Chapter II

Cyclone of Events: Cities Dissolving in Flames and Blood

Who do you accuse, my dear brother
Hang your head in shame.
It is a sin committed by us, you and me.
(TAGORE qtd. in The River Churning 119)

When India was in the threshold of independence, a storm of violence and hatred among different communities was at its peak in many parts of the country. People became fanatics overnight. Even the deserted calm areas wore an eerie quiet look. The upheaval erupted at that time had no parallel in India’s history. Seeing a smack of it in the length and breadth of the nation, Gandhi said, “but this is not the independence I wanted. To my mind it will be no independence if India is partitioned and the minorities do not enjoy security, protection and equal treatment in the two parts” (PYARELAL 106).

Soon after Jinnah’s call for ‘Direct Action’, other leaders of the Muslim League started delivering inflammatory speeches and the reputed dailies even carried them. The Tribune on 11 April 1946 reported the speech of Malik Sir Feroze Khan Noon: “The havoc which the Muslims will play will put to shame what Halaku did” (GANDA SINGH 27). The Halaku Khan was one of the most cruel and remorseless destroyers of life and property. Inspired by such heady speeches, the Muslim League initially targeted Haripur Hazara, a stronghold of the Muslim League in the Northwestern district. The Hindus and Muslims were negligible in number there. They were caught unawares when fire and sword played against them. There was
literally a bloodbath. Having been very successful there, the League then began its fire and sword operation in the central Punjab and in the cities of Amritsar and Lahore in March 1947. Many parts of these cities were burnt down in a few days. The carnage and contagion very soon spread to other cities and towns. The Hindus and Sikhs of Punjab were left with no alternative. Very soon violence began to spread to Ferozepur, Ludhiana, Sheikhupura, Gurdaspur, Sialkot, Montgomery, Lyallpur, Gujranwala and Jullundur Doab. The Sikhs had been spread out in these towns and cities. The whole of “Punjab was ablaze” (Swarna Aiyar 17). Many saw it as an unmistakable enactment of the gruesome slaughter witnessed some 2500 years before Christ at almost the same province (Kurushetra) when the earth trembled with a loud noise and the horizon became dim. Some people thought that such things were happening because The Mahabharata advocated retaliation. However sensible people thought that the victory of the sword was no victory at all. As Gandhi says, “Victory of the Pandavas was an empty nothing” (Communal Unity 412).

Quite naturally, the joy of freedom was drowned low by the exceptionally savage massacres that gripped these cities in the north, west and Bengal in the east. However, according to Swarna Aiyar, “the province most affected by these dark side of independence was the Punjab which was caught in the maelstrom of unprecedented violence”(15).

The disturbances in March 1947 in West Punjab lasted about three weeks at its peak intensity. This was the first phase of violence. It was marked by large-scale arson and destruction of property. The villages were also affected. The second phase between April and July was characterised by organised raiding and stabbing in both cities and villages. The rural areas were very tense. The uneasy calm of the Boundary Commission over the fate of Punjab made the situation still more volatile. Revenge
and retaliation were the principal passions expressed by all the communities as each faction swore to get 'an eye for an eye'. Stinking bodies of the three communities were seen strewn all over the railway tracks and stations. The evacuees were harassed at every stage of their journey. It was a journey downward to hell, for as Swarna Aiyar points out, "they were refused food and water and medical supplies"(20). In the report of a British army officer, "There were dead and dying in every rail track, and their bodies were covered by bile and excreta. The smell was almost unbearable" (Aiyar 20).

Muslims, Hindus and Sikhs turned to unspeakable violence to sweep clean of the other from their respective territories. To make matters worse, the authorities had to use force in boundary demarcation in the Frontier and Bengal. At the time of the Noakhali riots, the Muslims organised themselves beforehand to drive out all the Hindus. Though Gandhi was at that time in Noakhali, visiting village after village trying to restore order and to have a frank dialogue with the Muslims to make them calm, the Muslim leaders "sensing ... it a challenge to their own authority, they had begun to stir the populace's hostility to the Mahatma and his mission" (Collins and Lapierre 54). Even the school children were whisked off his way, as if "the old man approaching was a bogeyman come to cast some evil spell over them" (Collins and Lapierre 54). Gandhi was deeply pained. But still, proclaiming it aloud, "You shall have to divide my body before you divide India" (Collins and Lapierre 21), the 77 year old Gandhi like an aged, tired pilgrim to his sacred shrines, was going to "the hate-wasted villages of Noakhali covering 116 miles, visiting on bare foot of Noakhali's villages, seeking to restore "Noakhali's shattered peace" (Collins and Lapierre 21). Gandhi's lone mission to check "fraternal blood" (Collins and Lapierre 22) was not at all a success, the Noakhali outbursts shortly became a "firestorm to set
the whole sub-continent ablaze” (Collins and Lapierre 20). In their sensational book Freedom at Midnight, Collins and Lapierre graphically describe the violence of hatred in Noakhali:

Inflamed by fanatical leaders, by reports of Hindus killing their co-religionists in Calcutta, its Moslems, like Moslems all across Noakhali, had suddenly turned on the Hindu minority that shared the village with them. They had slaughtered, raped, pillaged, and burned, forcing their neighbours to eat the flesh of their sacred cows, sending others fleeing for safety across the rice paddies. Half the huts in Srirampur were blackened ruins. (20)

It was quite clear that the Muslims in East Bengal wanted the Hindus to leave. Unable to pull on for long, the exodus of the Hindus was continuing from Noakhali. In November 1946 when Gandhi visited the villages of Noakhali, as his text Communal Unity shows, “There were tears in his eyes” (442). Wherever he visited, he saw pathetic sights of awful destruction. At that time it looked as though the Muslims had looked upon him as their enemy No. 1.

Close to the heels of the orgy of madness in Noakhali, Assam was caught fire. The Hindus were a minority there. The Muslims mindlessly attacked them. Gandhi felt furious to hear it and he thought, “Man had sunk lower than the brute” (Communal Unity 386). Hopes that Bengal would be limping back to normalcy were very much shattered by the terrible events taking place in Eastern Bengal. Arson, murder, pillage and oppression became the day-to-day happenings. There were several incidents of forcible conversions and forced marriages. The name of religion had been dragged in for committing such atrocious deeds. The private sanity pitted against public madness was tested severely in every place.
The carnival of blood and bestiality did not sicken people as had been expected by the authorities. In Calcutta the streets were deserted and hills of garbage heaps were there wherever one turned to. Madness was witnessed in the entire rows of gutted shops and burnt-out houses in the side streets and by-lanes as far as one could see. The houses in the villages Noakhola, Sonachak and Khipara in the Lakhimpur Thana had almost all been burnt down. The betel nut and the coca-nut trees surrounding the houses were also scorched. "Those that were not killed or did not run away," to quote Gandhi's *Communal Unity*, "were said to have been converted including a deaf-mute.... The few women that remained were all weeping and wailing in a heart-rending manner" (437-438). Places of worship had also been desecrated and gutted down. Broken images of the divine idols were strewn all over the place.

