The Partition of India is the most momentous event in the Indian history. It is very difficult to find an event of such magnitude and far-reaching consequences in the history of the world. It is such a great event that it means different things to different persons. Great events generally inspire artists and litterateurs/writers. All great events have been recorded in history and represented in literature. The Partition of India has not been an exception.

History alone is not sufficient for a comprehensive understanding of the partition. Even after reading hundreds of books of history, it is difficult to have a complete picture of the Partition of India, its complexity, and its consequences. Dr. Asaduddin says:

The Partition of India, a momentous event in Indian history, continues to tantalize historians, haunt the Indian psyche and cast its shadow on our social and political life. It is closely linked with the chronicle of our freedom struggle that made the actual liberation of the country from foreign yoke an experience of violence, slaughter and exile for many. One of the most massive demographic dislocations in history, with its attendant human tragedy, it defies chroniclers to come to grips with it in all its dimensions. Tomes of analysis and exegesis by historians and bureaucrats have not led us anywhere closer to a definitive understanding of the phenomenon, even though the recent works of Bipin Chandra, Ian Talbot, Ayesha Jalal and Mushirul Hasan have brought fresh insights into the field. Historical accounts and official documents, despite their apparent ‘transparency’ and ‘factuality’ can tell us only about the statistics — at least one million deaths, ten million refugees, and so on.

Historians’ statistics fail to impart even a fraction of the enormity of the partition tragedy. Statistics fail to tell us how women must have felt while drowning themselves in wells lest they be abducted by men of the other community. These statistics fail to let us know that it was neither the religion nor the politics but the feeling of insecurity that made most of the common people choose India or Pakistan. Statistics or historical narratives do not reflect the identity crises that the innocent people faced at the time of partition during which identity could be easily changed. Historical narratives do not narrate the pangs of separation between husbands and their wives, brothers and sisters, and parents and their sons/daughters. History has been strangely silent about the sufferings of the women who were the worst sufferers of the tragedy.

However, for a little over a decade now, there have been some efforts to rewrite the history of the Partition. These rewritings of history are called new histories. They are histories that presently reconstruct the Partition rather than foreground the Independence of 1947. They are new in that they are very much a phenomenon of the 1990s and see themselves as correctives to the emphasis of what could be regarded as Conventional Nationalist History. Also, consciously, they see themselves as pluralistic and many-sided as opposed to History that is unidimensional and state-centric. Further, ‘they are histories with a small ‘h’ because they define their concern as being
with 'little or local events' and 'small actors' of the past and not with events and leaders of 'national' significance dealt by conventional history."

These new histories are distinguished from Conventional History in four aspects:

1. The Aim of the new histories: The new histories have the aim of bringing into history the event of the partition. Conventional History narrates the history of the transition from the colonial rule to the nationalist rule and the independence. It only refers to the partition of the country. But the writers of new histories show that what dominates the public/popular memory of 1947 is not the achievement (of independence) but the failure (of partition)—the failure to keep the communities and the country together in the process of nation-formation. The Partition is thus characterized as violence—the violence in breaking the communities, the culture, and the country. It is this history of the failure that the new histories aim at narrating.

Further, the writers of the new histories are of the opinion that, in Conventional History, the violence of the partition only figures as an aberration. But they say that the violence of the partition is not an aberration but an inherent characteristic of any process of nation-formation. That is why the new histories formalize the partition which cannot be seen in the conventional History which is basically a Nationalist History or State History. Gyanendra Pandey, one of the writers of new histories, in fact, sees little difference between the manoeuvres of the colonial History and the nationalist History in that while the colonialist History othered the native as the locus of irrationality and violence; the nationalist History, in a similar move, others 'the backward sections of the population, the lower classes, and the marginal groups that still fall prey to primitive passions on occasion.' For Pandey, while History itself becomes the prose of otherness, the new histories become the Subaltern history, the Survivors' history or the history of the Marginalized.

2. The Assumptions of the new histories: The assumptions of the new histories are based on certain post-modern and post-structuralist tenets. The first assumption is that writing Partition history is a rupture or break from the earlier modes of history writing. Since they see themselves as a break from the earlier modes, the new histories regard themselves as subversive or oppositional to all that the earlier histories are said to be—nationalist, continuist, statist, etc. This assumption leads to the construction of such binaries as conventional History = Statist History and new histories = people's history.

The second assumption is that the new histories are concerned with the partition as an event while the Conventional History is characterized as being concerned with the big historical forces and therefore ignoring events. Accordingly, the grand narrative of the nationalist movement and independence is said to have concealed the partition, an event that the current new historical discourse sees itself as constituting. In that sense, new histories would regard themselves as more complex and less homogenizing than the Conventional History.

The third assumption is that the new histories are an indigenous mode of history writing, being subjective, experimental, and memory-based. The Conventional History is seen as Western, operating with notions of objectivity and scientific truth or validity. But new histories being literally homegrown—springing from the memories of family, friends, and acquaintances—are seen as more authentic and legitimate than the conventional History.
These assumptions that the new histories operate with, with regard to the nature of their historical enterprise, not only serve to distinguish new histories vis-à-vis conventional History but also give the new histories a degree of acceptability as a form of post-colonial history—a history that marks a break from colonial modernity and its discourses such as nationalism, its institutions such as State, and its values such as objectivity and scientificity.

3. The Subject of the new histories: The new histories begin with the critique that the subjects of the conventional History are invariably leaders, politicians, and great men who took control over the struggle for freedom and the nation-states (of India and Pakistan). It is because of this the conventional History is not only elitist but also a story of the successful achievement of freedom and the realization of the nation-state. This success is said to be achieved by silencing the voices of the people that suffered the trauma of the Partition. Therefore, the new histories talk about bringing into history those silenced by the conventional History by writing a people's history of the partition. Some of the categories of people whom the new histories are trying to bring into history are women, children, dalits, communities, survivors, etc. Thus, by claiming women, children, and others as subjects, the new histories have received legitimacy as histories of/from the margins, hence seemingly more democratic and popular.

