CHAPTER II

PARTITION AND ITS IMPACT ON CREATIVE WRITINGS IN INDIA

2.1 Partition: Significance beyond mere Historical Reality

Psychologically stimulating national experience usually serves as a glorious reservoir of literacy material which can presuppose a significance beyound mere historical authenticity. Thus, the French Revolution and its Napoleonic aftermath, the American Civil War and the subsequent reorganisation of the country have all provided novelists with prosperous material for fiction.

The independence movement in India was not merely a political struggle, it affected all aspects of life of Indians in the 1920’s and 30’s. According to Meenakshi Mukherjee:

While the essential predicament of the nineteenth century American novelist was that of isolation, the major issues facing the twentieth century Indian novelist, until recent years, were involvement and concern: involvement with the changing national scene, concern for the destiny of the country. No Indian writer dealing with that period could avoid reflecting this aspect of society either directly as theme or indirectly as significant public background to a personal narrative.\(^1\)
However, overdependence on history can be a contraction of the novelist’s vision and this can be an even greater risk if that historical circumstance is a part of the novelist’s life. History has forever offered a milieu for fiction, which if appropriately used, can provide a useful perspective. But a good novelist uses historical material only to the extent it is essential to his fiction. He takes from history broad ideas and patterns and blends them into his narrative in such a way that they become a part of his fictional world. Thus, history loses its circumstantiality and becomes a timeless presence in fiction. Some of the most well-known examples of such writing are *A Tale of Two Cities*, *War and Peace*, *All Quiet on the Western Front*, *A Farewell to Arms* and many more war novels written in the west. Dickens employs the French Revolution in his *A Tale of Two Cities* to fictionalise history and make it serve an archetypal function, not intrude into the narrative as an external agent. Salman Rushdie selects some broad events from Indian history and fantasises them in his novel *Midnight’s Children*.

In his introduction to the novel *Tamas* by Bhisham Sahani, Govind Nihalani States:

* A Traumatic Historical Event usually finds
  * the artistic literary response twice.
  * Once, during the event or immediately  
    * following it and again after a lapse of
    * time, when the event has found its corner in
    * the collective memory of the generation that
    * witnessed it. The initial response tends to
    * be emotionally intense and personal in
    * character, even melodramatic. On the other
    * hand, when the event is reflected
upon with emotional detachment and objectivity, a clearer pattern of the various forces that shaped it is likely to emerge. Tamas is the reflective response to the partition of India – one of the most tragic events in the recent history of the Indian Sub-continent.

The violence that it unleashed was unprecedented, unexpected and barbaric. The Partition of the Indian sub-continent was the single most traumatic event experience in recent years. Provoked by the hooligan actions of a few, the vengeance that ordinary Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs wrecked on each other coarsened our social sense, distorted our political judgements and deranged our understanding of what is meant by moral right.

2.2 Real sorrow of the Partition

The authentic sorrow of the Partition was that it brought to an abrupt end a long history of communal co-existence. No doubt the relations between the Hindus and the Muslims were not always free from suspicion, distrust or angry, rejection by one group of the habits and practices of the other. Occasionally, the conflicts were harsher and even led to murder and arson, but such moments of communal frenzy was rare and short-lived. People had accepted co-existence as a way of life notwithstanding minor skirmishes or occasional outbursts of anger and violence which were suppressed quickly and normalcy was restored in a short time. Such was the mechanism developed by both the communities to contain tensions and disruptions, if any. And if at all there were conflicts and disruptions, the rich variety of the life of the two communities
were never seriously threatened – the Hindus never ceased from paying homage at dargahs, the Muslims continued to participate in Hindu festivals, Traders of both the communities carried on with their usual exchanges of goods and services, learned men sought each other’s company to gather information and knowledge about the best of both the traditions.

Had there undeniably been a history of diametrically opposed hatred between Hindus and Muslims, it would have been reflected in the cultural and social practices of the two groups. As Ashok Bhalla puts:

…it the pain of living together would have been extensively recorded in popular Kissas or Tamashas and Songs.³

But the people who commanded respect were the ones who highlighted confidence of the Hindu and the Muslims on each other and encouraged mutual support. It does not, however, imply that there were no organizations with communal prejudice or those which nurtured abhorrence towards each other or incited communal passions. In fact people like Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Tagore, Nazrul Islam, Gandhi and many more supported the theory of a unified state with a multiplicity of religious, social or moral ideals. The daily Life of the people (Both Hindus and Muslims) was so richly interwoven into common foundation and there was so much resemblance in their ethnicity and practices that the Partition came as a rude shock to the common people, leaving them in state of unqualified disorientation.