In September and October 1946, reports of killings and stabbings continued to pour in from different towns and cities. Terrible disturbances in Calcutta, Dacca, Allahabad and Bombay unnerved the leaders. Gandhi, on hearing these, left Delhi for Bengal and visited the affected villages as an apostle of peace. Wherever he went, he saw burnt houses, and heard heart-rending tales of cruelty, looting, and forcible conversions. Gandhi sadly observes in his *Communal Unity*: "Hindu women were without the auspicious vermilion mark on their heads and foreheads and without their conch shell bangles" (438). In all these places obviously the Muslims had lost their balance and gave vent to the spirit of vengeance and retaliation. The highest codes of morality and tenets of the great Islam had no sway over these multitudes. As days passed by, murder, loot, arson, abduction and forcible marriages and forcible conversions went on unabated. Bazaars and schools lay empty. Even school buildings did not escape the mass fury. Gandhi felt that "Bengal was a big province. If the community problem could be solved here," as his *Communal Unity* shows, "it would
be solved elsewhere also” (441). He wished and prayed intently that Bengal should not go by Punjab that recoursed to the primitive laws of blow for blow. God alone knew, as Gandhi’s text Communal Unity shows, “how his heart wept and what agony he suffered at the madness the people had indulged in (sic) in Noakhali, Bihar and ...Punjab” (584). Strangely nobody thought at that time that if division was the only alternative, then it could be done by mutual goodwill and understanding.

Before long Bihar was also in the turmoil. Gandhi was then in Noakhali. He was pained beyond measure to see the madness sweeping over the rather peaceful inhabitants of Bihar. It looked Bihar was avenging Noakhali. Here Muslim residents were subjected to concentrated attack. Reading about the conflagration in the press, Gandhi sent wire to the Interim Prime Minister Nehru to intervene immediately and to put an end to the senseless savagery and bring the goondaic activities under control. The well-meaning leaders felt that the evil should not spread through out India, as it did once in 1857 (Sepoy Mutiny). The shocked Nehru delivered a threat to the guilty parties: “The Central Government would never tolerate such barbarism. They would even use aerial bombing to put it down (emphasis added) (Communal Unity 414).

Torching and large scale destruction of property and pathetic cries to come out of the fiery hell and wild howls for revenge were day to day occurrences even in the nation's capital, Delhi just prior to and after the Partition. Shiv K. Kumar is describing such an incident here in his A River With Three Banks:

Right ahead, all along Pahar Ganj, a terrible blaze of fire—yellow, brown and red flames—was shooting in to the sky...the fire had engulfed all the timber shops in this area—the godowns stacked with teak, bamboo and deodar. The incensed flames were gutting everything in their way....
The fire had now engulfed a four-storied building looming above one of the timber shops, and frantic streams were coming from the top floor. By now a large crowd had gathered, yelling for revenge. Instead of making way for the fire engines, groups of people stood excitedly around, blocking the road and shouting ‘Har Har Mahadev!’(29)

According to a bigoted police officer, “those bloody Muslim arsonists” (A River 29) were responsible for the fire. Streets looked completely deserted and an eerie silence had fallen on both sides of the main road.

The small crowd that stood around the fire now got ready for violence. One man cried out that he saw a missile from the Ajmeri Mosque that set it off. He himself saw it. He added, “Kill those bastard Muslims, those Pakistani spies!” (A River 30). A few others now joined with knives and sticks of explosives. Most of the streetlights had been smashed. A strict warning from the Police Commissioner eased the tense situation. The crowd murmured, “These hybrid Englishmen were always for the Muslims!” (A River 30-31). The violent Hindu mob felt that Nehru and Mountbatten were taking sides with the Muslims. So they referred to them “stupid Nehru” and “Pandit Mountbatten” (A River 31). When the crowd in the capital was indulging in senseless violence, Gandhi was in Noakhali nursing the wounds of the Muslims.

In Mahavir Street in Delhi, in retaliation to Abdul’s (father of Haseena) murder, a large mob of Muslims armed with knives, swords, spears and sticks, took out a procession with an outburst of shouting, “Allah- ho-Akbar!” The crowd was led by a young tough guy who was shouting through a microphone: “Khoon-ka- badla- khoon! Blood for blood!” The other youngsters joined the chorus: “Kill the bloody ‘kafirs’! Castrate them! Rape their women... Ya Ali, Ya Mohammad!” (A River 54). Gentlemen like Gopinath Trivedi, an avowed Hindu, would “always put up a large
green flag with a crescent, whenever a Muslim mob passed by” (A River 56) just to save their skin in those turbulent times. He did so because when the two belligerent communities had sworn to eternal enmity and determined to destroy the other, it was sheer foolhardiness to announce one’s real identity.

It was strange and surprising that even animals had been branded Hindu. When ‘kafirs’ were not available for a blood bath, they sought the ‘kafir’ cows for butchery. As Shiv K. Kumar shows when a cow was seen muzzling into a heap of garbage for something to chew, one of the Muslims shouted, “The Kafir cow!” (A River 57) and hurled his spear at the animal. It let out “a jet of deep, red blood…. The cow bellowed out in pain, almost a heart-renting human cry, then slumped to the ground, basking its head against a lamp post” (A River 57-58). The others tore apart its body, limb by limb. On their faces, a demonic rage was glowing that lusted for blood “the blood of even a Hindu cow” (A River 58). The ghastly sight nauseated Gautam so much that he blurted out with deep revulsion, “What satanic butchery!” (A River 58).

A couple of days after Gautam’s encounter with Haseena at the Bridge, “Delhi witnessed an unprecedented explosion of communal frenzy” (A River 86). It all started with shovelling the mutilated carcass of a cow into the Shiva temple, near St. John’s Church. A Hindu journal Our Land condemned it in its editorial and pointed its finger at the Indian Muslims who were responsible for it. Within two days, India was in the grip of another cycle of communal frenzy. Thousands of Muslims were massacred, their houses were burned down and their property was looted. As Shiv K. Kumar points out, “the Muslims too retaliated furiously” (A River 87). The streets of Delhi were littered with dead bodies of men and women and children. They were “rotting on the pavements, waiting to be hauled away by the police” (A River 88).
As Gautam was taking Haseena from the brothel secretly to Allahabad, “another hotbed of violence” (A River 88), they saw a house ablaze with a solitary fire engine fighting the flames. There was a large crowd. Someone shouted: “It must be some bloody Muslim arsonists! We’ll wipe out the whole lot of them” (A River 96). Intermittently, the cry, “Har, Har Mahadev” rented the sky.