4. The Sources of the new histories: A look at the titles of books and essays on partition that have come in recent times gives some idea about the sources of the new histories. Titles such as The Partitions of Memory, Resisting Regimes: Myth, Memory and the Shaping of a Muslim Identity, The Landscape of Memory and the Writing of Tamas, Fiction as Memory: Partition Stories, etc., suggest that the new histories seem to have turned to memories, myths, and literature as central sources to rewrite the history of the Partition. Here, too, the new histories distinguish themselves from the Conventional History whose source is said to be mainly archival documents. Since the new histories propose to bring in different perspectives on the partition, not merely document the truth, they rely on such sources as memory, myth, and literature. Further, the new histories argue that archives provide only facts and figures on the partition and tell us nothing about the emotions involved. Also archives record only the goings on of the high politics—the dilemmas and decisions of the leaders—and not what the ordinary people thought or felt at that point of time. The sources for the feelings of the ordinary people with regard to the partition are, therefore, seen to be their memories, myths, and literature.

The detailed analysis of the new histories is not a digression, for it is very important. The act of rewriting history has attracted people from different disciplines like English, Sociology, Anthropology, Women's Studies, etc., and some non-academics like film-critics, publishers, litterateurs/writers, etc. The new histories have taken literature as one of their sources. Besides, these new histories cannot be strictly called history, for they have many qualities of literature. In this way, the demarcating line between the new histories and literature is not very distinct. Gyanendra Pandey, Urvashi Bhutalia, Ritu Menon and Kamla Bhasin, Shail Mayaram, Suvir Kaul, Veena Das and others have tried to record the voices of the partition-sufferers which have hitherto been unheard or forgotten. These new histories have been very important in recording the partition history. They are not less in quality than any literature. Dr. Rajendra Chenni says:
They are the authentic history of the partition. They have no tenacity to prove the truth, no craving or aim to say everything. Many times, trying to hide what should not be said, they say everything in their fragmentary narrations. Much of our literature, probably except the literature about the partition, has not come near these memories that the remaining living people recall about the ruined, the feelings in these memories, their wide experience and the excesses of the man’s world. (Translation mine)

So, new histories, despite their literary quality—which outweighs the quality of much of our literature—cannot outweigh the Partition Literature. Besides, the new histories cannot be supposed to be impartial and unbiased as Partition Literature is, because they are based mostly on memories of persons who cannot, with any degree of certainty, be expected to remember everything without any lapse.

Before going further, a look at the differences between History and Literature will help us understand better the relationship between the partition and literature. As it is clear from the analysis of the new histories, the conventional History has been factual, objective, homogeneous, elitist, and nationalist. History gives us only facts and figures but literature shows us the feelings and emotions of the people involved in the event. History cannot go deeper into the minds and hearts of the people and describe their experience of the partition as literature does. In this sense, history is a simple record of the partition. But literature is the reflection/representation of the whole complex tragedy of the partition. History gives us data about the leaders and other important men. ‘Historian’s history could never show, in any significant detail, the partition as a great human tragedy, simply because the ordinary men and women—except as an amorphous mass—were always kept out of it.’ But literature brings to life even the common, ordinary, and marginalized persons. While History is state-centric and nationalistic, literature is people-centred. The partition history has been strangely silent about the sufferings of the women in particular and people in general. But literature gives voice to the sufferings of women, children, and men. History mainly deals with the national struggle for independence and its achievement and narrates the partition only as a side issue or by-product. But literature mainly looks at the tragedy of the partition. What is not found in history is found in literature. Thus literature is complementary to History. With regard to History, Urvashi Butalia says:

I have for long been concerned with, what I like to call, the ‘underside’ of history. A question that preoccupies me is: Why is it that the history we know deals so much with the state, with government, with rulers and hardly ever with people? It is these and other similar questions that have informed my research on partition. As an historical event, Partition, for example, has ramifications that reach far beyond 1947, yet historical records make little mention of the dislocation of people’s lives, the strategies they used to cope with loss, trauma, pain and violence. Why have historians been reluctant to address these? Are these questions of no use to history at all? . . .

Also, Urvashi Butalia states that history is full of facts only and not feelings and that human suffering finds little or no reflection in history:

. . . But the ‘history’ of partition seemed to lie only in the political developments that had led up to it. These other aspects—what had happened to the millions of people who had to live through this time, what we might call the ‘human dimensions’ of this history—somehow seemed to have a ‘lesser’ status in it. Perhaps this was because they had to do with difficult things: loss and sharing, friendship and enmity, grief and joy, with a painful regret and nostalgia for loss of home, country and friends; and with an equally strong determination to create them afresh. These were difficult things to capture ‘factually’ . . .
These aspects of Partition—how families were divided, how friendships endured across borders, how people coped with the trauma, how they rebuilt their lives, what resources, both physical and mental, they drew upon, how their experience of dislocation and trauma shaped their lives, and indeed the cities and towns and villages they settled in—find little reflection in written history.

So, to understand the underside or the hidden human dimensions of history, oral narratives, diaries, memories, and personal accounts by people who were involved at the time are very important, according to Urvashi Butalia. But these sources are normally unexploitative and incomprehensive. Therefore, it is better to turn towards literature which is exploitative, comprehensive, and non-partisan. Literature does what history does and also what it fails to do. Literature begins with history and continues even after history ends. Thus, literature is all-embracing and gives us a complete and complex picture of the partition. The generations after the partition do not know about the greatest tragedy in the Indian history. They can read about and understand the partition in history. However, history cannot make them feel the horror and pity of the tragedy. But literature does it.

The oral narratives recorded by Urvashi Butalia, Ritu Menon, Kamla Bhasin, and others are the personal narratives which might be biased, partial, and one-sided. They might not look at the problem from the point of view of the other sides. Thus, they might not give us a reliable and complete picture of the partition. However, it does not mean that they are valueless. They are more valuable than the conventional historical narratives. But literature overcomes the shortcomings of both the Conventional History and the new history. Literateurs, being humanistic in general, look at the tragedy without any biases. Thus, literature is the best source for a complete picture of the traumatic event.