It is seeing that if Partition and its attendant bloodshed was so completely without any historical or social justification that most of the writers could only watch, as the place they had called home was reduced to rubble, and the memories of their collective rites and traditions,
stories and songs, names of the trees and birds were permanently tinged with the acrid smell of the ash, smoke and blood.

They justify the creation of an Islamic state and the fight for Partition of Muslims from India because of persecution and lack of equal opportunities. Communal historians have put-forward many explanations for the fact of Partition and the creation of Pakistan, Muslim separatists put the blame on the Congress as the embodiment of Hindu nationalism. On the other hand, the historians of the Hindu Rashtra quote profusely from the past blame the Muslims for their disruptive activities.

The calamitous Partition of India was the termination of a thousand years old love - hate relationship between the Hindus and Muslims. In unkindness of the fact that the antagonism of the two communities to each other was widely recognised from the earliest period of their contact, non-discriminatory people belonging to both communities did endeavor to bridge the gap in reciprocated understanding.

Firstly, the Partition of Bengal in 1905 on the basis of a Muslim majority which, though accepted by their British parliament, was strongly opposed by the Indian people. Many factors led to deterioration in the communal relationship. Muslims became more and more alienated. This alienation expressed itself in various separatist measures. Secondly, the establishment of a political party of communal lines in 1906 to safeguard the political rights of the Muslims was a major step. This is how the All India Muslim League was born. The Indian National Congress and the Muslim League, as well as the Hindu and Muslim communities as such, all had moderates and extremists in their midst. Moderates, were for unity and communal harmony and extremists had mutual suspicion and distrust. The brief period of mutual amity under Mahatma Gandhi did not last long. The Montague-Chelmsford Reforms for the Legislative Assembly in 1921 gave the death blow to this fragile communal accord. Thereafter began a period of self-assertion to gain maximum political advantage, subsequently erupting in a chain of vicious communal riots. Leaders of the Congress party tried in vain to create an atmosphere of mutual
understanding, trust, and harmony and thus bring about unity. A prominent factor in their failure was the uncanny sense of realism and political astuteness of the Muslim League leaders. They realized that to establish a separate entity for themselves would be more advantageous to the interests of the Muslims than a merged identity with the Hindus. Because of the situate they took from the very beginning, it was not surprising that Pakistan should have come into subsistence in 1947.

Gradually, restricted political agitation was transformed into a mass civil disobedience movement. Under the political pressure, in the 30’s and 40’s the British Government in India gradually expanded the scope for self-rule by transferring more and more responsibility and power to the Indian people. But the Congress under the dynamic leadership of Nehru rejected mere reforms and wanted nothing short of complete freedom for India. The Round Table Conferences proved futile. Communal discord led to riots. The Provincial Assembly elections in 1937 and the unexpected success of the Congress further damaged the relationship between Hindus and Muslims, as Congress refused any co-operation with what they regarded as anti-national forces.

The long political strife and struggle for freedom in India, led the British Parliament to agree on a peaceful and constitutional transfer of power to the Indians. With the adoption of a resolution for a separate nation for Muslims at the Lahore Session of the Muslim League in 1940, the alienation of the two communities and two organizations was complete. An interim government, with the Congress and the Muslim League as major parties, was installed in 1946, but could not function smoothly because of the divergent interests, and aims of their constituent members. Ultimately, it broke down of the Partition of the country was accepted by the Congress leaders, perhaps in sheer disgust. The leaders unproductive despondently in foreseeing the trends and evaluating the consequences of their decisions.

Jawaharlal Nehru abhorred the very idea of Communalism and Mahatma Gandhi emphasized Hindu-Muslim unity as one of his life’s missions. The Congress leadership refused
to accept the offer of Partition and tried till very end for an undivided India. In the end, the Congress leaders had to admit defeat for their secular, humanistic ideals and had to accept the Partition of the country. It was this wrong assessment of the political reality and the utopian approach to Hindu-Muslim unity that was partly responsible for the unprecedented bloodshed and a mass exodus from one side to the other.