Partition did not leave any city untouched. Allahabad, which means the ‘City of God’ became “an arena of violence” (A River 114). As the Hindus were a majority there, the Muslims felt very insecure. Most of them had already fled to Pakistan. Those who opted to stay back, herded together in small, cohesive colonies, scattered all over the city for safety. In spite of Maulana Abul Kalam Azad and Jawaharlal Nehru’s repeated requests to both the communities to come out and mix freely, they refused to stir out. They mistrusted each other. A Hindu cab driver that had a three-striped caste mark on his forehead told Gautam, “You can’t be friends with Muslims any longer…. They are bastards, Sir—fanatic Pakistani at heart” (A River 115). This was the typical Hindu attitude towards the Muslims then. The Muslims were also gearing up to encounter any possible attack on them. As Gautam, Haseena and Ahmed (Haseena’s brother) were walking deep into a ‘mohalla’, Gautam noticed

...many bearded blacksmiths squatting on the pavements, like street vendors. Bending over furnaces, they were hammering away—smelting, sharpening, fabricating. Nearby, on the bare ground, lay heaps of knives, swords, daggers, spears and hatchets. The place looked like an open arsenal of Muslim weaponry for defence against any possible Hindu raid. (117)

Gautam on seeing this felt that the sub-continent had become a savage battlefield. People had lost their sanity. “Nobody had foreseen the gruesome
consequences of this Partition. Not even Mahatma Gandhi!” (A River 118). Going by the happenings, Gautam felt that Allahabad was essentially “a city of the dead”, and therefore one of the most depressing places in the country” (A River 121). In Allahabad a Hindu ‘Panda’ told Gautam and Haseena near the great fort built by Asoka, “If only we could snuff out all the Muslims from Allahabad, bring them to this Fort and butcher them here. That’s how we wipe out an entire British garrison during the mutiny” (A River 130). Hearing the tirade against the Muslims, Gautam and Haseena’s nerves were totally shattered and they felt as if “they had waded through a river of blood” (A River 130).

The police officers in the cities and towns had a hell of time in controlling the mob fury and quench the fires. William Thornton, the police officer felt very tired and told Berry, “Oh, this blasted job! Not a moment’s rest” (A River 145). It was distressingly nerve-racking and nightmarish to be on the run all the time, with the “daily dose of arson, rape and killing” (A River 146). The truth behind the cyclone of events was awfully intriguing and a rotten affair because the police commissioner had secret and reliable information that “It’s always a Hindu who throws a cow’s carcass into a temple, and a Muslim who dumps a pig’s head into a mosque…. Diabolic ingenuity…. The idea is to keep the battle raging” (A River 146). Once again it was a Hindu who set fire to a cinema hall near Asaf Ali Road in Delhi. It was showing a Hindi movie. The officers felt that it would lead to a serious riot.

Back in the capital, when Gautam came to know that Gandhi was going to address a prayer meeting at the Birla House, Gautam and his father went to listen to him. Gandhi chose from some verses from some religious texts and began to address the gathering. Just then something exploded in the air. Everyone jumped up in fright except Gandhi, “who kept sitting, serene and unruffled, as though the deafening blast
was a mere firecracker" (A River 199). In fact, someone had thrown a hand-grenade at the Mahatma. When the man who threw it was whisked away, he was shouting: "We'll do it again.... We'll kill this saviour of the Muslims" (A River 190). Gandhi escaped unhurt. But from the crowd came away angry expressions like: "Once he's gone, we'll settle scores with the bloody Muslims.... We'll turn every mosque in Delhi into a brothel" (A River 200). Some Hindu fanatic refugees from Pakistan created the commotion.

It was widely believed that Partition had been a consequence of the separatist politics of the Muslim minorities. But somehow in Bengal it was not so. The bhadralok Hindus there evolved a parallel bifurcation of their own. While the Congress High Command was ready to pay the price of partition in order to strengthen its hold over a unitary India, the Bengal Congress, as has been observed by Joya Chatterji in her book, Bengal Divided: Hindu Communalism and Partition, 1932-1947, "campaigned successfully for the vivisection of its province on communal lines"(266). The bhadralok Bengalis instead of launching an agitation against the proposed partition on communal lines, actually worked for partition so that they believed, it would give them a separate homeland of their own. The centre on an unwilling province, as far as Bengal was concerned, did not impose partition. On the contrary, as Joya Chatterji observes, "it reflected a symbiotic relationship between the centre and province in which policy-makers at the centre encountered a reciprocal dynamic from Bengal"(266).

A startling factor in Bengal scene was that there was a distinct shift from nationalism to communalism. The communalism of the bhadralok Hindus was directed against their fellow Bengalis. As Joya Chatterji points out, "History, for one was the struggle against the British rule; for the other, it was the celebration of the
British rule as an age of liberation from the despotism of Muslims"(268). Their thesis was that Muslims were not Bengalis and then they were not even Indians. The key intention of the bhadralok was to see to it that the Muslims did not come to power when the British left. Both the communities knew the intention of the other. And both tried to suppress the other and waited for an opportunity.

In the meantime many leaders loudly proclaimed that Hindu Muslim unity should be achieved, at whatever cost. Gandhi started the Khilafat Movement to satisfy the Muslims and drag them to the national stream. Khilafat Movement had, in fact, nothing to do with India. India had no connection with Turkey then. Indians did not know what its people ate, wore or looked like. And when Turkey was defeated in the war and the Sultan was sent back, the colonised Indian Muslim community childishly insisted on his return. Sensible people knew that it was not at all a reasonable demand. In reality, it was viewed as a pact, or rather a bribe. As Joya Chatterji pungently points out, that leaders like Gandhi took the stand in this manner: “We want swaraj and you want Khilafat, so come, let us unite. We will offer our heads to be broken for Khilafat, and you will raise the slogan of Swaraj”(270). Shortly it was felt to be a futile exercise. It was common knowledge that no one can bribe or entice or delude people into joining the freedom struggle. Gandhi “felt cheated” (Joya Chatterji 270). His constant and sincere attempts “to find the magic grail of togetherness”(Joya Chatterji 269) did not materialise.

Jinnah’s call to ‘Direct Action’ sparked off the ‘Great Calcutta Killings’. People of both the communities were put to unimaginable hardships. Jyotirmoyee Devi has presented a smack of what happened in the pre-partition communal riots in Noakhali in 1946 in her novel, *The River Churning*. Herself a tireless crusader for women’s rights, Jyotirmoyee Devi, though makes a searing commentary on Partition,
is increasingly concerned about the patriarchy's hypocritical obsession with women's sexual purity in her novel. But still, as the action of the novel takes place in the most turbulent days of the Partition, she could not but narrate the widespread destruction of property and lives.

