grand children of those who actually lived through the Partition. As we read through some of these stories, some of us unconsciously contrast it with the holocaust in Europe. However, there is a marked difference. Soon after the Second World War, the Jews spoke out the trauma that they went through. But strangely, people who went through the Partition holocaust have been silent. The reason obviously is that in Europe, the line between the aggressor and the victim was clear. But on this part of the globe, the Hindus, the Muslims, and the Sikhs were, in turn, the victims and the aggressors. To quote Shauna Singh Baldwin, author of What the Body Remembers, “Each religious community was guilty, each was violent” (Sonia Trikha 05). For novelists like Bhisham Sahni and others, there was silence because it was too painful to recollect. That is the reason why he wrote Tamas much later and not soon after the Partition. In his words, “We had suffered physically
in the Partition and what I saw in Bhiwandi prompted me to write about our own experience. After all those years I realized that the experience can get buried in the subconscious but it cannot be forgotten” (Trikha 05). The authors of these narratives make use of the oral culture in which stories were passed from generation to generation to construct social memory. Most of these pieces are brought out with the hope that “fiction can help us see one another as human beings first” (Trikha 05). The worrying factor is though the Partition is over, the communal question is still very much with us.

Even in those mad days, many Good Samaritans risked their life and brought succour to the helpless victims of the Partition trauma. Instances are aplenty in the narratives. To read them was really heart cheering. In A River with Three Banks the bearded old man (Haseena's father) was stabbed on his chest, neck and abdomen and his intestines were thrown out by a bloodthirsty mob. The incident happened right in front of a church. Seeing that Father Jones was filled with an enormous sadness. He told his servant to pull the body across the gate into the courtyard. The victim's pockets were rummaged to see if he had any address. Finding a letter addressed to his wife, Father Jones and Gautam understood all about the man. Father Jones took steps to bury the body inside the cemetery, of course, after a Christian funeral service. Another startling incident in the novel is that though Gautam knew without a trace of doubt that Rahul was not his son, but his friend Mohinder's, yet he did not hate this child, but
“loved Rahul as his own child” (A River 19). Though a strong Arya Samajist, Gautam’s father Shamlal Mehta (who had been known for his zeal for the Hindu dharma in Lahore before he came to Delhi as a refugee) seems to be a very reasonable man now with a tolerant heart. Even his wife, Mrs. Radha Mehta with her Hindu orthodoxy agreed to her son’s conversion to Christianity.

Seeing the violence in the streets, the leaders were very much worried. Nehru expressed his anguish over his radio broadcast to the nation. Wanting to live in amity and peace with Pakistan Nehru said, “Let there be no ill-will against Pakistan; we wish that country peace and prosperity. But if our frontiers are threatened, we shall fight to the last. So let’s not waste our energies in mutual destruction” (A River 37-38).

Gautam had a compassionate heart. He once tells Gopinath Trivedi “the sight of any killing, of man or animal, sickens me” (A River 58). He felt enormous sympathy for the helpless old man. The letter found in the pocket of the deceased revealed the plight of the other family members of the butchered. Lying on his cot, Gautam “conjured up the image of the abducted Muslim girl Haseena, held under duress somewhere in the capital. Supposing he had a sister kidnapped and carried away to Pakistan!” (A River 39). At the earliest opportunity Gautam wrote a detailed letter to Abdul Rahim’s (the deceased) wife in spite of his mental agony. Gautam like men were there though small in number.
When a young man and his sister were harassed right in front of his eyes, Gautam “could take it no longer. Blood shot into his eyes, and his temples began to throb” (A River 60). Though it was very agonizing, he waited because if he intervened the miscreants would certainly kill the brother and sister and possibly Gautam too. Berry too would feel the same compassion for the victims. Ordinarily, he would have felt aroused to see a young woman stripped. But now, “he felt as though he’d himself been abused and humiliated” (A River 60). It was Berry who went to the rescue of the naked woman when the police moved in. He seized a large tablecloth and covered the woman’s nakedness with it. He then stopped the police van and formally lodged a complaint with the officer “A bunch of Muslim goons tried to rape a Hindu woman” (A River 61). Gautam even was a little tough with the police officer. He mellowed only when the officer came forward to personally “escort the lady to her house and arrange for immediate medical aid for her brother” (A River 62). Eyes brimming with tears she wanted to say something. But it was her brother who spoke: “I don’t know how to thank you both” (A River 62).

In those disquieting times when everybody tended to take sides with one religious group or the other, Gautam and Berry had never entertained any such irrational traits. They know the irony and paradox of the religions and the religionists. It is worth quoting here Gautam’s words to Haseena, “I’m a Christian. A few days ago I was a Hindu. And I wouldn’t
mind becoming a Muslim. I don’t believe in these religions—they all condone violence, instigate their followers to kill...” (A River 80).

Gautam is quite chivalrous like Walter Scott’s hero Ivanhoe in the novel Ivanhoe. As the latter risks his own life to save the Jewish girl Rebecca from the den of death and the devil Brian de Bouis Guilbert, Gautam risks his life and saves the miserable girl Haseena from the real hell (Pannalal’s brothel at Neel Kamal). To Haseena, the brothel house was a jail and a concentration camp and just as the castle of Templestowe an “evil place” (Ivanhoe 441) to Rebecca. Her jailer Pannalal like Brian de Bois-Guilbert of Ivanhoe had threatened her “with death if she ever tried to escape. As Haseena’s mother was full of gratitude for Gautam for saving her daughter from the mouth of hell, Isaac, the father of Rebecca instinctively tells her daughter, “Let us go, my dear daughter, my recovered treasure—let us go to throw ourselves at the feet of the good youth” (Ivanhoe 441). Not only Haseena’s mother but Haseena’s sister and their kith and kin are all thankful to Gautam who has risked his very life to save the life of not only Haseena but her sister and mother as well, though they belonged to another community and also strangers. In Ivanhoe, Isaac reminds his daughter how Ivanhoe came forth “like a strong man with his spear and shield, holding his life as nothing, so he might redeem thy (Rebecca’s) captivity...(Ivanhoe 442).

As in these tumultuous days, in those days too some journals like Our Land carried inflammatory articles fanning communal tension. That
paper described the Indian Muslims as criminals and “branded all Englishmen, staying on in India, as pro-Muslim, and accused them of acting clandestinely in collusion with the Pakistan spies” (A River 86). Lord Mountbatten was “alleged to be engaged in a diabolic conspiracy...” (A River 86) and with regard to Gandhiji, the paper asked, “How can we call him Father of the Nation when he has dedicated himself exclusively to the welfare of Muslims... If he persists in his one-sided commitment, he may soon have to pay dearly for it” (A River 87). Sometimes they gross-fabricate incidents and fumigate communal passions. An instance is, strangely, Gautam’s killing of Pannalal in sheer self-defence. But the journal Pioneer reported the matter and said, “it was a Muslim who did it” (A River 165). Such journals didn’t realize that carrying extreme views when the nation was in the grip of emotional upheavals was tantamount to unforeseen and unpredictable bloodshed. One consolation was that that particular journal was immediately banned.