Freedom was finally attained, but at a very heavy price. Such was the political situation: events followed in quick succession and the long drawn out, non-violent freedom struggle ended in violence. The memory of this intensely painful event lingered and will continue to linger for years and embitter the refugees and both sides.

The religious and political differences between the Hindus and the Muslims reached a climax with this event, leading to widespread disturbances, and causing destruction to human life and property. Much has been written on this aspect of the Partition of the country, the most important historical event of our age. The manner and the reckless speed with which the Partition was accomplished, with no regard for the orderly transfer of population between the two new states, compounded this. In the massacres which immediately preceded the Partition and continued for several months afterwards, lakhs of Hindus and Muslims lost their lives.

As the historian Leonard Mosley says:

*It is all very well to draw up a plan to divide India in 4 hours and accept it in 5 minutes. How, in a land consisting of 250,000,000 Hindus, 90,000,000 Muslims, 10,000,000 Christians and particularly and 5,000,000 sikhs do you implement it?*[^4]

Overnight, two new states came into existence, a truncated India, and a largely Muslim Pakistan comprising Sind, Baluchistan, the North West Frontier Province and parts of the states of Punjab in the West and Bengal in the East. Even by a conservative estimate, ten million
people took to the road, but at least million did not make it to their destination. The implementation of the plan with neither foresight nor preparedness led to a holocaust. Trains packed with Muslims refugees, all of them murdered during the journey arrived in Pakistan with messages scribbled on the carriages reading, A gift from India. In turn the Muslims sent back train-loads of butchered Sikhs and Hindus with the message: A present from Pakistan. Foot convoys, some of them 800,000 strong and 70 miles long, moved between the two dominions. Thousands were slaughtered on the way, an equal number fell victim to cholera and other diseases. An officer of the British Army, Captain Atkins, recalls a road on which a convoy has passed:

Every yard of the way there was a body,  
Some butchered, some dead of cholera.  
The vultures had become so bloated by  
Their feasts they could fly no longer,  
And wild dogs so demanding in their taste  
They ate only the livers of the corpses  
littering the road.  

They dispense the blame for the partition to power-hungry politicians who inflamed hatred among a simple people to serve their own selfish ends. The ghastly tragedies of the Partition have been a major theme with fiction writers in Indo-Anglian writing. Though the writers may differ in the treatment of their subject matter and their choice of gory incidents, they all seem to insist that the division of the Punjab was done arbitrarily, that the Hindus and Muslims could have lived in a united India as they done for a century and half under British rule.
However, there is also another dominant theme running through this whole literature and that is the restoration of humanism and propagation of communal harmony between the two communities. The Partition led to wide spread massacre, rape, terror, arson, orgy, rioting, hospitality, distrust, religious enimity, attacks and counter-attacks all of which is the subject matter of the literature pertaining to the Partition. As can be expected, communal narrow-mindedness and religious fanaticism are deployed by most of the writers who vividly portray the evil consequences of religious intolerance. They show that human values are preserved by individuals in both the warring communities even in the midst of utter chaos, and that itself is a ray of hope for man. Having put their faith in human rationality, many of them have no words to express their disenchantment.

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In doing so, they consciously avoid taking sides and put the blame equally on both warring factions. Unable to explain the violence, many of the writers concentrate on painting elaborate scenes of violence during Partition in the hope of conveying something of their sense of horror, suggesting that fiction can recreate the event even though history may tend to distort.

It is surprising that no novel in English by an Indian about the Partition was written until 1956, when *Train to Pakistan* was first published (initially titled a *Mano Majra*). Since then, of course, there has been a continuous stream of writing about this event.