In that village community in Noakhali, Sutara Dutta's Hindu family lived with quite a good number of Muslim people amicably. Sutara's family had employed two domestics, Rahim and Karim. They had been with that family for many years. Now they were in their twenties. Sutara's family lived in a Hindu area. As most of the provinces were in flame, Sutara's village also did not escape it. The fire started by some miscreants was spreading fast. Sutara innocently asked her mother, "Why is there a fire? This isn't the time for fire works" (The River 07). Instead of quelling the fire, the two orderlies "grinned broadly, showing their teeth" (The River 08). Sutara was deeply troubled. She was too young to understand the why's and how's of such things. Though the Muslims and Hindus had been living there as neighbours for many years, they couldn't understand why "a bloody massacre, without reason, without a dispute" (The River 13) had taken place in that part of Noakhali. The Muslims had no ill feelings at all for their Hindu neighbours. They were not enemies. And that's why, the extent of the atrocity "was beyond their wildest imagination" (The River 15). Reasonable people thought that "the fire was not likely to subside in the near future" (The River 18). Already Sutara's family—father, mother and sister had been wiped out in a flash. The fire had spread in Bamunpura. It was here Sutara's family lived.

News of the communal tension in Calcutta began to spread like wildfire. Tamijuddin Sahib, Sutara's father's Muslim friend had heard "stories of the 'Great Calcutta Killings', of gruesome murders in broad daylight of how the entire population had behaved like savage beasts with no qualms about killing close
neighbours as if they were bitter enemies” (The River 20). Soon Noakhali caught fire.

“The flame of hatred” (The River 20) had already devoured so many lives. People everywhere looked hopeless. Towns and villages looked devastated and left desolate. There was suspicion and distrust on one side and terrible panic on the other. As Jyotirmoyee Devi observes, “The minorities were suffering from a kind of helpless terror that had no limits” (The River 20-21). Sometimes, going by the ugly outbursts, it was difficult to distinguish between killers and abductors.

As the fire at Noakhali was still smouldering “the news from Bihar was ominous” (The River 27). Not only Bihar, the entire nation seemed to be split into two religious camps. The leaders who started this game were flabbergasted. People kept on asking each other, “How was this going to end... What was the way out?” (The River 27). During the last one year the City of Calcutta “had witnessed no end of fighting, murder, loot and plunder and numerous cases of abduction of girls” (The River 46). This is how on 15 August 1947, “a divided, truncated, blood-stained Bharat” (The River 39) was reborn. However if people had known that freedom entailed partition and bloodshed, they would never have wanted “this bloody freedom which played havoc with innocent lives” (The River 55).

The wave of hatred that swept through the entire nation destroyed everything—“ancestral homes, centres of happiness, hope and memory. Everything, was damaged beyond repair. In the relentless rolling of the victory chariot, replacing one king with another, millions were crushed underfoot like insects” (The River 104).

It is evident that historians are quite silent about the catastrophic events accompanying Partition, though they are quite aware of the exceedingly brutal and gruesome nature of the violence during this period. In the Partition massacres, as Swarna Aiyar points out, “crowds formed as much the victims as the aggressors.
Much of the violence was directed against the people fleeing towards safety and security, by small and well-organised bands"(24). Every band or gang that was formed had a nucleus of trained members skilled in the use of modern lethal weapons. In Punjab, the ‘jathas’ would often meet outside a village ‘gurudwara’ and would be given necessary inspiration and instruction before setting out on their mission. In August 1947, the ‘jathas’ seemed to be playing out the Sikh prayer, ‘First of all I worship thee, sword’. The ‘jathas’ would usually be given protection by the village folks in the areas of their operation. The ‘jathas’ would first throw bombs or use firearms on one side of the village to drive the people out, and another party waiting on the other side of the village armed with spears and swords waiting for them. This way all the inhabitants would be massacred. The carcasses were then collected and heaped in piles of fifty to one hindered and were set on fire, or mass-buried, so as to erase any trace of evidence. As soon as the butchery was over, the ‘jathas’ would then leisurely loot the village and set it on fire.

All these gruesome incidents happened in the eve of Partition and as Ismat Chughtai in her immortal story “Roots” pungently observes, that the deep wound caused as a result of the Partition plan of the Britain “would not be healed for ears to come” (An Epic 189), because as she sadly adds, “the surgery on Hindustan has been performed with crippled hands and blunt scalpels so that thousands of arteries have been slit, a river of blood is flowing and no one has any stamina left to stitch the wounds up” (An Epic 189).

Even when the Hindus and the Muslims were living so harmoniously in states of Marwar, at the time the Partition, as Ismat Chughtai says, “the mouth of the chasm widened” (An Epic 196) and when the rioters ad come on the scene, and began
looting the houses and set fire to the buildings, “serpents began to hiss this chasm” (An Epic 196).

Living in those turbulent days was like walking down the barrel of a gun, which would any moment with a deafening bang. Helpless people looked at each other with dismay. They never knew when “the night of commotion” (An Epic 58) would end. The minority community people felt as if the dooms day had taken hold of them like a ghost. In Ashfaq Ahmad’s story, “The Shepherd”, the author presents the terror of the minority Hindus (the Banias and the rich merchants) in a predominantly Muslim locality in Lahore. When “a series of clashes broke out there and fast deteriorated into violent attacks and bloodshed” (An Epic 83), the Hindus and Sikhs began to flee. When the houses were torched in the narrator’s ‘qasba’, and when “fierce battles took place” (An Epic 84) in street corners, the police and military clamped down a curfew.

Whether there was a curfew or not, in the eve of Partition, as Jamila Hashimi painfully points out in her story “Banished”, “the roads are infested with village hoodlums. They’re butchering entire trains” (An Epic 100).

In Upender Nath Ashk’s “Tableland”, Dina Nath sadly recalls in a refugee camp in Delhi, how his brother and his other relatives had to leave behind everything in their birthplace Lahore. Before they had flown, Dina Nath says, “our houses were torched, and our belongings looted” (An Epic 107). The fire ignited by Jinnah’s call for ‘Direct Action’ at Calcutta was reaching almost all the cities of North India. And also the murderous flames” (An Epic 109) reached all the way to Bombay. The situation in the country was fast deteriorating. Dina Nath’s beloved city Lahore that was neutral initially soon became “a veritable volcano” (An Epic 110), which made the Calcutta, Noakhali and Bombay riots look like “mere firecrackers” (An Epic 110).
It was an arduous task to be cool-headed and to maintain one’s neutrality in those days of communal violence. On hearing the gruesome reports of violence from his beloved city, Lahore, his “neutrality was finished” (An Epic 110). As soon as the Boundary Commission was announced, the Muslims in Lahore “set fire to Akbari Mandi” (An Epic 110). It was here Dina Nath’s elder brother and his other relatives were living. Dina Nath’s brother wrote to Dina Nath:

Lahore is burning even as I write these lines. Hindu houses in Mohalla Sarban...and Paper Mandi have been gutted by fire. Over a hundred houses were burnt down in the Paper Mandi fire alone. The fire was set at 2:30 in the morning, right in the middle of the curfew hours. Whoever came to put it out was gunned down by the police. Lahore is not known to have witnessed a greater conflagration. Its biggest wheat market, Akbari Mandi, had been burnt down only recently.