Another encouraging factor was that when Gautam reached his office, his chief editor announced that he was issuing a special edition of The Challenge “to expose the reactionary ideology propagated by Our Land” (A River 88). Like a thoroughbred economist the Chief Editor added, “If India was to forge ahead, she must shake off all religious bigotry. The basic issue involved were more economic than communal” (A River 88). As has been wanted by Gautam to do an article on communal harmony, his suggestion was readily accepted.
It is easy to see that Shiv K Kumar has taken pains to illuminate the crisis in our society by offering us plenty of details of known experience. In doing so he has made efforts to reflect the tension of his hero Gautam and his struggle for relationships in a fast changing society. Gautam inherits an evolved brain, which gives him his common human basis. Through this inheritance, and through the forms that his culture teaches, he begins to realise that as the world he is watching is changing and being changed, as Raymond Williams observes, “new acts of perception, interpretation, and organization are not only possible but necessary” (591). And hence his taking risk with Haseena even when the society he is living is totally against this move of him. In a way he and his society are at loggerheads with each other. To many his act is very revolutionary. With much difficulty his parents accept. To cut it short, it is human growth that Gautam takes efforts to communicate, by work and language to make a new reality. Understandably the tension can be quite great in his struggle to establish reality. The novelist presents this exceptionally high tension in a convincing manner. To quote again Raymond Williams, “Realism is precisely this living tension, achieved in a communicable form” (591).

As King Richard comes to the rescue of the sick Ivanhoe who is scarce able even to take his saddle “to take on thee such a venture” (Ivanhoe 439), Bala Subramoniam, the correspondent of The Evening News, and secretary of the Press Club willingly comes forward to escort
the fleeing Gautam and Haseena, in his jeep to the railway station. To Gautam and Haseena, it is “a question of life and death” (A River 97). Bala Subramoniam’s reply is quite warm: “I’m glad I could do something for you” (A River 97). And Berry on his part has booked two berths in a reserved coupe, “a damned luxury these days” (A River 98), as it is usually meant for the English bureaucrats. Berry even travels with the tensed Gautam and Haseena until the next stop to securely see the lovers off Delhi. With a lump in his throat, Gautam tells Haseena said that he is ashamed for his conduct of going to the brothel to take her like a dog. But she immediately refuts it saying, “No, no, you never touched me...you were a perfect gentleman” (A River 104). This incident highlights that even in those devastating days, Good Samaritans, though rare were there.

The general sentiment then in most of the north Indian cities was that the Muslims were die-hard Pakistanis at heart. Though the killings in many parts of the city stopped, the hate campaign continued. Gautam realised this when he visited Allahabad with Haseena. Allahabad was then like Ahamedabad of the post-Godhra carnage. In spite of the impassioned pleas of Maulana Abul Kalam Azad and Jawaharlal Nehru, the Muslims here refused to stir out of their settlements and mix freely with the other communities. This was due to their experience of unspeakable violence. There was a clear-cut chasm between the Hindus and the Muslims. And it seemed unbridgeable. Gautam and Haseena realised this when they talked to the cab driver, who displayed a three-striped caste mark on his
forehead. His words were packed with hatred: “You can’t be friends with Muslims any longer. They’re all bastards, sir—fanatic Pakistanis at heart” (A River 115).

Gautam was not very sure of the treatment of Haseena by her people. He thought most probably she would be ostracised and thrown out as she came back soiled. Waiting outside Haseena’s house with a great turmoil, he thought that she would be “bundled out of the house...discarded and disowned” (A River 116). But the unexpected happened; Haseena’s uncle told Gautam, “We’re very grateful to you, Mehta Sahib”(A River 116). The next person who acknowledged the help of Gautam was Haseena’s mother with her words: “You have been a ‘farishta’ to us” (A River 117). It means a guardian angel. Gautam was deeply touched by their generous compliments. Haseena’s mother even called him “my son” (A River 118). And in turn he called her, “ammijan”(A River 118). In the Indian societies sexually abused women were normally not taken back. Even legendary women were suspected and put to untold suffering. But Haseena’s people were different. They accepted her with love and compassion. More over Gautam felt that he had been well liked by the family.

Shiv K Kumar presents the awkward position of the English people then in India. As the independence of India drew near, not many English wanted to go back to England. Many had their roots firmly laid in India and they didn’t want to go back to India. They were mostly the
professionals like the professors and principals in state colleges and universities. Those who were associated with FERA companies like Philips, Dunlop, Remington and Crompton found the new situation tricky. These companies wanted their employees to stay back, lest their companies would slip into the hands of the American businessmen. Many had felt already embittered by the loss of the Indian Empire. Thousands had already gone back to England. Many even preferred the hot Indian climate to “the vile British winter—blizzard, mist and smog” (A River 144). Quite a few Englishmen had fallen in love with Indian monuments like the Tajmahal and “the romantic story behind this peerless mausoleum” (A River 144). A good number didn’t want to serve under the Nehru Government. They’d rather “face hardships back home than lend themselves to the indignity of working under their Indian counterparts, whom they had bossed over till the fifteenth of August” (A River 142). Even Lord Mountbatten looked rather anaemic “a little jaded in a press photograph” (A River 145). Berry refers to them as “Transit passengers” (A River 143). How ever Berry felt very much impressed by their “poise, solemnity and grandeur—traits he found utterly lacking in the new crop of Indian civil servants” (A River 143). Berry was happy at his country’s freedom; but the price that his country had to give was terrible. Berry felt sad to know that like his Chief Engineer, “most Indian bureaucrats were vindictive, mean, conceited, tardy at work and
irrepressibly corrupt. The Gandhi cap was now an ‘open sesame’ by which flew open all the portals of power.

Even when the administration passed on peacefully from the British to the Indians, there was a deluge on almost everyday in the capital and the other sensitive areas in the north, west and east. Grisly incidents were aplenty. The whole country looked as if it were trapped in religious medievalism. To the law-enforcing authorities it was distressingly nerve-racking, and a rotten affair. They felt awful and disgruntled: “Oh, this blasted job! Not a moment’s rest” (A River 45). And according to the English officers, the communal violence was spread by the same community, and not by the other. For instance the Hindu pilgrim is killed by another Hindu and the pig’s head is dumped into the mosque only by a Muslim. This would certainly provoke a series of violence in the vicinity. It was not something new for “killings were now daily occurrences all over the country” (A River 161).

Oddly enough, in the brothel behind Neel kamal, the Hindus and Muslims operated in close partnership. Thus it was an awful mess. All this ‘pralay’, the bloodletting religious rage was “happening in the land of the Buddha and Gandhi” (A River 147). It was profoundly shocking to the English officers to see the entire subcontinent lapsed into barbarism in spite of its professed cultural heritage and Emperor Ashoka’s preaching of love and peace. Gautam and Haseena stand before the famous edict of Ashoka and read it: "True religion does not recognise any barriersBetween
one human being and the other. It embraces all living creatures—man, animal and bird. Compassion, endurance, understanding and love are man’s greatest treasures” (A River 157).

Having converted once from Hinduism to Christianity, it was not difficult for Gautam to convert to Islam. When he was told that he had to receive the ‘kalma sharif’, to accept Islam before his marriage would be solemnized, Gautam said, “I’ll do it, gladly” (A River 169). This answer of him made everyone speechless and happy.