No matter how history is written, we frequently have to be reminded that what captures the interest of historians has ramifications for ordinary people, usually too ordinary to feature other than as statistics in the columns of newspapers or as generalizations in the pages of history books. Literature can often go a long way in sharpening our perspectives on the past...

The difference between historical and literary narratives can be easily understood by reading a book of history and a book of literature side by side. To have an experience of the difference between the two, an extract from a book of History and an extract from a book of Literature (both about the Partition) can be read. The reading of the two rather long extracts clearly brings out the typical characteristics of History—factual, objective, homogenous, elitist, nationalistic—and of literature—sentimental, emotional, subjective, heterogeneous, marginalized, people-centered.

The extract from a book of history gives us only factual details about the origin of Pakistan. It does not give us any details about how common people responded to and how they felt about the attempts to originate Pakistan. Only those who are really in need of studying history for some academic purposes will read it. But the extract from a book of literature is interesting and lively. It creates a life-like situation in which common people express their feelings and responses to the idea of Pakistan. It gives us details about the impact that the idea of Pakistan had on people. Though literature cannot make us relive the life, it makes us see the life with all its complexity. "Literature which has been fed by all essential rasas of life is creative, active and continuously developing like life. It is desirable." It makes people read it even without any serious academic purposes. Literature makes
history, but history cannot make literature. History provides raw material for the creation of literature, which is the reconstruction of life. History may be compared to the biography of a nation while literature to the autobiography of the nation. Dr. Nikhila Haritsa says:

> Even as the practice of seeing Partition from different disciplinary standpoints has been to enable a more comprehensive account of the partition, certain uniqueness has been ascribed to the literary representation of the partition. Reasons cited for this uniqueness are many—the non-partisan and humane nature of literature, its existence as a social document, as people's history, as voice of the silenced, etc.

The uniqueness of literary perspective has become a common sense in partition studies within the subcontinent and outside it. Ian Talbot says in his essay, *Literature and the Human Drama of the 1947 Partition*:

> The partition related massacres and migrations, represented an unfolding human tragedy of enormous propositions. Nevertheless, historical studies have tended to focus on the causes of Partition rather than its impact. Sustained treatment of its consequences has largely been limited to accounts whose main purpose is to apportion blame for the related massacres. In this great human event, human voices are strangely silent... Moreover, valuable clues to the future consequences of North India may be lost by the failure to address the human dimension of Partition... Novelists, unlike historians, have fully addressed the human agonies which accompanied partition. Hundreds of novels, short stories and plays have taken these as their theme.

Prof. Alok Bhalla, in the introduction to his 3-volume anthology of partition stories, says that most histories of the partition are written 'either by the apologists of Pakistan or by its bitter opponents,' and hence these are communal histories which give us a biased narration. So, Bhalla dismisses all attempts to historically study the cause of the partition. He is of the view that literature narrates the real experiences of the sufferers with all the complexity and intensity involved, with a humanitarian outlook. Instead of reading the biased and communal history, it is better to turn towards the unbiased, secular, and humane literature. If there are two books—one a book of history and another a novel—on the Partition, we would naturally pick up the novel and start reading it! And that's the quality of literature. The discussion about History and Literature can be concluded with the words of S. Settar and I.B. Gupta:

> Creative writers, poets and artists, who experienced Partition either personally or through others, have articulated with greater sensitivity, and have captured the multi-dimensionality of human suffering more realistically than some of the conventional historians. They do not get obsessed with the specifics of causes and results, they do not attempt at quantifying evidence, they do not believe it necessary to decorate their statements with quotes and notes, but the kind of stark reality that emerges from their works is hard to come by in conventional historical accounts.

The Partition of India has evoked great interest among the writers of different languages and they have responded to it. Volumes of literature in different languages have been written on the event. This kind of literature has come to be known as *Partition Literature*. Even the writers belonging to the linguistic areas which have not been directly affected by the Partition have represented their emotional experiences/responses in literature. The writers belonging to the linguistic areas which have been directly affected by the Partition have delved deep into the event in their writings. The Partition literature has been written in Hindi, Urdu, Punjabi, Bengali, Marathi, Gujarati, Sindhi, Dogri, Malayalam, Kannada, and English. It has added a special chapter to the body of Indian literature.
There is a necessity of looking at this Partition Literature as a separate section in the history of Indian Literature. Though Sisir Kumar Das does not treat the Partition Literature in a separate chapter in his book, he does recognize the need to treat it as a separate category. He says:

A new corpus of literature grew out of the immediate experience of the partition in several Indian languages but mostly in the languages and in the language-areas directly affected by it. Thematically, these writings are culmination of the communal discourse in the colonial period but so conspicuous are they by the immediacy of the response to the massacre and suffering and degradation of all human values that they deserve special attention and it is better to treat them as a separate category.

The partition is the most terrible tragedy in Indian history. The human suffering it unleashed before, during, and immediately after its happening has been enormous and continuous. But when compared to the stupendous immensity of the Partition tragedy, the Partition Literature produced so far has not been proportionately prodigious. "Unlike other such historical events that spontaneously produce memorable artistic creations in literature, theatre, cinema, painting and sculpture, artistic works produced as a result of the partition have not been adequate to the occasion." Many traumatic events of the twentieth century—the World Wars, Fascism, concentration camps, Hiroshima and Nagasaki—found critical and emotional representation in art forms almost immediately. Literature, cinema, painting and theatre from many countries continue to unravel the many facets of these tragedies. In India, however, despite the magnitude of the suffering the partition unleashed, its representation in the arts was comparatively on a smaller scale. The literary production also tended to remain within the domains of the readership available to the languages concerned. So, the available readership was one of the reasons for the scanty production of the partition literature. The fear of scratching the wound—and thereby augmenting the intensity of the pain, and repeating the old communal hatred, violence, massacre, and suffering—is another reason for the scantiness of literature on Partition. In this connection, Arjun Mahey, says in *Partition Narratives: Some Observations*:

Nor was it evident that the writers could invoke the capacity to write of such things. Relative to the wealth of Urdu, Punjabi and Hindi writings which existed before, and since the Partition, the Partition itself is little represented: at best only a handful of stories, novels and poems. The reason is more than obvious: any 'non-factual' (or non-statistical) account of the event is apparently capable of re-explooding into another full-scale war.