As for the Old City, owls hoot in Anarkali, and Civil Lines appears hushed like a frightened child. It’s calm now, but it’s the kind of calm that comes before the storm. Everybody, from the magistrate down to the ordinary policeman, has become a communalist. Our business in Lahore is finished. I’m thinking of selling off the two houses as fast as I can and getting out of here. But properties everywhere just lie vacant and there are no buyers. People are fleeing, from the city, from Civil Lines, Sant Nagar, Rishi Nagar, Bharat Nagar and even Model Town. It’s only a matter of days before Lahore will be completely emptied of Hindus. (An Epic 110-111)
On reading this letter, Dina Nath's heart was going up in flames. All his beloved haunts of Lahore had been destroyed. He had stopped reading the newspapers just to spare him from "the heart-rending news" (An Epic 111) of unspeakable brutalities.

As the cities were torched down like this, people like Qasim Bhai felt strongly that the seed for the Hindu-Muslim hatred was planted in by the British quite cleverly in 1909 itself to further their imperial interests. Now it has grown in to a flourishing tree and is oppressing the land with its venomous sap. They don't even know that "what we are witnessing today is simply the climax of the satanic politics of Hindu-Muslim enmity" (An Epic 116).

When the country was facing its worst communal calamity, the fires of revenge spared nothing. In the Pakistan side, the Hindus were "dumped alive like sacrificial goats" (An Epic 124); in the Indian side, the followers of Ram, Krishna, Nanak and Gobind visited the same calamity on their Muslim brethren.

Intizar Husain's classic tale "An Unwritten Epic", talks about the battle between the rival communities and the "incredible bloodshed" and "heaps of corpses" (An Epic 153) seen everywhere in Qadirpur. Earlier nobody had thought that Qadirpur would witness such a fierce battle. When the storm of communal riots began, there was confusion everywhere, and "human lives everywhere went for a penny a pound, give or take a few ounces" (An Epic 153). The brave Jats gathered from far and near and marched forward on elephants with cannon, gun power, arrows and swords. Seeing them marching with torches, the Muslims were speechless and stopped in their tracks. But still they took positions on rooftops and kept their javelins and other fearful weapons ready for an attack. Soon a commotion had broken out everywhere. Some violent and restless Muslim youngsters like Pichwa, Mammad and
Kalwa got ready to display their bravery. Kalwa boasted, “It’s true, my club has seen better days. But now I’ll dye it red again and bring out its true colour” (An Epic 161).

Ironically, when Pakistan was created, Qadirpur had no place in it. The Muslims were speechless. However, they hoisted a Pakistani flag on the peepul tree by the Eidgah. They thought they could “make their own separate Pakistan” (An Epic 162) this way. Some ‘intelligent’ Muslims, overnight migrated to Pakistan thinking that the lives and fortunes of Muslims in India were no longer safe in India. But, in reality, those who went to Pakistan with full of dreams were shocked, became as Naim Miyan tells Pichwa (once a local hero), “everyone just marches to Pakistan expecting to get something, as if his old man had buried a treasure here. They just don’t realize that there isn’t that much room in Pakistan” (An Epic 167).

Trying to give a picture of the unwritten epic, Intizar Husain says that the land of Pakistan was “reddened with the blood of its devoted sons. The reddened earth there, the air full of cries for help, the charred houses, the demolished mosque, the ruined wrestling arena” (An Epic 169)—all these are telling a very old story like an epic to many.

In Ismat Chughtai’s “Roots” too, the author makes a hint to some tension in her Marwar city. She begins her story with the word, “Everyone’s face was ashen, no food had been cooked. It was the sixth day the children had been out of school…” (An Epic 189). The atmosphere in the city had been so oppressive that the minority Muslims were feeling “as if they were under house arrest. On the doors were padlocks and outside the police were patrolling” (An Epic 189). A deep chasm, many miles long, had been formed between the two major communities. Muslims were fleeing for they didn’t want to submit themselves “to brutality at the hands of unbelievers” (An Epic 197).
The classic tale “The Wagon” by Khalida Ashgar (and not Khalida Husain) as identified by the editor Muhammad Umar Memon) is a frightening tale about an unidentified city, which is invaded by a strange, deathly, inexplicable, and nauseating stench. The time is left ambiguous and the people are without any unique identity. What is obvious, however, is the presence of some cataclysmic evil, which awaits everywhere, and at every moment like a nuclear bomb to annihilate all the inhabitants.

The narrator, an office-going Muslim married man is “filled with a mute sadness” (An Epic 256) and he “felt terribly ill at ease” (An Epic 256), as though molten lead had seeped into his legs. An air of mystery surrounded the entire city for when the sun went down, “the entire sky seemed covered with a sheet soaked in blood...” (An Epic 259), and the sky “blazed like a winding sheet of fire” (An Epic 259), and the redness kept spreading from place to place. People thought that they were going to have a storm any moment.

In the meantime, another disheartening thing happened. A pungent smell, the like of which they had never experienced in their life was oppressing them. The narrator felt nauseous. It made him giddy and gave him the chills. He felt a cracking blow on his head and it made his heart sink. He found it difficult to breathe. People’s faces “looked drained and withered” (An Epic 263-264). Intellectuals hypothesized that it must be due to nuclear blasts. People began to use tranquillisers and sleeping pills. Soon they found them to be useless. The narrator’s persistent efforts finally helped him identify the source of the stench. It was coming from a curtained wagon but he never knew what was inside. The only thing anyone could do was to continue to linger with fear in his or her hoops and without hope till the day of their extinction.

The fear, the stench and the violence continued to oppress the people even after the Partition. Salam Bin Razzack presents this in his story “A Sheet”. The
newspapers were full of reports of the riots in Bombay. Anwar, a resident of Pune was a contractor. He was a friend of a Hindu family in Bombay. They gave him protection, but an unknown fear surged up “inside him like a wave” (An Epic 291). A whirlwind of some inarticulate anxiety or fear swept over him. Dread and despair had begun to thicken around him like a gloom and “he felt smothered by it” (An Epic 290). Being in Bombay, Anwar felt a strange tension in the air, the streets were deserted, and the shops were closed. A curfew was imposed. Police were patrolling everywhere. About a hundred huts were torched the previous night in Dharavi and several chawls were also set on fire in Jogeshwari as well. A terrible riot broke out in Mahim too. Soon Anwar’s friend Vidyacharan and his family seemed strangers to Anwar. He felt that he would suffocate. Fear had raised a wall of suspicion. His heart was sinking, and he had no sleep. To make matters worse, on the lane outside, Vidya’s house, a young man’s wrists were bound behind, his clothes were doused with kerosene and he was set on fire. He raised a wild cry. He was asking, “What will you get by killing me? Water... Water!” (An Epic 305). Windows were partly open, and people craned their necks to look at him, but nobody wanted to help him. Soon he became charred as a piece of charcoal. Anwar saw everything from his room. Soon his fear was “replaced by a terrible emptiness” (An Epic 307).