Shiv K Kumar captures the fear and anxiety of the minority community in his novel. As day by day the atmosphere vitiated by communal retribution, the minority Muslims felt threatened and so a good number of them decided to leave for good. Their choice of country was of course Pakistan. Experiencing what happened to her husband, and then to her college-going daughter, Haseena, Begum Rahim took such a painful decision. She told Gautam:

As you know already, we’ve decided to migrate to Pakistan—and that decision is absolute, irrevocable...I can’t let Salma be whisked away next. You can’t take charge of the entire family when there are abductors lurking everywhere. So, it’s time to go—to another country, I know, not ours. Leaving Allahabad would be the greatest wrench. But there’s no alternative. (A River 169)
Besides the English, the other foreigners like the Americans knew about the ongoing communal war in India. The visiting American couple Jim and Alice, for instance, asked Gautam whether it was possible for a Hindu to marry a Muslim in India. Haseena answered before Gautam responded, “But should religion be a barrier?” (A_River 172). To this Jim’s reaction was in the negative and also he added, “What a shame we kill each other in the name of god!” (A_River 172). Haseena’s immediate reaction was sharp and pointed: “This happens when our religion is just a political posture, not a matter of conviction” (A_River 172). Alice appreciated this, with her expression, “Beauty and mind” (A_River 172). It was the American couple that warned the presence of Bhole, the notorious panda to Gautam and Haseena. Bhole was loitering menacingly in the vicinity looking for Gautam and Haseena who, according to his estimate were “a Muslim couple masquerading as Hindu honeymooners” (A_River 72). It was interesting to note that the Americans were “particularly welcome anywhere in the country for their warm friendliness and their dollars—in spite of the communal turmoil” (A_River 170). That America had always been with India was revealed through Jim: “But whatever the problems, India is now a free country. You always had our sympathies, you know” (A_River 173). Jim predicted that India had a glorious future; hearing this Gautam quipped, “But a bleak present” (A_River 173).

As Gautam was a chivalrous and a Good Samaritan, he escorted Haseena’s mother and her sister to the Wagha Border near Amritsar. He was ready to undertake any
arduous and hazardous enterprise if Haseena was with him. In his words, “If I have your love, I could walk through fire” (A River 175). With the help of Berry Gautam got the emigration papers ready and even secured police escort for them from Delhi to Amritsar.

One panacea for ending the communal flare up is indirectly hinted in the novel. It is nothing but reading the holy texts of the other with an open mind. Shamlal did it when Gautam gave the The Koran to him. Shamlal was very much taken a back to red one of the sermons given there by the Prophet:

All human beings are created as a family
A single community
Then god sends His Prophets
Bearers of glad tidings,
Who guide those who believe in Him
And punish the evil (A River 191).

It was startling that Lord Krishna in the Bhagavadgita expressed the same view: “Whenever righteousness declines and evil prospers, I assume a visible shape and move as man with man, guiding the virtuous, punishing the wicked…” (A River 191). Thus the two prophets are saying the same thing. Like Jesus was sent, God sent Buddha, Guru Nanak and Mohammad from time to time as His bearers of Glad Tidings. Together they form “a clear enunciation of a sort of universal prophethood that embraces all religions—Hinduism, Christianity and Islam” (A River 191).

Gandhiji was infected with this broad perspective and was moving “towards a sort of universal religion” (A River 195). There were good journals like The Challenge that hailed Gandhiji as a “radical socialist” (A River 194), who was basically concerned with
the concept of social justice. It was Gandhiji’s firm belief; the paper reported, “The lowliest of our people are the true salt of the Indian nation... (And) the poor man, whether Hindu, Muslim or Christian, is indifferent to communal politics.... He just wants his bread and shelter” (A River 194). Gandhiji’s focus was to bring man closer to man and by juxtaposing all religions, he was trying “to neutralize any kind of religious commitment into his own brand of socialism—a social order cutting across caste, creed and colour” (A River 195).

It is a novel idea to assign a place to Gandhiji in the novel. Deeply pained at seeing the bitter communal clashes which turned into an orgy of rage and bloodbath, the “Sabarmati’s saint” (Jairam Ramesh 72) Gandhiji announced his fast unto death. Taking the cue from Gandhiji, the government of India evicted the Hindu refugees from all the mosques. They had used them as their halls of residence. Incited by the Hindu fanatics, the refugees burst into another round of dance of death. This provoked Gandhiji to take some desperate steps. His fast worked as a miracle. He set up peace committees. A week later, he announced the resumption of his prayer meetings at the Birla House. Gautam and his father saw clearly a glow of righteous wrath in Gandhiji’s eyes as the evening sun caught his face. He spoke in a feeble but firm voice “We have indulged in senseless killings, abductions, forced conversions, and we have done all this shamelessly” (A River 198). His prayer concluded with the verse:

Called by diverse names

Bhagwan or Allah

You are the same, O Lord!

Give every human being
Sanity to perceive this (A River 198).

An encouraging thing then was that when the religious violence was searing the whole country, many philanthropists and secular peace organizations had contributed generously towards the rehabilitation of the riot victims and the safe passage of refugees to the Wagha Border.

Usually man believes in god ardently when he is broken, and gripped by some innate fear. In his young age, Gautam would seldom pray. As a young man, he’d always scoff at it as man’s weakness. But the same man was praying when there was a palpable danger to his would be mother-in-law and sister-in-law on their way to the Border. He closed his eyes and started to pray: “Haven’t I suffered enough already, O God? I know I’ve no right to ask anything of you. I have lied and I have killed. But, then, what about your divine grace, your willingness to forgive and bless. I now beseech your help, not for myself but for these destitute women” (A River 208). After seeing them off safely to Pakistan, Gautam and Haseena were returning. They would be known to the world as Gautam and Haseena Gautam their first names only. And they would “start a new race—sans caste, sans religion, sans nationality” (A River 214).

What we find in Jyotirmoyee Devi’s The River Churning is how abhorrence was rooted in the Bengali middle class people’s psyche as a result of their religious intolerance when the Partition madness seized the nation. Millions of perfectly middle class citizens, who would normally want good governance, a better economy and limit their religiosity to private practice, suddenly find themselves marginalized. When they had to take a painful choice of choosing either this side or the other, with their strong cultural moorings, and their sentimental attachment to the Bengal landscape, it was
awfully difficult and trying for them to migrate from one part to the other. The landscape on which their homes were built was naturally conditioned by images of Sonar Bangla ('Golden Bengal'). This landscape was imprinted in the collective memory of the refugees. As Gyanesh Kudaisya observes, “The El Dorado which the Bengal landscape represented to them, and their desire for an abode within it signified, not so much a precise geographical location, but a state of mind” (125). The novel also presents the horizontal and vertical journey of its protagonist Sutara who belongs to a “friendless tribe” (Jyotirmoyee Devi viii). She was limping along, like a blind person groping in the dark amidst innumerable complaints, and societal strictures. Sutara’s experience was every woman’s experience. She was equated with fish, meat and oil and prohibited. She was considered characterless and so untouchable. Even though there were many aunts, uncles and sisters in the family, and many male relatives within the narrow space available for the woman, she had to cross many insurmountable barriers to develop some friendship with them. Their distorted perspective arose from their own circumscribed vision. And so Sutara had to spend her existence on crutches with certain guilt, a certain fear as though she was straying from the model path.