Although the partition was preceded and followed by a savagery of communal violence, references to it in literature are not as plentiful as they should be. For some writers, the tragedy of the partition should be forgotten. "Tormented voices mourning for the dead, for the lost, had to be swept out of hearing, denied their histories, just so that the task of nation-building could be carried on uninterrupted." But the partition is not necessarily an event of the past. It has its own impact on the present. Besides, man should always build his present on the foundation of the past to hand over a better world to the posterity. He should learn lessons from the past. Sukrita Paul Kumar says in *On Narrativising Partition*:

Since partition is recent history and many from amongst the affected people are still alive, to narrativise partition is not really a reconstruction of the past, it is in fact a recording of a continuous present. In that sense partition is an enduring fact, living in the present as much as in the past.

Urvashi Butalia started listening to and recording the voices of the sufferers who survived the partition tragedy only after she saw the communal riots of 1984 in which more than 3000 Sikhs were
killed in Delhi as a reaction to the assassination of Indira Gandhi, the then Prime Minister of India. 
Otherwise, these voices/stories of the partition-hit people might have been buried in the past for ever. 
History had allowed such painful voices to be forgotten. It had been silent about those voices. It was 
probably because the demand of the reconstruction of the nation after the partition had been very urgent. 
The attention of the nation was directed towards it and the voices of the suffering were neglected. Besides, the tragedy was so horrible that many writers, even litterateurs were shocked and 
stupefied. They needed some time to overcome the initial shocks of it. ‘Authors maintained a near total silence on the subject because at this point when the national agenda of nation building was so clear, their doubts and fears had to be buried into oblivion. Partition, therefore, remains the proverbial Pandora's Box even for authors like Tarashankar Bandyopadhyaya, a classic example of a forceful pen remaining almost mute on partition. This was especially ironic as this silence followed hard on the heels of many passionate representations of India's struggle for freedom in his novels. The final gory rupture after three decades of hope for an ultimate harmony between the two communities proved too painful to be addressed. An author like Sadat Hasan Monto could express the phobias of the two communities, starkly and brutally, but not many had the courage to do so, even if they had so desired.‘

Prof. Alok Bhalla feels that 'there is not just a lack of great literature, there is, more seriously, 
a lack of great history.' He lays emphasis not only on the lack, but also on the quality of both literature 
and history by using the adjective great. There have been many volumes of history on the partition. 
But what Prof. Bhalla means is that most of these are biased, which do not show, in any significant 
detail, the partition as a great human tragedy. Dr. Rajendra Chenni says:

What is not seen in the official writings of history is the people's grief for no fault of 
their's, what is not heard is their inexplicable agony. What does not touch them is the 
monstrous shadow of the history that presents itself before them suddenly and crushes 
them and changes everything.  

What is not seen and heard in history is heard in the partition literature, however scanty it is.

It may be because of the dearth of the partition literature, we have almost forgotten the 
partition tragedy. Especially the generations after the partition do not know anything about the greatest 
tragedy of the country. We have been celebrating the Independence Day and the Birthdays of the 
leaders who won the independence for us. We have been looking forward towards development and 
progress of the nation and not backwards towards the partition out of which the present nation has 
been formed. The present is usually strife-ridden and violent the roots of which are in the partition. 
Without a solid foundation of the past, it is difficult to build a strong nation in the present. Dr. Rajendra 
Chenni is of the opinion that we should remember the partition tragedy and he also makes it clear how 
to remember :

Remembering does not mean remembering only the numbers of deaths and 
dislocations. But the memories of the partition should become a part of our moral 
awakening, political awareness, and collective consciousness. If a society/community does not make the most distorted, massive, and shocking event of its history a 
part of its memory and imagination and does not understand the ABC of it, the 
society/community will lose its ability to face the same kind of violence when 
repeated. We will become weak against the forces which exhibit the violence in 
Gujarat as an act of bravery. These forces do not have memories. Therefore, there 
is no question of atonement. That is why, we find speeches like, 'We will build an 
other Babri Masjid' and 'We will once again build Ayodhya' in their language. There 
are only desires of 'another' and 'once again' and nothing else. But for the human
beings, in the real sense, that these ‘anothers’ and ‘once agains’ should not be there is a kind of moral code. This should not have happened is the mature reaction of the human beings about the historical tragedy. 

So to make people human beings, to make them know about the partition tragedy, and to make them strong enough to resist the repetition of such a tragedy, we need partition literature.

There is a view that in the subcontinent literature can play a great role in bringing people together especially at the present times despite the prevalent tensions and competing interests in the region. A similar view has been recently expressed by three writers—Bhisham Sahni, Ajeet Kaur, and Ashok Vajpayee—on the Star News Channel. These writers were of the view that those in power have their own compulsions to maintain boundaries, hostilities and perpetual differences among the people of South Asia. But the common people do not always endorse the attitudes or actions of their leaders. In fact, the common people of this region actually want to come together and they have many reasons for coming together such as their shared history of colonialism, their state of poverty, underdevelopment, etc. In such a scenario, they believe that it is the function of the literature/literati to take up these concerns of the common people. Writers/litterateurs/literature should voice the sentiments and feelings of the ordinary common people.