Ali Imam Naqvi’s “The Vultures of the Parsi Cemetery” brings out the tiredness and the anger of Pheroze and his companion employed as attendants in the Parsi Cemetery to dispose of the corpses. They dealt with “dead bodies, more dead bodies and vultures” (An Epic 312). Usually the dense trees of the Parsi cemetery would be full of vultures waiting for the corpses. But that day, not a single vulture was seen anywhere in sight. The attendants were terrified. They alarmed the other staff of the cemetery. Nobody knew for certain what had happened. But they knew
one thing that the vultures had gone away. There were a couple of corpses that day to dispose of, but no vulture was in the vicinity. When everybody stood transfixed, the city police commissioner gave a clue to the riddle, “... the vultures, all of them, are flocking to the Khaki, Raviwar Peth and Somwar Peth neighbourhoods” (An Epic 315). Instantly they knew that there was a terrible riot and they torched everything; houses, shops, even ambulances and hearses, whole lot. The Hindus and Muslims were at each other’s throat once again. The street was littered with corpses, one above the other. The commissioner added, “our vultures — well, they’re having a field day there” (An Epic 315). In all possibility, the vultures might not return, because, as someone in the cemetery expressed his doubt “...there is a riot every day here, every day a fire, every day people die. The vultures’ll come back? The hell they will!” (An Epic 315).

In Ilyas Ahmad Gaddi’s “A Land Without Sky”, Kalim Bhai’s sister tells her family’s bitter story at the time of the riots. Kalim Bhai was protected by his close Hindu friends, Ghosh Babu and and Mukul babu. But when the air of the city turned vitiated and when “a horrible dark cloud of fear hung over the entire city” (An Epic 345), Kalim Bhai’s resolve to stay back in his birth place where he and his family had been living for generations loosened. There was a sense of utter eeriness on the faces of the people and their faces turned pale “with some unknown fear. People looked at each other as if for the last time” (An Epic 345). Kalim Bhai’s entire home was suddenly thrown into deathly silence, for every now and then, there was a riot and a stampede. Unable to pull for long, Kalim Bhai decided to look for a safe place for his family. With a terrible feeling of loneliness, he told his sister, “An old bond’s broken today” (An Epic 347). His sister could see “inconsolable pain” (An Epic 346) on his face.
Most of the narratives of the editor Alok Bhalla's three volumes of stories too, like those of the editor Muhammed Umar Memon's *An Epic Unknown* is in the words of Alok Bhalla "an instance of violence in an unending stories; savagery is random and capricious; anyone can be destroyed" (xix). The tales in both the editors are sad witnesses to a period in which our people fell far low out of a human world of language, customs, rituals, and prayers "into a bestial world of hatred, rage, self-interest and frenzy" (Bhalla xxxiii). Syed Mohammed Ashraf gives just a hint of the genocidal Partition in "Separated from the Flock": "Then came 1947—growling, gnashing its teeth, holding the order of the Partition in one of its claws. And they heard voices calling for terrible sacrifices rumble down the mountains—screams of Ya Allahi rent the sky" (SAP I 119).

Salil Choudhary tells his sad tale of riots and violence in his story "The Dressing Table" through a series of letters found in an old dressing table. The action of the story takes place in Calcutta on the eve of Partition. Nanda bought a second hand dressing table from the pavement. He bought it at a chief rate. His wife was excited. She stood hours before the mirror and either adjusted her sari or put a bindi on her forehead. However her excitement was short-lived as she found a bundle of letters inside the drawer of the dressing table. The letters contained a very distressing tale of arson, loot' and violence in the eastern sector. The letters were from Bagerhat written by Rahim to his wife, Amina. The second letter goes as follows;

I saw people fleeing from this place, deserting their homes. The whole town is as silent as a graveyard. People are even scared to talk loudly.... Recently, there had been a terrible riot in a scheduled caste village a few miles from the town....
One day, a number of armed policemen, accompanied by a gang of hooligans, attacked the village. Brutality, in its most horrendous form, was unleashed upon the villages. The policemen didn't differentiate between men and women. Village after village was burnt and looted. The inhabitants fled from their houses. The sky and the air were rent with the screams of the victims. In the meantime, some people began shouting that the Hindus were enemies of Pakistan. Slogans like 'throw the Hindus out', were raised. (SAP I 32)

Taking advantage of the confusion created, the goondas in the town looted the shops and then torched them. Those who were neutral and poor were utterly helpless. If they protested, the goondas would burn their houses or even kill them. The entire human race seemed to Rahim "crooked and deformed" (SAP I 35). Rahim had no wink of sleep for many nights. He wandered about in the town like a mad man. People, he thought, seemed "to have lost even the last drop of humanity" (SAP I 35). Bestiality had been unleashed upon the town. The entire town was filled with screams, wails and fearful fiendish laughter. He was not sure whether his beloved wife Amina was alive or not.

On reading these letters, Nanda rushed to the spot where Rahimuddin lived. But there was no trace of him. Somebody who knew him said that he had gone to Pakistan; but the sad part of the tale was that Amina was scorched inside her house. At midnight, "the house was locked from outside and set on fire." There was a lot of firing at that time, bullets were flying all around and it was impossible to come out. When Amina was burnt in the fire, her dressing table escaped because it was kept in the smaller room.
Saadat Hasan Manto’s “Cold Meat” is a horrible tale about a mad Sardarji’s butchering some six men with his dagger and abducting a lovely young woman and raping her after her death. Kulwant Kaur, the mistress of the Sardarji, Ishwar Singh, however in a fit of jealousy, slit his throat with the dagger and he died, shortly making the gruesome confession.

Umm-e- Ummara’s tale “More Sinned Against Than Sinning” too, talks about the violence and the destruction of Munni Bitiya’s family, because of her father’s foolish decision of taking the family to Dhaka much against the wishes of the other family members. Though the action of the story took place in the early 1960’s, the enmity between the two communities still existed, and both tried to smother the other. The lone survivor of the violence Munni Bitiya sadly recalls what happened then:

Evil finally strangled good. The enemy attacked with all its force and fury, and man lost all traces of humanity. Phoolbari was set on fire. Poor Pakhi (her sister-in-law), with her hair dishevelled, ran from one singed flower to the next like a frightened bird. But before she regained her senses, her Phoolbari had been burnt to ashes. She tried to bury herself in the ash. (SAP I 116)

Not only Pakhi’s lovely body was reduced to ash, even her flower-like children were burnt to death.