The novel shows that Sutara has a mind, but she has no means of expressing it. She has a heart, but a heart that is not held in esteem. As if “there is a tune, but no music; there is ‘bhava’, but no language. That is the kind of life she has” (Jyotirmoyee Devi xxii). Her grief and lament has been this novel. Having seen all that had happened to Sutara, and having been privy to the fact that the authors responsible to Sutara’s tragedy were men, Jyotirmoyee Devi indirectly calls the men folk as ‘barbarians’. 
In the novel she tries to uncover the core of the subjugation of women by a specifically male violence on which the social order is dependent. It is an order that is shot through with hypocrisy and cowardice. The Indian history is full of such male aggression, socially condoned by patriarchal values. They make women pay dearly for crimes of which they are the principal perpetrators. The novelist has detected such injustice at the heart of the vivisection of the Indian subcontinent into two and, later, into three states. The tragedy of this diasporadic communal tension that brought in benumbing moment of darkness and despair, of shock and shame quite strangely elided from our history books, but did not escape the eagle eyes of the novelist. She has convincingly brought home the extent of hatred in the society; it is a hatred that crossed the bounds of mere prejudice and descended to rape, arson, abduction and looting.

The novel resounds the cry of Sutara when she was gang-raped and thrown out as the peel of an orange. Her problem, her silent humiliation and her pain started from that moment onwards. As Jasodhara Bagchi, in her Introduction to the novel points out, “Defilement of communal honour through the violation of female sexuality is a thesis that resonates through the entire process of our nation-building, to which our popular mass media bear ample testimony” (xxviii-xxix). By keeping Sutara’s humiliation and molestation as the centre of her narrative, the novelist gradually unfolds how the teen-aged girl is ostracized not only by the caste-ridden men folks of her society but also by her own custom-steeped women folks. Sutara is thrown out as a deviant from the exclusionary boundary with which the woman’s own community preserves its caste-class purity. It is a raw truth that hordes of women like Sutara had to pass through the
gruesome chimera in order to witness the incomprehensible birth of two nation-states from the margins of the community.

It is not right to consider Jyotirmoyee Devi’s novel as an apology for social reform and social action. Her intention is make the makers of society and politicians and administrators see the unmitigated suffering and horror that they cause to the innocent children in the name of administrative advantages. They should also see that civilized societies should not allow anger to descend into the savage acts of barbarism and should take timely measures to prevent people participating in the vandalism, which is a chilling symbol of the breakdown of social values. If her novel should serve in any way to shame and warn the Indians belonging to any religion, she would be quite happy.

In the literatures of the eastern or western, the king gets back his kingdom, the heroes of war are honoured and the world resounds in praise of male bravery, acts of heroism, but strangely, it has nothing to say about the eternal ‘stree parva’, the humiliation of women, the endless exploitation of helpless women like Sutara. Behind all heroic deeds, there lurks behind a tragic chapter of shame and humiliation of innumerable women. Unfortunately the ‘stree parva’ is not over. The last words are not said yet as is evident from reports of barbarism at its worst in Ahmedabad as a backlash to the Godhra Carnage. Manas Dasgupta reports the endless agony of the minority community in The Hindu on its 31 March 2002 edition thus:

Around mid-day earlier this week, a couple on a scooter was stopped by a mob of people armed with knives and other weapons on Vasna main road in Ahmedabad. They were asked to disclose their identity. Sensing trouble the man gave a Hindu name. But the mob was not amused. He was made
to strip to confirm his identity and then stabbed in the chest and abdomen. 
(Emphasis added)

Munnabhai, 28, who migrated from Uttar Pradesh about a decade back is 
fighting for his life in hospital. His wife, Muntaz Bano, 30, who was 
stripped and stabbed repeatedly on her private parts, died instantly. 
(Emphasis added)

From reading the novel, The River Churning one is shocked to know that the 
rioters seemed to have a large measure of social sanction. This is very ominous. It is 
disgraceful that even trusted servants like Rahim and Karim of Sutara’s household 
connived with the perpetrators of violence. When the entire household was gutted down 
in the grisly fire, the servants were with seen a glee in their faces. They did not even 
leave Sutara’s mother. She jumped into the water to save her honour. The novel tells us 
with out much sentimentalism how the communal peace that had been there for many 
years was shattered and how the outraged communities went after the other committing 
the genocidal massacres. It looked as though for the Indian people in general religious 
frenzy was then the number one cause of concern. As the people at the helms sat back 
and even allowed the mobs to seek bloody revenge, the novel rightly says, “this fire is not 
likely to subside in the near future” (The River 18).

It is self evident that the reference in the novel to the Great Calcutta Killings that 
rocked the Bengali society had a strong negative impact on Bengal’s social, political and 
economic life. The mass violence on the streets threw sand into the wheels of inter-
personal relationship. What was worrying, even frightening, was that people had started 
looking upon each other as sworn enemies. People displayed utter disregard even for their
close friends and started behaving like wild beasts. And the communal violence was not exclusively restricted to its natural habitat—cities and towns—but had simultaneously taken place all over, from villages to the state capital. Institutions collapsed, governance broke down and the disparate, irate mobs ruled the streets. Bengal had blown completely apart. What had been lurking behind the masque was an ugly cancer. It sent shock waves all over the country and people started living in fear that what had happened in Bengal might happen in their town and village too. There was no doubt that among the mobs, which rampaged through the Bengali lanes and by lanes there were as many educated unemployed youth as there were lumpen youth. All this happened because the poison of communalism was then running too deep in the body politic. And it was quite common then that the Indians of the best economic standing were spouting communal opinion of the vilest kind. It looked as though the religious bigotry might not move from people’s mind in the near future. The natural flow of conversation had dried up between members of the rival religions. Circumstances “had transformed them into two sets of confused individuals. The happiness, the lively exchange they once enjoyed were stifled. Even common civilities were bruised because of the loss of near relations” (The River 40). Thus the Great Calcutta Killings was a ‘black mark’ on India. It was too mild a description.

In spite of all these, there were Tamijuddin Saheb and Ramatulla Saheb who gave shelter to the afflicted Hindu riot victims. There were plenty of rumours then that such Muslims were forcibly keeping Hindu girls and were planning to convert them. There were many lurking behind to implicate such Good Samarians. They even wanted the Muslims to hand over the girls to some philanthropic organizations and thus to save their
skins. There was “a lot of loose talk going around—the trouble makers are trying to rope in others, innocent people” (The River 22). Even the police officers, the magistrate and relief workers were collecting evidence against such good souls.