Although Mulk Raj Anand, R.K. Narayan and Raja Rao depicted the freedom struggle and the impact of Gandhi’s ideas in their novels, they did not deal directly with the holocaust of the Partition in their writings as did Kushwant Singh or K.A. Abbas or Chaman Nahal. However, the trauma of Partition has also stirred the creative genius of such novelists as Attia Hosain, Manohar Malgonkar, Raj Gill, Kartar Singh Duggal, V.N. Arora, and Gurcharan Das.
At a distance from Novels, there are a large number of emotionally charged short stories on communal incidents revealing the anger and disgust of the innocent people. There are stories which are full of lamentation and consolation and bring out the pathos of the situation by writers like K.A. Abbas, Saadat Hasan Manto, Kartar Singh Duggal, and Khushwant Singh. All describe an unusually vicious time in which the sustaining norms of society as it had existed in the past are absent. It is as if the Partition had only shattered the continuity of the tradition of the nation in which the Hindus, the Sikhs and the Muslims had defined their individual and communal identities, but it had also ensured that it would never again be possible for anyone to recreate a community in which moral and political choices which are valid for all can be made.

The Partition, they know, has forced them to leave behind human world and has given them in return only a heartless substitute of a religious community. Many short stories are concerned with sorrows of migration, with uprooted people who find that they have nowhere to go. Manto’s Story: *Toba Tek Singh* reveals the writer’s own state of mind. Fearful of communal tensions prevailing at that time, and persuaded by his wife and family, Manto left Bombay for Lahore in January 1948 and always regretted having done so:

*I want to say that there is great sadness
in my heart today, a strange melancholy.
Four-and-a-half years ago, when I bade
farewell to my other home, Bombay, I had
felt that way I fell today. I was sad at
leaving a city where I had spent the
hardest, the happiest and the most*
Manto looked on the Partition of the country as an act of insanity, and he takes this theme of insanity to its culminating point in the story by having the governments of India and Pakistan agree to an exchange of Lunatics. Humour and pathos are mingled throughout the story as in the medley that takes place on the border of the two states:

*Getting the lunatics out of the buses*

*and handling over custody to officers of*

*other side proved to be a very difficult*

*task. Some refused to come off the bus;*

*control; a few broke loose and had to*

*be recaptured. Those that were naked had*

*to be clothed. No sooner were clothes*

*put on them than they tore them off their*

*bodies. Some came out with vile abuse,*

*others began to sing at the tops of their*

*voices. Some squabbled; others cried or*

*roared with laughter. They created such*

*a racket that one could not hear a word.*

*The female lunatics added to the noise.*

*And all this in the bitterest of cold when*

*People’s teeth chattered like the scales*
of rattlesnakes.⁷

And it is through his weird cry and death that Manto speaks of the pain and grief of the millions who were forced to leave their homes. Among the groups in an old Sikh, Bishen Sing, who wants to be neither in India nor Pakistan but in the village – Toba Tek Singh – to which he belongs.

In another of Manto’s stories, A Tale of 1947, a character Mumtaz speaks with great passion:

Don’t tell me a hundred thousand Hindus
and the same numbers of Muslims have been
massacred. The great tragedy is not that
two hundred thousand people have been
killed, but all this enormous loss of
life has been futile. The Muslims who,
killed a hundred thousand Hindus must
have believed that they had exterminated
the Hindu religion. But the Hindu religion
is alive and well and will remain alive
and well. And after putting away a hundred
thousand Muslims, they Hindus must have
Celebrated the liquidation of Islam; but
the fact is that Islam has not been affected
in the least. Only the naive can believe that religion can be eliminated with a gun.

Why can’t they understand that faith, Belief, devotion, call it what you will, is a thing of spirit; it is not physical.

Guns and knives are powerless to destroy it.  

Mumtaz was sailing for Pakistan, a country he knew nothing about. To him religion was not an infection which afflicted ninety-nine percent of the people. It was a faith which makes a human being special, distinguishes him from the herd and proves his humanity.

It is Manto’s own disillusionment that is reflected in most of his stories. As he says:

For a long time I refuse to accept the consequences of the revolution, which was set off by the partition of the country.

I still feel the same way; but I suppose in the end, I came to accept this nightmarish reality without self-pity or despair. 