The great divide ultimately divided even the good neighbours of both the communities. When there was so much fighting and killing all around, even friends would turn enemies. Manik Bandyopadhyay’s story “Childishness” is all about that. People, on seeing the violence, which they had never seen in their life, “were bewildered and terrified; their hearts quavered” (SAP I 129). They had heard the Japanese air raids a couple of months ago, and were struck with terror. But that was
far far away. But now, “here was a wider, more terrible calamity rising from the nation’s own heart—across the city, in their very quarters, at their own doors. The heart’s loud flutter found no pause; it rose and fell, fell and rose” (SAP I 130). The air was full of such cries as— “Kill, cut them up, butcher them, finish them off” (SAP I 130).

Bhisham Sahni’s “The Train has Reached Amritsar” illuminates a moment of horror. In their story, a motley group of refugees were going in a train to Amritsar. On their way, as the train stopped in stations, some got in and some were refused admission and pushed out. On the route of the train, the refugees saw more than once fires and burning of buildings. They saw “flames leaping out of the clouds of smoke, which rose above the city,” (SAP I 151). The passengers were frozen in fear. Some rushed to the windows to catch a glimpse of the fire. They saw that “the city was in flames” (SAP I 151). And they understood that many people had been killed. Terrified, they pulled their shutters down. The narrator of the story recalls later, “In the far distance, we saw flames leaping up into the sky. Cities were burning all around” (SAP I 153).

The riots were a natural corollary to Partition. Yaspal’s “A Holy War” focuses on the riot in Lahore, a city of beautiful gardens and bustling crowds. The city was very much loved by its citizens, but now there was “no sign of life in any house” (SAP I 193). In one part of the city called Gangu-ki-Gali, there was a fire, which had “destroyed all the electric wires and the street lamps” (SAP I 193). That resulted in permanent darkness. Soon such dark places of the city became, to quote a phrase from The Bible “full of the habitations of cruelty”(Psalms 74:20). The streets were deserted and made “the desolation and the sadness more oppressive” (SAP I 193). When the curfew was imposed, it naturally was felt to be “gloomy and suffocating” (SAP I
193). On 13th of August, 1947 all the Hindu families living in Gangu-ki-Gali had run away. The nearby Bazaar had been attacked twice by hordes of Muslims. Incidents of burning, looting, and killing in the bazaar led the Hindu families to quietly slip away. Seeing the desolation, reasonable Muslims exclaimed, “Ya Allah! What a catastrophe!” (SAP I 197). But the multitude of the wicked felt elated and said, “Let the kafir bastards go to hell! Pakistan doesn’t need kafirs!” (SAP I 197). The lootings, which were going on unabated on a large scale, were justified by the violent and heartless among them. Boys like Nasru argued, “Why, everyone is looting. They say they are collecting the just rewards of a holy war” (SAP I 198). Lahore was stunned and became a “ghost-haunted place” (SAP I 197).

It was a day today sight to see the enemies of the other roar in the midst of all around devastation, and life in every village and town had been turned upside down, as Kulwant Singh Virk’s story “Weeds” shows. As the author observes, this is a story about post-partition Pakistan. Strangers now occupied the old havelis there, and the rivers and canals, which flowed past their towns and villages, were polluted. For many days, the water flowing through them “had been reddened by blood and befouled by the bodies of men and women who had been mutilated and killed” (SAP I 204).

One of the most harrowing tales about violence is Saddat Hasan Manto’s “Open It”. Having been a witness to violence, Sirajuddin’s mind “went blank” (SAP II 69), and searching for his missing daughter Sakina, he was “like a demented person” (SAP II 69). He had lost the capacity even to mourn.

S.H.Vatsayan Ajneya’s “The Refuge” narrates the sad experience of an educated Hindu in the midst of his majority Muslim neighbours in Lahore. Seeing the violence and habitations of cruelty all around, the Hindus had left one by one. Only
Devenderlal stayed back, because his Muslim friend Rafiquddin repeatedly assured to protect him from his enemies. But this did not last long. When the city was besieged by the mob and when looting was conducted unabashedly and the city was in flames and the smoke made the humid night even more suffocating, Rafiquddin watched everything in silence, and with a sense of defeat exclaimed, “I was fated to see this day—and that too in the name of freedom! Ya Allah!” (SAP II 74). In no time, the city was deserted. Countless “dead bodies lay rotting here and there; the houses that had been looted, were now burning” (SAP II 75). In a moment, the minority Hindus were brought into desolation. They were utterly consumed with terrors. It looked as though even the gods in heaven cast them down into destruction. Ajneya points out,

The atmosphere was vicious, horses of rage were whipped into murderous frenzy by hatred and envy, religious groups spread poison everywhere, and the flames of communal frenzy were fanned by the police and the bureaucracy! There were times when Devenderlal felt that Rafiquddin and he were the only sane and normal, while everything around them was burning with rags, smouldering, crumbling and turning to ash…. (SAP II 75)

When Devenderlal had to quit his friend and hide in a narrow and dark garage to save his skin, he looked up at the sky and found a big column of smoke going up “from houses in flames!” (SAP II 78). Devenderlal thought, it was “an offering of incense! A red chandan, a chandan of blood” (SAP II 78).

Intizar Husain’s “The City of Sorrow” is a very chilling story wherein three nameless men share their acts of violence and cruelty in their city, which is rightly
called “the city of sorrow” (SAP II 90). And everyone living there was “under the shadow of death” (SAP II 91) and the city was “on its way towards extinction” (SAP II 91). The three men had committed terrible sins like the men of Sodom and Gomorrah and as “the Lord rained burning sulphur on the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah and destroyed them” (Genesis 19: 24-25), the City of Sorrow was also under a divine condemnation. Seeing what happened to them, and what they did to others, the people of the City of Sorrow despaired and felt that everything under the sky was an illusion.

Ramesh Chandra Sen’s “The White Horse” gives a hint as to the way the army behaved at the time of the riots. There was some tension and a series of riots in Calcutta. The white horse let loose in the streets of Calcutta brought a fresh whiff of life there. However, when fresh riots began, and killing had started in Lalpatty, the army put a bullet on the temple of the horse, Sohrab. When the groom came looking for it, the horse had already been dead. The story proves that man is more cruel than animals.