The caste Hindus were unduly perturbed about their family’s honour rather than the plight of their abducted rape victims. They refuse to take such children back. Sutara’s is a classic example. Though her Muslim neighbours were more than willing to harbour her with out any ulterior motive, Sutara’s family members turned a deaf ear to her cries. Her wail, “have my brothers come to take me…”? (The River 23) keeps on echoing in our ears. Her people would have heaved a sigh of relief if she had been killed or at least sent to an ashram or some camp specially set up for the refugees. Tamij Saheb’s wife rightly assessed the situation that Sutara’s people would not “accept her after such a long stay with a Muslim family. She was aware of Hindu prejudices. How would they react? If they refused to take her back, where would she go?” (The River 26). Surprisingly Sutara’s own kith and kin did not display such genuine concern for her. In fact, when the time came for Tamij Saheb to hand over Sutara to her unwilling brothers, she sat in a boat with Tamij Saheb, Aziz and Moinuddin. Little Moinu kept up his constant chatter, “Look at that beautiful bird, Sutardi…. You are homesick, aren’t you? Mother was crying so much, even didi. Why don’t you stay with us Sutardi? Don’t go” (The River 28). Sutara was so confused and she had no answer for Moinu. She just “held his hand hard and they sat like brother and sister while the lush green villages on the river bank kept receding” (The River 28). Such an unalloyed affection was missing in Sutara’s own household. They hated her very much. They shared their hatred for her in their conversations: “…people don’t accept girls if they have stayed with unclean communities, even for a day.
And this girl has lived and shared food with a Muslim family for more than six months!”
(The River 46).

Societal regulations and beliefs are well brought out in the ruminations of Amulya Babu who was a veteran deputy magistrate:

...individuals do not really count before groups. A social group is like the wheels of Jagannath, trampling individuals underfoot heartlessly. What were a few individuals to it, no better than insects. It did not stop for anyone, it had no time. Among Muslims it was a little different. They abducted girls but accepted them, even married them. Christian society was different. But they have shelters and homes for such girls in their own country as well as here. They may not accept them as wedded wives but they don’t throw them out in the streets either. They don’t push them into a life of sin. High caste Hindus are tied down by various regulations...
(The River 48).

As there was no easy solution to this imbroglio, the elders in the family took a convenient stand of leaving everything to fate, for according to them, one could not shoulder everyone’s responsibilities.

The novel refers to the existence of communal harmony in the good old days when Hindus had been the subjects of Muslim rulers for a long time and Muslims, too, were aware that in many princely states they had lived under Hindu kings. One community celebrated its pujas with the blowing of conch shells, with bells and shehnais it had thirteen festivals in twelve months in which Muslim drummers participated, and could sit to the community meal if they wished. The other group too exchanged good
wishes at Id, Muharram, Id-ul-Fitr. When their procession went out in the middle of the night, mourning for Hasan and Husain, Hindus lined the streets to watch. One group knew all the stories of Mahabharata, Ramayana and Kurukshetra, the other knew the tales of Karbala. Many sensible and reasonable people thought that there was no reason why they should not get along.

The novelist dwells off and on at the deep friendship of Sutara and Sakina. Sutara had never forgotten all that Sakina’s people had done for her. She “owed them her love, respect, regard and gratitude, beyond measure. Sakina’s companionship had filled her with warmth and tenderness” (The River 76). She wouldn’t even imagine what would have happened if they had not protected her. When Sutara and Sakina met after the disaster, Sakina put her arms around Sutara’s shoulders and said, “We’ll have your company for some more time” (The River 76). Their childhood affection remained as pure and selfless and loving as ever. Even when Sakina went to Karachi, she wrote regularly to Sutara. Quite ironically nobody wrote from Calcutta, where her people lived. Her own people had long since ceased to be her own, had long withdrawn from her for fear of social ostracism. So she had been living like an orphan. On the other hand, Sakina’s mother considered Sutara, “a nice girl… how fond we are of her… She would be the darling of the family” (The River 93).

With all her sadness and burden, the depressed girl undertook a holy journey to Kedarnath and Badrinath. It was not a pleasure trip like going to Simla, Mussorie or Darjeeling. It was a difficult and unfamiliar journey. Earlier Draupadi and the five Pandavas had taken the same route, “the way to the ultimate end, where all life ceased” (The River 107). Sutara took the holy dip at the holy ghat of Rishikesh. She felt
refreshed and walked to Kedar-Badri and Devprayag to complete her penance. Here there was no dividing line between the way and the wayfarer. The pilgrimage seemed to her like "an eternal journey—the great exit of the Mahabharata" (The River 106). She resumed her walk "with a happy heart, a general feeling of being at peace" (The River 113). For the first time in her life, "she was enjoying the lovely world, and its beautiful sights had lifted the burden of the worry and the neglect of years" (The River 113). Should we take it that her sin and guilt, if she had any, was washed away in her holy immersion. Her experience in the holy place was like the Christian experience of born again. The novelist observes:

...Sutara was swept off her feet by this strange and fascinating experience. Her life of twenty-eight years took a new turn. Every moment there was new magic to behold and her sorrows faded in the face of serene beauty and the grandeur of her surroundings. She heard a voice within her—all is not yet over, there are other things in life. The world contains a lot more than your tiny self. (The River 113)

From now onwards there was a sea change in her life. When Pramode held her hand out of his unbounded love, she stared at him, dumbfounded. Slowly, the tears began to form in her eyes. Through the darkness around her came a message that said, "Don't worry, Sutara, I am taking charge of you" (The River 133). That message brought with it emotions that could not be described in words. After twelve long years, "It brought hope, assurance, security, companionship, love and kindness. It was one of the most unique, most wonderful feelings she had ever experienced. Her body, which had been weighed down with all the heaviness of the earth, suddenly lifted, and she felt as light as air". (The
Litterateurs do not see Partition as something finished and done with, "a moment frozen in time" (Memon xvi). This is due to the deep mutual distrust that has always been there in the Indo-Pak relations. Even in the beginning of the new millennium, there are no clear signals that the distrust would be eased. Various incidents like-- the Indo-Pak war, war for the creation of Bangladesh, the Pokran Nuke tests, the demolition of the Babri Mosque, the proxy war in Kashmir, the Kargil conflict, the attack on the Indian Parliament, and the army build-up on the line of control—all point to the mounting tension between the two nations. In this recharged atmosphere no body seems to have a clear-cut vision as to how things will move in the future. And the leaders in both the nations have no time to look into people's suffering. Majority of people in both the nations are peace-loving folks and they look askance, as Faiz Ahmed Faiz sadly sings, Did the morning breeze ever come? Where has it gone? Nigh weighs us down, it still weighs us down (An Epic 03).

In Sadat Hasan Manto's "Sahae", the four friends (three Hindus and one Muslim) analyse the futility of killing for communal cause. When a Muslim or a Hindu is killed, the killer has not killed a Muslim, a Mumtaz, or a friend, but a human being. If he were a Muslim, one wouldn't have killed his Muslim-ness, but his being. Human characteristics like mazhab, 'din', 'iman', dharm, faith, belief—"all these were found in our soul, not in our body, and that they couldn't be annihilated by cleavers, knives, and bullets... (An Epic 09).