The most horrowing tale about rape is Open It by Manto. In it a Muslim girl Sakina who has been abducted and raped so often that when she is hospitalised and the doctor asks the girl’s father to open the window her hands involuntarily move to undo her trouser strings. The father’s exclamation of joy is given as under:

She’s alive. My daughter is alive, is very ironical.
Stories about women being physically abused and mutilated are quite painful and nauseating. Kartar Singh Duggal’s *Kulsum* brings about a moment of horror. In this story an old Sikh rapes a Muslim girl (Whom he has abducted) for failing to oblige sexually his young guest, a schoolmaster. As the old man emerges from the hut tying his *tehmad* we find ourselves as dumbfounded as the girl, *Kulsum*. The earlier plea to the schoolmaster:

*Marry me. Marry me first... I beg of you. I shall repay you for your kindness.*

Repeated many times by the helpless girl, add to the pathos of the story.

In the middle of both communities, the Hindu and Muslims, there were those who accepted conversion to the other’s faith to save their lives. In Bhisham Sahani’s, *Pali* 12, a lost Hindu child is adopted by a Muslim couple and circumcised and pronounced a Muslim. His name is changed from *Pali* to *Altaf*. Some year later, the boy is discovered by his real parents and taken back to India where he is rebaptised as a Hindu after the mundan ceremony and again called *Pali*. This situation, comic as it may seem is most poignantly moving and touching. One can easily imagine the utter bewilderment of the boy who had to undergo the formal ceremony of conversion from Hindu to Muslim and vice versa only to satisfy the religious ego of the two communities. What about the feeling of the boy that are injured brutally in this process? Whom will he accept, his biological parents or his foster parents? Can he be insensitive to the succour provided to him by couple because they were Muslim? The language of love transcends all barriers. But the greatest irony is that all religions tend to forget the essential message underlying them. Bhisham Sahani’s story is an attempt to bring out this tragic irony and ruthless irrationality of religious bigotry and its horrible consequences. It was a common practice during the partition to strip a man naked to determine whether he was Hindu or Muslim. In Khuhwant Singh’s *Train to Pakistan*, one of the characters who is circumcised, muses:
Where on earth except in India would
a man’s life depend on whether or not
his foreskin had been removed? It would
be laughable if it were not tragic.  

The riots were a natural result of the Partition, and Khushwant Singh with incisive irony, presents the genesis of one such riot in a story called simply The Riot. Tension ran high in two communities, but the real culprit of the day was the bitch Rani. A stone thrown at her by the Hindu shopkeeper, Ram Jawaya, catches a Muslim grocer, Ramzan. And soon,

What had once been a busy town was a heap of charred masonry.

The threadbare, matter-of-fact account of the happening, without comment from the narrator, exposes the hideous face of riots. Riots may be caused by a flimsy situation but are aggravated in an atmosphere of fear and suspicion. It is during the riots that man’s rationality takes complete holiday and his savagery comes out with full vigour and force.

Many writers were so disgusted with the horror and violence of the Partition, that they blamed both the parties without taking and sides. The most striking example of a neutral account is Krishan Chander’s Peshwar Express where the author has presented almost a well-balanced statistics of the butchered men, women and children from both the communities. This story is different from others because it is narrated through the persona of the railway engine which,
though a machine, is capable of human feelings whereas human beings have taken on the role of
machine guns. The train speaks thus:

I heaved a sigh of relief as I
Pulled out of the Peshawar railway
station. My carriages were jam-
packed with passengers...
By now I had started detesting each
and every part of my body. I felt
utterly polluted as if I had been
thrown out of Hell.
I am a lifeless train- a structure
of wood and steel, devoid of any
feeling. But even then I hate to
carry a cargo of blood and flesh
dripping with hatred,
I will haul foodgrain to famine-
stricken areas. I will carry coal,
Oil and iron ore to the mills, and
ploughs and fertilisers to the
farmers. I will carry groups of
prosperous peasants and happy workers
in my carriages. The pious and
simple women, secure in the love
of their husbands, would cast loving
glances at them, and the children,
their faces radiant like the lotus in
bloom, will not cower before death
but greet the life to come with
mounting confidence. Then there will
be no Hindus and no Muslims. There
will only be workers and human beings. 15

Women writers also show a non-partisan point of view. Attia Hosain’s *After the Storm*,

is rich in feeling and shows how children and women struggle to keep alive in the hell let loose
by their menfolk. *Bibi, a child small and thin with serious anxious eyes and a smile on her face*,