Krishna Sobti’s “Where Is My Mother?” presents in stark detail the army’s role in the riots in places like Gujranwala, Wazirabad, and Lahore. Bahadur Yunus Khan of the Baluch Regiment had seen ditches “filled with human blood” (SAP II 135). He himself had “sprayed the land with bullets” (SAP II 135). He was doing so because, “he was fighting for the creation of a new country” (SAP II 135). As he toured around the country, he watched the “flames as they leapt up from the villages burning all around” (SAP II 135), besides these horrors, he had watched other fires before. He had seen children thrown into the fire…and women and men. He had seen neighbourhoods burn all night and had seen charred bodies in every street” (SAP II 135). The army chap thought that without a revolutionary struggle and bloodshed, his
country Pakistan would never been born. He was a nightmare to the 'kafirs'. He was boiled with anger at the very thought of a 'kafir'. In the fields, land and market places, "charred and mutilated bodies lay in piles" (SAP II 136). He was also responsible for it. A good number of soldiers joined the hooligans and looted and then set fire to the buildings. Shortly, "the streets of Lahore were burning" (SAP II 137). Corpses of both men and women lay piled everywhere like garbage, and "bodies of naked women lay scattered in the deserted streets. The silence of the city was broken by slogans..." (SAP II 137).

In the story "How Many Pakistans?", Kamleshwar brings to the surface the nightmarish trauma of a Hindu boy who fell in love with a Muslim girl. The author shows how the creation of one Pakistan led to the creation of so many Pakistans in the hearts and lives of so many people. Bano the Muslim woman and her Hindu lover had to fall apart because of the creation of that "dark blind space; a space without feeling; a space where the sufferings of others are no longer sufferings..." (SAP II 174), because Pakistan was "that barren and still place" (SAP II 174). When Chinar was turned into violence, "murder was in the air. Everyone was apprehensive.... Even the Ganga was flooded. The peepal tree on its banks trembled. The wind was fierce. The ruined fort was full of whispers" (SAP II 176-177). In short, the air in the village had been poisoned. Chinar had been destroyed and Pakistan came into existence. In the neighbouring Bhiwandi too, when the communal riots were in full swing, houses were torched, and the air smelt smoke, acrid and pungent. In Bombay too, streets were lying desolate; "a strange, eerie silence" (SAP II 181) and "a blankness" (SAP II 181) was felt everywhere. The lovers in the story had become victims of Pakistan, for they had been entrapped by it. The rioters had set fire even the nursing homes. The goondas threw firebombs at the house of the lover. It was virtually a nightmare. The
air was “full of bitter smell of ash. Unable to cope with this nightmare, the father of Banu, the gentle drillmaster had gone mad.

The Partition, according to K.A. Abbas, just turned the whole subcontinent mad. It made the people turn irreconcilable enemies. Only very rarely, a couple of persons surfaced as good Samaritans. Abbas’s story, “The Death of Seikh Burhanuddin” describes the bitter hatred of a Muslim for the Sardarji Burhanuddin when the country was witnessing the most grotesque spectacle of violence. In Rawalpindi, the Sikhs had been virtually wiped out. Those who escaped from Rawalpindi, came to East Punjab, and began to kill the Muslims. Here, “hundreds of thousands of Muslims were martyred; the blood of the faithful ran in streams” (SAP II 228). Even Delhi did not escape the rioters. There was a general massacre in old Delhi. Many Muslim homes were burnt in Karol Bagh. Muslim shops in Chandni Chowk were looted. The rioters were killing Muslims in Connaught Circus too. The narrator’s faithful servant told the former: “We have hundreds of guns, several machine guns, ten revolvers and a cannon. We will slaughter these infideles; we will roast them alive” (SAP II 230).

Maheep Singh’s “The River and the Bridge” also provides similar insights into the hardships of ordinary people in Lahore which witnessed a conflagration fourteen years before, wherein “lakhs of people had died in that fire, lakhs still carried memories of their wounds” (SAP III 79). Soon the fire caught Punjab when Punjab had been partitioned, and “the rivers of Punjab had turned red with blood” (SAP III 80). The flames later spread throughout Punjab and houses, villages and cities were reduced to ash. When the fires subsided, it seemed as if “a wide and deep chasm had appeared between Amritsar and Lahore” (SAP III 80).
At the time of the Partition, the determined and organised effort of the three major communities was to ensure ethnic cleansing. So the vengeful demons wielded bloodied weapons and waded through knee-deep in to the viscous fluid. Bhisam Sahni’s “Pali” also refers to the ambush of the rioters and its effects even much later.

After the Partition of the country the blood on the roads and streets had long since dried but its stains were still lingered faintly visible here and there. The fire that had engulfed the houses had died out long since but the charred frames were still standing. The mad frenzy of the Partition had abated but its effects still in the minds of the people. (SAP III 133)

Gulam Abbas’s story “Avtar: A Hindu Myth” provides a striking account of how even the gods and goddesses were terribly upset over the “unendurable evil and suffering” (SAP III 192) at the time of the Partition. As Vishnu Bhagwan on earlier occasions came down to the world to defend the innocent and the bereaved, it was time that he came down once again to give succour to the defenceless. Prithvi, the goddess goes from one god to the other with her report and pleas for help:

Maharaj, there is no religion left anywhere in the world. The darkness of sin has spread over it. In every city, in every town, in every village, innocent people are being slaughtered. Villages have been reduced to ash. Unborn children have been plucked out of the wombs of pregnant women, impaled on spears and brandished in the air. Breasts of women have been cut, noses of men have been chopped off, people have been roasted in fire. Human beings have become more ferocious than the beasts. I can no longer watch such horror, Maharaj. (SAP III 191)

If she doesn’t get help immediately, she will even “sink in to the nether world” (SAP III 193).
N.G. Gore gives plenty of details in very strong epithets, regarding the horrific character of the mass killings, unprecedented fires, and traumatic disruptions that occurred on the eve of the Independence Day in Delhi, Amritsar, Lahore and Sialkot in his story, “A Mouthful of Water...”. Using the popular mythic imagery, the dancing of the Destroyer, Rudra, he says, that the awesome beat of His drum “was shaking the skies” (SAP III 225) and His hideous laughter “was crippling our reason every moment that passed” (SAP III 225). Man has become “human beast” (SAP III 225). Witnessing the murderous frenzy of the rioters, Gore says in pungent words “The human layer on our bodies was dropping. Instead, on them were sprouting wolfish eyes, tiger’s claws, tusks of wild boars, and the he-goat’s satyr penis!” (SAP III 225). When the riots spread to Delhi, it was virtually “the Day of Judgement at the end of Time!” (SAP III 226). Houses started to burn with a crackle, and collapsed with a bang. The sky was covered with a smoky film. In short, the whole earth was covered with the dark forebodings of the Doomsday. In such a vicious circle of brutality, women and children were the worst sufferers. Hundreds and thousands of married women became widows and countless number of women were tormented in unimaginably cruel ways by the prowling hungry wolves. Even aged women and tender children were stabbed to death. It is true that ruthless leaders like Nadir Shah, Genghis Khan and Adolf Hitler had slaughtered and gassed people but at the time of the Partition, the zealous fanatic mobs went one step ahead. They burnt alive men, women and children. These issues become the focus of the next chapter.