Raijinder Singh Bedi's "Lajwanti" besides taking up the issue of rehabilitation of women, also ridicules the conservative attitude of the village leaders who eulogise Ramachandarji even though he ordered the virtuous Sita out of the house though she was
big with a child. But there were sane and reasonable people like Sunder Lal in the village who pointed out the double standard of these leaders who had no word about Sri Ram who believed the washer-man but not his own wife, the greatest Maharani ever. But such people’s words were silenced immediately with brutal threats, “Quiet... We’ll kill you!” (An Epic 20). Many a time people mindlessly deliver such messages of hate, because they seem to enjoy the heightened passions they feel at such times. Some senior person in the crowd reminded Sundar Lal that he spoke in such a manner because he didn’t know the rules and regulations of the Shastras. Sundar Lal persisted, “But I do understand one thing, Bawa. And it is that even a washer-man could be heard in Ram Raj, while its champions today won’t even listen to Sundar Lal” (An Epic 20). Sundar Lal was deeply pained by the fact that innumerable Sitas had been then abducted and confined secretly for their private enjoyment and the attitude of those who had lost them was lukewarm. They were not very enthusiastic either to trace them or to take them back for they were considered ‘soiled’. Sita was sent out for the second time, this time because she was compelled to live with Ravan for some time. Sita, “the Queen of Virtue” had to suffer for no sin of her own. As Sundar Lal was a good human being he accepted his wife with joy. He told her, “Let’s just forget the past. You were hardly to blame for what happened. Society is at fault for its lack of respect for goddesses like you.” (An Epic 28).

It makes for very chilling reading to note the horrible treatment meted out to great scholars, and saints like Dauji at the time of the Partition violence by thugs and unlettered criminals. Ashfaq Ahmad captures such a moment of humiliation and sadness in his long narrative, “The Shepherd”. The ominous, bloody-looking Muhajir men seized Dauji as he happened to be a Hindu and snatched the turban from his head, and clipped off the ‘bodi’
with a sickle that was used for pruning twigs and branches. A chap by name Ranu said, “He’s far too old. May be I can use him to tend my goats” (An Epic 85). And then, Ranu struck Dauji’s bare head so hard that he nearly fell down. He fumed, “Sale, bastard...” (An Epic 85). Ranu then shoved his lathi into Dauji’s hands and ordered him to tend his goats.

Many stories like “Banished”, “Do You Suppose It Is the East Wind?” and “Roots” portray the suffering of women and how their dreams of paradise were shattered. The jagged splinter of their broken life was a concern not only to themselves but also to those who were near them. After having gone through the trauma, their path before them seemed like “a cremation ground. It’s desolate” (Jamila Hashimi “Banished” (An Epic 94). They could never comprehend how everything they cherished in their heart of hearts would crumble away like a dream one day. The little paradise they had fashioned from love and affection was so covered over with dust that they looked in vain for even a hint of freshness anywhere. They were wondering whether they were merely shadows of reality like photographs. What an amount of oddest thoughts they had entertained in their foolish, naïve hearts! But everything turned like a doll’s house devoid of reality. They found themselves in paths which criss-crossed each other so often that they were confused and lost their way. Many like Munni’s mother were counting her days sitting under the shade of the neem tree spinning her wheels with her tongue-tied. These women had been treated like leftover by their kith and kin and so nobody turned in their direction. They could only long for their parental homes but no chance of reaching there, for many of them had been abducted and kept captives hidden from outside view. They
were full of love but their love could not find any new crutches. Exiled or not they were compelled to move on in life's fair.

Amidst the reign of madness, and organized hysteria, there were some gems of men who gave their time and energy to the riot victims. The world was alive then because of such men. Dina Nath of Upender Nath Ashk's "Tableland" is one such man. He had never made any distinction between Muslims and Hindus. He knew that in Pakistan, the believers of the Rabbul Alamin had subjected innocent Hindus in Pakistan, and the worshippers of Bhagwan had subjected innocent Muslims in Hindustan and they would not be able "to atone for it even in seven successive births" (An Epic 125). Himself a riot victim from Pakistan, and a T.B. patient, with the little energy he had, he had been collecting donations for the rehabilitation of refugees. He wouldn't easily give up even when faced with stiff resistance. As his brother's letter from Delhi shows, "Man is pretty stubborn. He just doesn't give up his fascination with life no matter how bitter, how painful the situation. These days all of us are proving just that: our stubbornness" (An Epic 112). With a Muslim friend by name Qasim Bhai, Dina Nath went from shop to shop, and door to door collecting everything they could get. Their loud appeal would be: Stop the riots! Help the Refugees! Dina Nath had a mixed experience. Some contributed wholeheartedly. Some gave everything that they had for the noble cause like the widow in the Bible shows who gave away everything she had:

As Jesus sat near the temple treasury, he watched the people as they dropped in their money. Many rich men dropped in a lot of money; then a poor widow came along and dropped in two little copper coins, worth about a penny. He called his disciples together and said to them, 'I tell you
that this poor widow put more in the offering box than all the others. For the others put in what they had to spare of their riches; but she, poor as she is, put in all she had—she gave all she had to live on. (Mark 12: 41-44)

As Dina Nath was walking along the tableland looking at the seductive beauty of the landscape, he saw the bungalows, and the dingy houses and their inmates “who had handsome faces but ugly hearts, or ugly faces and good hearts” (An Epic 122).

In spite of the bitter enmity prevalent between the Muslim and Sikh communities then, there were instances of giving one’s precious life for the other. Ahmad Nadim Qasimi’s “Parmeshar Singh” presents such a Sardharji. Parmeshar had lost his son in the fast spreading communal virus. It was then he sighted Akhtar, a Muslim boy who was abandoned inadvertently by his mother on her way fleeing to Pakistan. Through mounting pressures and stinking criticisms even facing threats, Parmeshar took the boy home to bring him up as his own son. Surprisingly even the boy was not willing to be in Parmeshar’s home, fearing that he might be killed there. But the Sardharji never lost his heart and loved the boy very much and brought him up as a Sikh boy. He fed the five year old boy with his own hands, kissed him on the forehead, patted his back, and having eased him into bed, he went on gently massaging his head. Many a time he pleaded with his wife that “Kartare (his missing son) and Akhtar were brought into the world by the same Vahguruji” (An Epic 133). His parochial and fanatic Sikh companions even thought, “Parmeshar’s gone half-mad” (An Epic 130). The Sardharji himself was a refugee from Lahore. However when the boy wanted to go back to his mother, “Parmeshar Singh’s face turned so red that he seemed about to cry” (An Epic 144). He sat on the boy’s cot for a long time. That day he had also heard a speech delivered by an
army officer in the village to hand over all the abducted especially women. He concluded his speech with the following words:

And what is religion, my friends? Doesn't every religion teach man to be truly a human being after all? Now look at your conduct. In the name of religion you take away from man his humanity. You trample on his dignity. You call yourselves Sikhs, you call yourselves Muslims. You say we are followers of Vahguruji, we are slaves of the Prophet. (An Epic 146)

Parmeshar Singh imagined the torrent of pain Akhtar's mother might be undergoing every moment for the missing son. And so he took Akhtar to his mother's country and at the moment of returning, he was hit by a bullet and died. His dying words were, "Why did you have to shoot me? I just forgot to clip Akhtar's 'kes'! I only came to return Akhtar to his dharm, 'yaaro'!" (An Epic 151-152).