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is led to speak about her past. It is difficult to tell how many years of childhood, life had robbed
her of. Her story is given in snatches and with many digressions, and is a curious blend of fact
and fiction. But one is able to gather from the story that *Bibi* is an orphan without a soul. Her
mind refuses to fill the gap between the refugee camp and her adoption. She remains detached.
The real horror of the story comes through, not from what *Bibi* says, but from what she leaves
unsaid. She was able to cope with her circumstances because of the make believe world she
created for herself.
Krishna Sobti’s story,

*Where is My Mother?*  

brings out the horror imprinted in the little girl’s mind. Her persistent pleas and repeated requests to the *Baluch – Yunus Khan*, “I want my mother, Where is my mother?” bring out the agony, which no promises of any kind can diminish. Her inconsolable and anguished cry is as poignantly moving as the cry of the lost child in Mulk Raj Anand’s story: *The Lost Child*. The promises of material nature do not have enough attraction to make the child forget the inimitable material love and care.

Some of the Pakistani writers have also written on the theme of the Partition and effectively brought out the sufferings of Muslim women. Manto, Bapsi Sidhwa, Qudrat Ullah Shahab, Ashfaq Ahmed, Aziz Ahmad, Aziz Ahmad, Ibne Insha and Intizar Husain are some of those who have expressed their feelings through their stories. Shahab’s,

*Ya Khuda*  

is a powerful tale of harrowing misery to which Muslim women were subjected during Partition. *Dilshad* is Muslim girl. She is waiting for her turn to be transported to Pakistan. She is molested and sexually abused at the hands of her Sikh captors in India. At last, she boards a train to her new home – with hope of new life. There are quickly shattered when she discovers that even her own countrymen look upon her only a means of gratification on their carnal lust.

The title *Ya khuda* rings in our minds and symbolises our utter helplessness in the face of such an inhuman treatment given to womenfolk by men irrespective of what religion or country they belong to.
Punjabi writer in English, Hindi, Punjabi and Urdu come to this theme again and again, perhaps because Punjab suffered the most of account of the Partition. Novels, short-stories, poems dealing with the trauma of the division of the country are found in abundance in Punjabi literature. Amrita Pritam’s Pinjar (Translated in English as The Skeleton by Khushwant Singh) and her poem Aj Aakhan Waris Shah Noo, I invoke Warris Shah Today) have moved the people on both sides of the border so deeply that even today when they read poem they weep for what they themselves had done to each other, a sign of the sense of shame and disgrace, we feel even now.

Beside these stories, there are a large number of stories written by men and women who were witnesses to this age of genocide, Kamleshwar, Rajinder sing Bedi, Mohan Rakesh, Yashpal, Kulwant Sing Virk, Maheep Singh, Ismat Chughtai, Vishnu Prabhakar, and many others. Most of the stories are ironic in their tone and realistic in their depiction. They bring out the inhuman aspect of the Partition, but uphold human goodness.

K.A.Abbas,

*Inquilab (1995)*

is a detailed picture of the Indian political scene over a period of almost two decades upto the 1930s. The novel offers glimpses of Bhagat Singh, Tilak, the Ali Brothers, Gandhiji, Nehru etc. and also of the political development taking place. But perhaps because of its objective stance, the novel reads like a newspaper report rather than a work of fiction.

Attia Hosain is the only women novelist who evokes Partition in a nostalgic mood in her novel,

*Sunlight on A Broken Column (1961).*
The novel is in four parts, it covers some 20 years in the life of the narrator-heroine, *Laila*. The first three parts paint a vivid picture of *Laila* as she grows up in a rich and cultured land-owning family in Lucknow. In the 20 years that witness *Laila* changing from an orphan girl of fifteen to the widowed mother of a girl of that age, India too moves from colonialism to independence and the old feudal order loses its property, privileges and poise and old world habits give place to the frustrations of the post-independence era. It is a time of Political turmoil. The politics of the streets have invaded the drawing rooms of the sophisticated, to the extent that father and son find themselves in opposite camps.