Although these writers have talked of literature in general, they have referred in particular to the indigenous literature which is said to be the voice of the common people. The belief is that this indigenous literature created by the native writers is more authentic than the British literature which was earlier advocated for its civilizing function. Thus when the connotation of literature has shifted to mean indigenous literature, its present function—of binding common people together, expressive of their inherent aspirations—has been one of the reasons cited for constituting the category called ‘Partition Literature’ in recent times. This idea is clearly expressed by Mushirul Hasan in the prefaces to the two volumes on partition writing that he has edited:

The aim [of this collection] is to unfold certain aspects of this epic tragedy with the aid of stories, poems, diaries, eye-witness accounts and excerpts from novels and autobiographies... The idea is to let poets and the writers reflect on the social, cultural and political upheaval caused by the country’s division. In a nutshell, to give them a voice in the inconclusive debates on Independence and Partition. Those who speak through these volumes do not occupy center stage in national or provincial arenas of formal and institutional politics. They are not, by conventional political standards, influential. Yet they must be heard... They articulate, in varying degrees, the mood and the sensitivities of large numbers of aggrieved and tormented people who had no say whatsoever in the actual transfer of power to two sovereign nations... The voices are not in unison; there is no reason why they should be, because the country’s vivisection signified different things to different people.

And, There is, however, no attempt to impose a perspective or a historical structure. Rather, the effort is simply to draw attention to ‘The Other Face of Freedom,’ to explore shared memories, shared symbols and shared experiences of India’s composite and collective past. These volumes serve, above all, as a reminder of how partition cruelly displaced millions, divided India’s past, wrecked its civilizational rhythm and unity and left behind a seemingly constant legacy of hostility, bitterness and rancour between the peoples and governments of India and Pakistan.

The above passages suggest that the partition literature gives importance to plurality, harmony, and humanity. These qualities had been the inherent traits of the past in the subcontinent. The partition is seen as an event that disrupted the plurality, harmony, and humanity of the past and since then has
bred suspicion, jealousy, and hostility that do not reflect the real feelings of the people. So the partition literature has been trying to alleviate these evil qualities from the people of the subcontinent and to express their real feelings of friendship and harmony. As History is an incomplete account of the partition, it needs to be supplemented by Partition Literature. That's why Hasan envisions his two volumes on partition literature/writings—India Partitioned: The Other Face of Freedom, first published in 1995—as a sequel to his compilation of historical studies on partition—India's Partition: Process, Strategy, Mobilisation, published in 1993.

The point to be noted here is the difference between the views of Prof. Mushirul Hasan and Prof. Alok Bhalla. While Prof. Mushirul Hasan treats literature as a supplement to history, Prof. Bhalla envisages literature as a substitute or corrective to the biases of history. While Hasan argues for a plurality of perspectives in partition literature, Bhalla sees partition literature as a stream-lined genre. Seeing the partition literature in such a way, he classifies the partition stories he edited into four groups. But the partition literature is not a kind of literature that can be so easily classified. It is a literature, which has its own existence. It is a special kind of literature in the sense that it is not purely imaginative, but is based on realities. It is the artistic re-creation/representation of what really happened. It is the utterance of the real unending sorrows of man's world. This literature does not boast of any victories; it does not celebrate any acts of bravery. But it is the expression of intense regret, great shock, utter helplessness, boundless patience, and endless endurance of the people who were the victims of the partition tragedy.

The Partition Literature re-enacts the past (history) for the present and influences the future. In this connection, Asha Kaushik says:

Literary writing, as a creative index of history as 'lived experience' of the past, possesses significant interlinkage with the present. It is both compelling and challenging for a creative writer to assimilate critically the legacy of history, as a reference point for the present as well as to reinterpret and 're-enact past experience'... and formulate his own reflections. The legacy of history is variably reconstructed in imaginative writing, for instance, through crystallization of the 'particular' or an expansive probe into the general or the 'epochal'. In both cases, the artist confronts an unfolding of the historical process in terms of factual events, myths, icons and norms. In fact, the 'historical' as any other aspect of social reality, does not get documented or factually produced in literature. Creative practice operates through 'selection' in order to be meaningful. The artist's prerogative of selectivity does not rule out commitment to an idea, ideal or ideology in aesthetic interpretation. History thus 'selected' and 're-enacted' may be less scientific, less sequential, less objective, yet more interpretative in human terms, that is, in terms of the hopes and despair, aspirations and ideals of real human beings—thinking, feeling, suffering—in concrete life situation. (emphasis added)

The nation got its independence and it was partitioned simultaneously. The independence and the partition are the two faces of the same coin. It is bitterly ironical that the independence achieved through the non-violent struggle headed by Gandhi, the Guru of Ahimsa, should be simultaneously followed by the violence of the partition. The independence was/is an occasion for rejoicing, but the communal holocaust that preceded and followed the partition was/is an event none the less for mourning. In fact, no other country in the 20th century has seen two such contrary movements taking place at the same time. If one was a popular nationalist movement, unique in the annals of world history for ousting the colonizers through non-violent means, the other, in its underbelly, was the
counter movement of the Partition, marked by violence, cruelty, bloodshed, displacement, and massacres. If one was the cause for the celebration, the other caused deep anguish, anger, and indignation. If one was the assertion of the nation's independence and sovereignty, the other was, in the same breath, the tearing apart of the subcontinent on religious lines. Naturally, the bizarre and horrific simultaneity of these two events resulted in mixed responses from writers/litterateurs. In this connection, Asha Kaushik's words are worth examining:

The response of the Indian novelists in English to this aspect of modern India's politico-historical legacy is a mixed aesthetic compendium of pride in national glory and achievement of freedom as well as agony over the degenerating fabric of core values of individual and public life. Although, the novelists often turned to the durable core of the integral cultural heritage for foundation, firmness and faith, they are particularly sensitive to divisive communal trends eating into the very vitals of social organism. The response is, in no manner, homogeneous. On the whole, the response is notable for politico-cultural interpretation of the historical legacy.