Fanatics need no sanction to do what they want to do because they believe that God—or some sectarian version of Him—gives them the right. At the time of the partition too there were many fanatics—both Hindu and Muslim—making the most noise in which part their province would be. Qadirpur, in Intizar Husain's "An Unwritten Epic", was one such province where the Muslims had dreamed that their province would go with Pakistan. In a situation fraught with ugly possibilities and frightening tensions, the Muslim leaders like Pichwa and Naim Miyan were getting their followers ready for a final showdown. The young men who took vantage points to attack the Hindus were fanatic zealots who believed that this kind of violence was an honourable activity because it was done in the name of Allah. Pichwa had even told them, "I'll roast anyone of you
bastards alive who shows the slightest weakness" (An Epic 155). They sharpened their weapons and got ready to beat the enemies to a pulp. Pichwa, the local hero, was inwardly happy that at last he had a chance to display publicly his skill with the club. With both authority and excitement, he ordered his band, 'Tighten your belts, lads. After a long time dear Almighty God has finally heard us. We are going to have the time of our lives—God be praised!' (An Epic 161). Unquestionably it was his faith's fury, in the words of Prasannarajan, "the rage of the crescent" (36). Pichwa was one of such warriors with medieval fury, a mad mahant and a man of the zeitgeist, not so remote from the mad mullahs of Islam or the ethnic cleansers of Christendom. Slaughtering people amidst religious frenzy was certainly an amusing sport to these people. Passion plays of religion cannot be explained by stereotypes alone. Religion with a capital R is the most defining and destabilizing force that has emerged out of the wreckage of ideology. The zealots in Qadirpur considered the impending showdown as nothing short of a communal war. This is evident from the young man Mammad's bursting: "I swear by the Master if Qadirpur doesn't win, Mammad is not his father's son" (An Epic 161). Their fanaticism did not end even when Pakistan ditched them by not including Qadirpur in their map. They decided to make their own separate Pakistan by flying on the banyan tree by the Eidgah an Islamic flag representing Pichwa's group, not the flag of Pakistan. Such was the magnetic hold of the radical Islam on its votaries. The radical Hindu was in no way different. Secularism to them was a false conceit.

In spite of the widespread communal disturbances, like the oases in the desert, there were instances of people of one community helping the other braving all dangers. Ismat Chughtai's "Roots" presents such an experience. In a particular place in the
Marwar region, where the Hindus outnumbered the Muslims, the fanatic Hindus made open demonstrations to scare away the Muslims. Their intention was to cleanse the place of Muslims. They didn’t care a hoot for human emotions. It was in such a volatile situation, Roopchandji, the Hindu doctor came to the rescue of his Muslim neighbours in a big way. In fact, after Abba’s death, a sense of responsibility was added on to the love Roopchandji had for the Muslim neighbour. Nothing important was done without consulting the Doctor Sahib first. When “Farida quarrelled with her husband and went back to her parents, her husband approached Doctor Sahib and the following day Farida returned with her husband” (An Epic 195). However when the Muslim family left in a hurry to cross the border, leaving behind the stubborn mother, it was Dr. Roopchandji who went after them like a whirlwind, traced and reprimanded the “good-for-nothing sons” (An Epic 202) of Amma and brought them back with the assurance that he would be with them in thick and thin.

The Hindu-Muslim friendship is treated in many stories in the three volumes of Alok Bhalla—Stories About the Partition of India too. In Salil Choudhary’s “The Dressing Table”, for instance, Rahim received a letter from Amal, wherein the latter deplored the murderous riot that took place in Calcutta and with a terrible fear complex and in despair, he added, “Please forgive my weakness. I was proud of my people and my country. Today that pride has been shattered. I always praised man for his humanity, but I forgot his capacity for bestiality. Now it is the beast in man which has begun to prowl” (SAP I 36).

S.H. Vatsayan Ajneya’s “Getting Even” stresses the humanity in man. It shows not all men are bad. Even though haunted by visions of
burning houses and bodies that followed the communal clashes, and though with a depressing psyche, the Sardharji in the story escorted the helpless Muslim woman Suraiya and her little daughter from Delhi to Aligarh. He would not take revenge for what had happened to him at Shekhupura. He took a decision to do good for the evil; in his words

... whatever happened to me should never happen to another. That is why I escort people back and forth between Delhi and Aligarh. It helps to pass the days, and I am able to get even just a little. And in this way if someone should happen to kill me someday, the account will at last be closed—it matters little whether the killer is a Muslim, or a Hindu! 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 makes a reference to a doctor who brings in solace and comfort to innumerable number of people in a refugee camp specially set up for riot victims in her story, “A Leaf in the Storm”. It was he who softened the Sikh rape-victim Jyoti who was pregnant as a result of repeated abuse. The doctor was specially trained in Gandhiji’s camp to serve the battered refugees. However, he never thought that he would have to undergo such an ordeal in the camp, which was overflowing with people. They were victims of savage attacks and so were still looked dazed. The doctor was a disciple of the supreme master of ahimsa. It was at his master’s instance that “he had given up a well-paying job to serve the refugees here” (SAP I 139).
In Yaspal's story "The Holy War", the Muslim man Fazzay is portrayed as a compassionate human being, whereas his son Nasru is presented as a hard-hearted predatory ruffian who pursued his fanatic religious cause by terrorism. What he did to the helpless innocent old woman Moolan Tai makes for very chilling reading. Unable to digest it, the father cursed the son, "May you burn in hell..." (SAP I 201). It is reasonable, compassionate and level-headed people like Fazzay who always assured us that no matter how grim the tragedy, not all men were deviant and devoid of finer human sentiments.

That there was a lot of distrust and suspicion even among friends when the communal monster was ravaging the different places is evident from S. H. Vatsayan Ajneya's story "The Refuge". Taking asylum in his best Muslim friend's house, Devenderlal enjoyed the hospitality there. But one day his food came not from his friend's house, but from the house of his friend's friend. It was from Zaibunissa's father's house. His instinct told him that the food was poisoned. So he gave it to the waiting cat, which the moment it ate it, fell down and dead. His Muslim friend failed to protect him. Devenderlal became very bitter and was wondering whether that was 'azadi' and brotherhood.

By the end of those days of exacerbate rioting, as Suraiya Qasim's story shows, "the Hindus had won, the Muslims had won, but humanity had lost" (SAP II 115). According to her, it was the professional jealousy that had festered for years found an outlet in communal frenzy. Ironically, the rioters and arsonists were even jealous of the brothel establishment kept by Ma.
Though a Bihari, Abdul Waheed never considered himself so when the question of saving his Bengali friend Nurul from the mouth of hell in Ibrahim Jalees's sad tale "A Grave Turned Inside-Out". Nurul was his dear friend and for him (Abdul) friendship "had no nationality, (and) knew no geographical boundary..." (SAP II 144). Abdul Waheed, in spite of his wife's protests, ran to Nurul's house to rescue Nurul's wife from the cruel clutches of the goon Hassan Ullah. But, a bullet fired from Hassan Ullah's pistol had pierced Abdul Waheed's body and he died on the spot. There could not be any greater sacrifice than this, that a man giving his precious life for another man.

Saadat Hasa Manto's story "Mozel" also brings in the sacrifice. But it was of a slightly different nature. Here, Mozel, a Jewish woman gives her life and honour to save her former male-friend Tirlochen and his wife from the ferocious crowd. Tirlochen who was not willing to make a compromise on his religion to marry Mozel, looked abashed at Mozel's naked body.

K. A. Abbas's "The Death of Sheikh Burhanuddin" too deals with the great sacrifice of a Sikh to a Muslim neighbour. When the Sikh prevented some violent goons from looting and killing the Muslim family, they attacked him and killed him. The Muslim narrator asked the bleeding Sikh, why he had done that. The Sardarji called him son and added that he had a debt to pay, for back in Rawalpindi a Muslim had sacrificed his life to save the life of the Sardarji and the honour of his family.

Lalithambika Antharjanam's "The Moher of Dhirendu Muzumdar" speaks about the great sacrifice done by the Bengali youth for Independence, but the irony was that their sacrifice went waste because of the Partition. As Punjab was divided in the northwest, Bengal was divided in to two. This angered many. Antharjanam brings out the
anger through the speech of the mother of the patriot Dhirendu Muzumdar who exploded that history was not going to forgive Gandhi and Nehru:

When they divided the country finally in the name of religion and caste, I asked the great emperor Nehru: With whose consent did you cut off Bengal’s head? With whose permission did you separate us? Here no one is a Hindu, no one is a Muslim. We are all Bengalis. 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)

She rightly said it because when storms and floods and contagious ailments and starvation confronted them, people would throw away their caste and religion to the wind and come together to tackle the common menace.

It is awfully surprising and ironical to note that India whose major religion is Hinduism, which is a tolerant religion, its adherents were not. As Manjula Padmanabhan observes referring to the Ahmedabad imbroglio as a sequel to the Godhra Carnage, “By responding negatively to the Islamic flavour of the name, they show (the Hindu fundamentalists) themselves capable of the very fanaticism they claim to despise in Islam” (58). Both the religious groups let things fester and slowly even the politicians find themselves helpless of the situation. But the same India once had a different open cultural structure. As Firaq Gorakhpuri sings,

To India came caravans from all over the world,

Each found a home here and so India was made (Alok Bhalla vii).
India had gone a long way from this broad cultural base at the time of the Partition. Through the 19th century and till about 1935, the Hindu and Muslim intellectuals worked hard and successful too to creating free spaces for enlightened thought than with confining people within their narrow and parochial religious and communal identities. It does not mean that there was no organization covertly or openly spread hatred towards each other and ignited communal violence, but they were a microscopic minority, and common people did not attach any importance to them. In the society then, “People who commanded respect were the ones who acknowledged the dependence of the Hindus and the Muslims on each other and encouraged acts of ‘well-doing’. Raja Ram Mohan Roy, whom many thought was more inclined to Islam, edited the first Persian newspaper in 1822 Miraatul Akhbar (Mirror of News). In 1857, the Hindu Muslim soldiers fought the British together. Premchand wrote about movingly the duty of Hindu and Muslim friends toward each other and the country in Karmbhumi (1932). One could go on adding endlessly to the list of people who thought that the notion of a unified state, with its multiplicity of religious, social or moral ideals, had legitimacy, not only because it made good sense, but also because it was derived from a long practice of living together. It was incomprehensible that there was always hatred between Hindus, Sikhs and Muslims in their day-to-day existence. Even at the time of 1946, the daily life of the Hindus and the Muslims, at the ordinary and local levels was so richly interwoven as to have formed a rich archive of customs and practices. That was why people were shocked and chilled in disbelief at seeing the unprecedented communal violence. Most of the stories analysed in this study would reveal some coherent explanations for the sudden eruption of irrational passions amidst the people then so violently that, clean oblivious of their humanity, long
patience and endurance, and religious faith and cultural pride they began to stalk and kill each other.

As one goes through the various narratives of the Partition holocaust, a good many questions come into one’s mind—Why didn’t we, as people resist? Why didn’t we follow Gandhi, as we had done before? How did the complex structure of works and deeds and words that the three major communities had so suddenly come apart? Why did we believe that our faith alone would lead us to social justice and ‘mukthi’? How did the ones who had indulged in a killing spree or raping spree continue to live afterwards—with guilt, remorse, or continuing exultation? How should we now remember this gory past so that, overcoming anger, angst, grief and irreparable terrible loss, may now start living to work towards a new civilized order? If all religions are one, as saints and visionary poets and enlightened prophets tell us, and if god resides in the human heart, why did religious conflicts destroy the communal fabric of the subcontinent? Why did people resort to an eye-for-an-eye and a tooth-for-a-tooth philosophy? The answers we seek and our findings will normally be based upon our belief and practice, our diverse background and vision. But one thing is quite certain, that God in heaven is watching as Gualam Abbas’s “Avtar: A Hindu Myth” shows. The cries of the innocent victims reach as far as Devlok and it is quite apparent that the evil that he sees would make him shudder. And he curses the Man: “You are not human beings. You are worse than jackals. The earth, which has given birth to you and sustained you, is so fed up with your deeds that it wants to sink into the nether world. Even the Gods above curse you, although you claim to worship them” (SAP III 204). It is a shocking irony and a cause for great concern that India—the million year old ancient country with a plethora of
religions and especially the land of the Peace-incarnate Buddha who preached and had his life's mission to 'conquer hatred with love'--has taken a reverse route.

What is the way out from this malaise? The only solution is that one should regard the other as an equal, for as M. K. Gandhi says in his Communal Unity, "We are all equal before our maker--Hindus, Mussalmans, Parsis, Christians, worshippers of one God" (291). If people begin to realise this, then there may not be any fight among them. Reading and trying to understand the holy texts of the other is another solution. We have before us Gandhi as a model. He says, "I am also a reader of the Quran like them, and I will tell them that the Quran makes no distinction between Hindus and Mussalmans" (M. K. Gandhi 1949, 291). Seeing the mass murder and the unruly behaviour of communal forces from both the communities, Gandhi's soul was sick unto death, and he very often wished that he were not on earth. The communal leaders of both the communities put hatred and distrust into the minds of their sheepish followers. As the saying goes, sow the wind and you reap the whirlwind. Instead of moving towards a universal religion, the followers of Vivekananda and Prophet Mohammad have been moving towards a narrow and parochial hate zone, which facilitates a wholesale mass killing. They have conveniently forgotten what religious savants like Vivekananda have pointed out time and again. For instance, in discussing the ideal of universal religion, he says, "Nothing makes us so cruel as religion, and nothing makes us so tender as religion. This has been so in the past, and will also, in all probability, be so in the future" (Gautam Ghosh 01). The majority of the people think that they do all these havoc to please their God. They
conveniently forget that God is their Brother who stands among the helpless brothers that
they annihilate. How can they profitably worship their God if they do not heed Him? If
they do not pluck out their hatred and prejudice embedded deeply in their mindset and
allow love, equality and respect for the other to blossom, cleanse themselves of their sins
accumulated over the past many years, there may not be any lasting and durable peace in
this sacred land of ours. A verse from Tagore's Gatanjali will be a fitting conclusion to
this thesis:

Life of my life, I shall ever try to keep my body pure,
knowing that thy living touch is upon all my limbs.
I shall ever try to keep all untruths out from my
thoughts, knowing that thou art that truth which has
kindled the light of reason in my mind.
I shall ever try to drive all evils away from my heart
and keep my love in flower, knowing that thou hast
thy seat in the inmost shrine of my heart.
And it shall be my endeavour to reveal thee in my
actions, knowing it is thy power gives me strength to act. (04)