The ways of looking at the Partition are varied and even contradictory. The Partition is such a complex event that it has variously been approached and interpreted by different writers/litterateurs. Some criticized and cursed the perpetrators of crimes, others condemned the political instigators behind them, and yet others saw the imperialist game behind the tragedy, and still others sought to portray it as the handiwork of cruel fate whose writ reigned supreme. Mohammed Hasan comments:

For Krishan Chandar, it was the total negation of values imbibed in centuries, while for Ramanand Sagar, it marked the death of human sensibility acquired after centuries of collective living. For Rajindar Singh Bedi, it was the total estrangement of all nobler sentiments from their contexts as for Hayatullah Ansari, it marks the return of human life to the laws of jungle. For Qurratulain of Aag Ka Darya, it was Fate which finally took us again to another Mahabharat, where on both sides are arrayed armies of our own kinsmen and in between stands the rath of Sri Krishna preaching to Arjun to rise above considerations of blood relationship and enter the war with selfless, "divine" motive against his own kinsmen.

For all the writers/litterateurs, the Partition was/is essentially the greatest human tragedy that overtook the subcontinent irrespective of caste, class, creed, culture, religion, and region. The effect that the Partition left on the people of all classes, communities, and religions was agonizing and onerous. They felt it as perdition turning religious, communal, political, social, and sexual orgy into a way of life. It appeared to be a conspiracy to put the national independence to shame. It seemed to be a calamity out to disrupt the centuries-old composite culture. All the writers/litterateurs represented all this commonsense in their works. The agony was suffered by human beings in general, and not just by Hindus or Muslims or Sikhs. There is a human viewpoint in the Partition Literature as the Partition is a human tragedy:

One does not discern a 'Hindu', 'Sikh' or 'Muslim' viewpoint. Most writers and poets speak a language that would make sense to the 'elites' as much as the 'subalterns', the 'Hindus' as well as the 'Muslims', the urban dwellers and the rural folks. Most of them invoke symbols of unity rather than discord. They dwell on pan-Indian values and traditions that bear the hallmark of the country's composite and syncretic development. And when religious idioms are pressed into service the purpose is to soothe rather than inflame passions. They are outraged, in equal measure, by the
divisive effects of militant Hindu nationalism and the two-nation theory. In some, the intensity of their reaction, the locale of their stories, the carefully-woven themes, and the delineation of characters convey the unmistakable message that India's Partition was an epic human tragedy, a man-made catastrophe brought about by cynical and hot-headed politicians who lack the imagination to resolve their disputes and the foresight to grasp the implications of division along religious lines.50

The great quality and characteristic of the Partition Literature is its commitment to humanity. With the exception of a few, all the writers/litterateurs are secular and against the Partition. There is an underlying feeling in all the works of literature, again except a few, that it should not have happened. The tragedy of the Partition had a tremendous effect on the minds of the writers. They were shaken by the mad violence that the Partition unleashed. Even after 60 years, the theme of partition and the entire trauma it brought along find expression in many of the literary works at present. "This was primarily because the Partition of India was not only a geo-political division of the country into three parts but also a division of common tradition, culture, heritage, and a lot more. However, the decision of imprudent politicians to divide the country on religious ground had far reaching consequences on the populace. The partition of India, in spite of solving any problem faced by the masses, created many for them that remain unresolved even today".51 The Partition Literature takes into its fold all these problems. There have been works of literature about all the faces of the partition. "The literature of the period reflected the complexities and the dynamics of social life more closely and elaborately than it had ever done in the modern period".52 With a firm commitment to humanity, the Partition Literature has depicted all the problems of the Partition. It looks at all the sufferings of the people who suffered the pangs of the partition with empathy and sympathy. S. R. Chakravarthy and Mazhar Hussain rightly point out:

What emerges, from this vast body of partition literature, is that most of the writers look at the problem of partition from a humanist point of view. They stood, in the main, for humanism, brotherhood, tolerance, unity, respect for women's dignity, inter-religious marriage, preserving the shared language, culture and heritage and integrity of the country. In essence, they are opposed to religious animosity, bigotry, any kind of violence against humanity, bringing dishonour to women folk and finally, the partition of the country.53

All the writers/litterateurs believe in an essentially harmonious relationship that existed before the partition. Their belief has found its expression in their works. Despite horrible depiction of communal riots, violence, abduction, migration, dislocation, and various inhuman acts of fundamentalism and bigotry, most of the writers/litterateurs have shown a great commitment to the ideals of communal and religious harmony. Prof. Alok Bhalla is of the opinion that if there had been a history of irreconcilable hatred between the Hindus and the Muslims, it would have been reflected in the cultural and social practices of the two groups. The pain of living together would have been extensively recorded in popular kisssas and tamashas or chronicles and songs.54 Plurality and harmony had been the characteristics of the country before the Partition and they have been extensively represented in the Partition Literature. Prof. Bhalla further says:

There is hardly a fictional text which presents the partition as an inevitable consequence of an ancient hatred between the Hindus and the Muslims.55

All the writers/litterateurs have rejected communalism and fanaticism. They have upheld the composite and syncretic culture of India.
Many writers/litterateurs have written about the spread of communal and fanatic propaganda with the beginning of the movement for Pakistan and the origin of the Hindu Mahasabha. Communal discord became the dominant attitude of the society. Communal anity was replaced by hostility. Communal clashes, riots, and killings were rampant just before, during, and just after the Partition. Indescribable panic took over the people. There was no safety for life and property. There was no order but disorder and anarchy in the country. Many writers/litterateurs have described how the Partition ruptured the existing social fabric of friendship, trust, and harmony. They, however, were hopeful that the communal hatred would soon end and harmony would be restored. All this rupture and hopes of recovery have found expression in the Partition Literature. Though there were some attempts by some political scientists and politicians to justify the Partition as a necessity, yet writers/litterateurs, in general, have considered it as uncalled for and unnatural. How much pains humanity had to suffer and to what extent human values were butchered during the Partition can be seen in the Partition Literature.

The Partition resulted in one of the greatest migrations in the history of the world. Ten to twenty million people crossed the newly created borders. The displacement resulted in the severance of old roots, longing for old ties, and a feeling of nostalgia. The migration also caused a heavy loss of life on the way to cross the borders. All these themes have been represented in the Partition Literature. The loss of home and hearth, the worries for the near and dear ones who were left behind, the anxiety of starting life afresh in a new land, the utter helplessness, and poverty have been captured in literature. ‘Leaving one’s motherland was a great grief which the sufferer can only feel and that too was the destiny of those fortunate ones who remained alive after the Partition. This grief still haunts the memory of the millions of people living in India and Pakistan. Is it a small misery that millions of people became refugees in their own homeland? Which government has the details of those, who were killed in the exchange of population?’ Many novels have these details. ‘They contain the problems relating to migration, refugee camps, acute problem of accommodation, forcible occupation of vacant houses, and finding employment for increasing number of refugees. Many people went mad after being frustrated by the problems.’

The tragedy of the Partition was so severe that there was an immediate response from writers/litterateurs who have produced a number of works about it in different Indian languages. Sadiq Ur Rahman Kidwai observes:

"Literature, which came during the process of partition and immediately after, is marked by emotional outburst against the human tragedy that followed political development. Large-scale massacre, destruction, displacement, and migration of population were their (the writers'/litterateurs') major concerns. A feeling of hurt for age-old human values occupied all the space in the writings at the time. Most touching are those occasions where the narrative is woven around the plight of the aged, women and children."

Krishan Chandar, Rajindar Singh Bedi, S.H. Monto, Ismat Chughtai, Qurratulain Hyder, Yash Pal, Bhisham Sahni, Rahi Masoom Raza, Kamleshwar, Badi-uz-Zaman, Khuswant Singh, Amrita Preetam, etc., have created some fictional works of enduring value. They have created some unforgettable characters and contexts to reflect different facets of the holocaust of the Partition. For the first time, the Partition Literature posed a set of different questions about life, politics, religion, culture, and values. ‘In some writings, we feel an overflow of pain, anger and anguish while in others
satire, humour, and even a sense of shame, remorse and contempt. The writers of this age had personal experience of the ground reality as they had lived through the trauma of partition. Personal suffering, creative perception and the struggle within against the attempt to split humanity and to destroy the accomplishments of thousands of years of history came together to produce fiction and poetry of the highest aesthetic values as well as the most authentic documented account of how humanity survived the tragedy of its own making.

Along with this immediate response to the partition, the writers/litterateurs have also written about another important theme i.e., the tragedy of those who really fought for the unity of the country. Independence was achieved, but the country was partitioned. The Partition was the victory of the communal forces and the defeat of the secular forces that failed to keep the country united. It was a rude shock to them. Especially the ‘nationalist Muslims,’ who stayed back in India, had to suffer much just for having fought for the unity of the country. The anguish and suffering of these people have been represented in the Partition Literature.

Culture was another important theme for many writers/litterateurs after the partition. Was the composite and syncretic culture not strong enough to keep the people, with different languages, together as it had been doing? What constitutes culture? And such other questions have been taken up by many writers/litterateurs in their works. They generally believe in the pluralistic character of the Indian culture with enough space for regional, religious, and language diversities and also for occasional aberrations. Culture flows on with the passage of time and it imbibes new elements in every successive age in history with the core remaining in tact. But it failed to throw up a successful challenge to the communal, religious, and political forces. ‘This debate on culture is still alive in Partition Literature especially in Urdu on both sides of the border’.

The issue of culture has been discussed more vigorously and widely in Pakistan than in India. Sadiq ur Rahman Kidwai says:

In Pakistan the discourse on culture is even more challenging. The pre-Partition simplistic and rather casually formulated Two-Nation Theory has given way to the dilemma as to what is Pakistani culture. After formation of Bangladesh the issue has become even more ironical. One can now easily sense the emergence of a consensus among the Urdu writers of Pakistan i.e., religion is an essential but not the only basis of culture. Intezar Hussain’s Basti and various short stories have sensitively dealt with the issue. Here again we find a stronger belief in continuity and indivisibility of historical heritage, human experience and tradition.

Another important theme of the Partition Literature is the identity crisis. The displacement and migration pose different questions: Where does the individual actually belong to? What is his/her heritage and tradition? What is his/her history? These questions were very relevant after the partition. The migrated people could not easily accept the new land as their homeland for they could not forget the old homeland or motherland that had been theirs for ages. They could not easily identify themselves as the citizens of a new nation. At the same time, they could not be easily accepted as their equals by the natives. This question of identity has been pondered over by many writers/litterateurs like Harris Khalique, Krishna Sobti, Kamalishwar, S.H. Monto, etc., in their fictional writings. Monto tried in vain to ‘separate India from Pakistan and Pakistan from India’. He said:

What my mind could not resolve was the question: what country do we belong to now, India or Pakistan? And whose blood was it that was being so mercilessly shed
everyday? And the bones of the dead, stripped of the flesh of religion, were they being
burned or buried? […] Everyone seemed to be regressing. Only death and carnage
seem to be proceeding ahead. A terrible chapter of blood and tears was being added to
history, a chapter without precedent. India was free. Pakistan was free from the
moment of its birth, but in both states man’s enslavement continued: by prejudice, by
religious fanaticism, by savagery.\(^{63}\)

The Partition Literature gives us a complete picture of the Partition. The social, religious, and
political conditions of the pre-Partitioned times; the harmony that existed then; the composite culture
that emerged as a result of living together for a thousand years; the beginning and growth of communal
differences; the widespread violence and suffering; the abduction of women; the break-up of families;
the separation of relatives, friends, communities and regions; the migration and dislocation of people;
the refugee problem; the feelings of alienation; the nostalgia; the question of identity; the rehabilitation
of the displaced people; the impact of the Partition on the people; the continued feelings of suspicion
and hatred between the two nations; etc., have all been represented in different forms of literature.

Among the dreadful consequences of the Partition, there is only one thing for a little
consolation i.e., though the country was partitioned, the language and literature were not partitioned.
The Hindi-Urdu conflict was, as we know, intensified with the rising communal differences. Urdu
actually stood for the cultural synthesis of the Hindu and the Muslim communities. Unfortunately, it
was directly linked with the very idea of the Partition. It was because the Two-Nation Theory claimed
Urdu to be the language of the Muslims of the subcontinent. After the Partition, it was supposed that
Urdu also migrated to Pakistan. But Urdu is still there in India. The Muslims who stayed back in India
and the Indians who have been living together with them have kept Urdu alive in India. Even the
literature in Urdu has been responsible for its vitality. ‘The partition failed to destroy Urdu because its
very character conflicted with the idea of Partition and now it is Urdu which can claim with some pride
to be still the strongest cultural link within the geographically and politically partitioned subcontinent….We
find Urdu literature of India and Pakistan, though identified with its own particular situations,
indivisible’.\(^{64}\) S.H. Monto asked himself: ‘Will Pakistani literature be different – and if so, how? To
whom will now belong what had been written in undivided India? Will that be partitioned too?’\(^{65}\) The
obvious answer is ‘no’. Literature can never be partitioned.

Thus, literature signifies the synthesis of the two nations. It always has the effect of unity,
strength, and humanity; and not suspicion, division, and destruction. ‘Literary journals of the whole
subcontinent though not easily available on either sides of border due to political hurdles show that the
community of readers and writers is common and constantly enlarging. Literary gatherings like mushairas,
symposia and seminars are generally considered more important when participants are from both the
countries. This literary atmosphere confirms that Urdu literature is not partitioned. Even Urdu-Hindi
conflict does not exist when it comes to literature. Increasing publications and popularity of literature
from Pakistan and of Indian literature show that literature being the most genuine and authentic
expression of mind and heart has refused to succumb to political gamesmanship.\(^{66}\) For those who do
not know either Urdu or Hindi, the important works of Partition Literature have been translated into
English and made available in India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh. Thus literature is beyond the bounds
of language or region and it unites people on the grounds of humanity.
Although the literature about the Partition has been called the *Partition Literature*, the function it does is not of partition, but of unification of minds and hearts irrespective of colour, culture, creed, and country. That is why literature has always been a unifying and humanizing force. Political discourses or debates will always lay blame on the other. This blaming keeps the animosity alive. Only the literature truly represents the experience, the suffering, and the feelings of the people who were the innocent victims of the partition. These sufferings and feelings will pave the way for reconciliation and reconstruction. The literary work on the partition affirms that the subject of the partition was first the human being—not the Hindu human being, nor the Muslim, nor the Sikh. The suffering and despair were common to all the human beings who were the victims. Literature treats them without any discrimination. In this sense, again, the literature is not partitioned. Jason Francisco says:

The literature as a whole seeds pathos for the suffering and inhumanity of the partition, and related instances of cultural chauvinism, but not merely so. It also sprouts a countervailing protest, a voice of justice that must be the surging of our humanity itself—something greater than our bestiality—within us. In this sense, the literature does what religious leaders in each community failed to do: to make communities forces for the affirmation of humanity broadly, and to forge nations—if nations are the destinies of cherished traditions—dedicated to human improvement, dedicated precisely to virtuous conduct with those of different faith.

That is why we need to encourage the reading of the Partition Literature more and more in the subcontinent where 'Iqbal, Rabindranath, Nazrul, etc., have still the same appeal to all the states of the subcontinent'. They are of equal interest to the people of the subcontinent irrespective of their colour, culture, creed, language, and land. The creative Partition Literature—be it Indian, Pakistani, or Bangladeshi—is still strengthening the bonds of the people. The creative writers/litterateurs have upheld humanism and the composite culture of the subcontinent. Different forms of literature—like novels, plays, poems, and short stories—have faithfully captured the partition in all its detail and complexity. We shall take up the *Partition Stories* for discussion and analysis in the following chapters.
Reference and Notes:


3. For all the ideas about new histories, I am indebted to Dr. Nikhila Haritsa’s unpublished thesis on *Communalism and Women’s Writing in Independent India (A Case Study of Writings on Partition)* submitted to Bangalore University (henceforth referred to as Haritsa, N.) See pp. 110-114.


12. This is a study of what happened to the Meo community in Western India at the time of partition by Shail Mayaram, published in 1997, op. cit.

13. This is an interview, by Alok Bhalla, of the famous writer, Bhisham Sahni, known for his famous novel, Tamas. The interview was conducted in 2002. It is found in the book: Settar S. and I.B. Gupta, op. cit.

14. This is an essay by Asaduddin, M., op. cit.


26. Ibid., Vol. 1, p. xii.


38. Ibid., p. 3.
39. The Evening Hindi News Bulletin on the Star News Channel, on 7th December 2001, invited
these three writers for a discussion in the context of the forthcoming South-Asian Regional Co-
operation Meet for writers. This interview was also before the 13 December attack on the Parlia-
ment whenafter such views have hardly been expressed. It is mentioned in Haritsa N, op. cit., p. 63.
41. Ibid., p. 64.
42. Hasan, Mushirul, India Partitioned, op. cit., Vol. 1, p. 9. Quoted in ibid., p. 64.
44. See the Introduction. Bhalla, Alok, op. cit.
India Literary Responses. Eds. Chakravarthy S.R. and Mazhar Hussain. New Delhi: Har-
49. Hasan, Mohammed. ‘Literary Reaction to Partition in Urdu’. Chakravarthy S.R. and Mazhar
Hussain, op. cit., pp. 74-75.
53. Chakravarthy S.R. and Mazhar Hussain, op. cit., p. 34.
55. Bhalla, Alok. ‘Memory, History and Fictional Representation of the Partition’. Ramakrishnan
E.V., op. cit., p. 90.
57. Ibid.
59. Ibid.
60. Ibid., p. 69.
61. Ibid., p. 70.
63. Quoted in ibid.
67. Francisco, Jason. ‘In the Heart of Fratricide: The Literature of India’s Partition Burning Freshly’.
68. Ibid., p. 393.
69. Chakravarthy S.R. and Mazhar Hussain, op. cit., p. 28 (Iqbal is a famous writer of Pakistan,
Rabindranath of India, and Nazrul of Bangladesh).