In the fourth part of the novel, we are told of the effects of Partition, which has affected not only the migrated families but also those that did not. The novelist takes a look into the lives of *Laila’s* two cousins, *Saleem* and *Kemal*. Saleem opts for Pakistan while *Kemal* decides to remain in India. As the two brothers argue over the merits of their respective decisions and at the same time try to keep the family from splitting up, we see the enigma of Partition and also the tragic irony of the two brothers so indivisible and so attached, yet forced to choose different nationalities. Isn’t it man’s cruel affront on Nature? The novel raises many questions. How is it that one suddenly becomes an alien in one’s own birth place? What is more important to the individual — family ties or a country? To whom does one owe loyalty? And is loyalty divisible? *Saleem* and his wife leave for Pakistan and *Laila* tells us that,

*It was easier for them thereafter to visit the whole wide world than the home which had once been theirs.*\(^{21}\)

Manohar Malgonkar’s,

*A Bend in the Ganges* (1964)\(^{22}\).
is an epic presentation of India’s struggle for freedom from the late 30s upto the dawn of Independence in August 1947, thus encompassing the history of a saga depicting the movement for Independence, the World War and the Partition of India. This novel, with its large work of art embracing India, Pakistan and the Andamans, starts by promising to be an ideological presentation of the conflicting norms of Gandhism and terrorist politics. These two ideologies are contrasted through the two chief protagonists in the novel, Gain and Debidayal, Gian, a follower of Gandhi and of the non-violent movement, also holds the English in high admiration, believing that they were fair and just as compared to the corrupt and thoroughly degenerate Indian officials. On the other hand, Debi has a profound hatred for the English, having witnessed as a child a drunken English soldier’s attempt to rape his mother. The basis of his hatred and of his patriotic idealism is personal and psychological to a great extent. Therefore, Debi deliberately cultivated violence as a mean of achieving what he considers the ‘noble’ end of throwing the English out from India. In the course of the novel, he is killed travelling to Pakistan to evacuate his parents when he discovered to be Hindu.

* A Bend in the Ganges is an intimate study of communal and mob violence. In fact, the major theme in *A Bend in the Ganges* has been said to be the rejection of Gandhian concept of non-violence. G.S. Amur writes:

> for example in his analysis of the novel supports this when he argues that Debi’s murder reveals to Gain the unreality of non-violence as a way of life, and that his revenge “proves to be an act of liberation and self-fulfilment.”

However, Malgonkar’s chief concern seems to be to depict the state of man in a world where values change rapidly. The old order seems to break apart, being unable to adjust to the winds of change. It also suggests the limitations of idealism in as much as it cannot sustain through all the
ages and stages. Gandhi’s ideal of nonviolence might have proved powerful enough to bring down a mighty empire but it failed miserably to hold the two communities together after independence. Not only that, once the riots erupted the only ideal that worked was ‘tit for tat’.

The writer’s note in the beginning is an indication of how he has tried to encompass the panorama of life.

Only the violence in this story happens
to be true; it came in the wake of freedom,
to become a part of India’s history, what
was achieved through non-violence, brought with
it one of the bloodiest upheavals of history.\textsuperscript{24}

Raj Gill’s novel,

*The Rape* (1974)\textsuperscript{25}
dramatizes the dehumanization of life and the collapse of all values. Dalipjit the protagonist in the novel, dazed to discover, on his return home after Partition, that his Muslim girlfriend, *Leila*, whom he had rescued and who had given shelter by him, has been raped by his own father. In portraying Dalipjit’s disillusionment, the writer delves into the political and historical background and uses this as a catalyst to motivate action in his characters. The human story and its poignancy are lost in the process of describing minutely and details of the convoys, the transportation and rehabilitation. Though there are episodes in the novel which are full of poignant moments. One such episode is about *Lakha Singh*, a village priest, who joins a foot convoy, carrying his eighty-year old mother on his back. Seeing his mother in a coma and unable
to bear his burden any longer, he lowers her into a canal. Revived by the cool water, the mother
blesses her son before she sinks.

What a moving tale of man-made disaster which had struck millions of helpless victims
dazed and devastated. The novel is a brilliant exploration of the theme of Partition. It not only
narrates a touching tale of the times of Partition, but also presents unforgettable scenes and sights
of the great historic events artistically.

Chaman Nahal’s,

_{Azadi (1975),}^{26} (Freedom),

written on the epic scale offers a most comprehensive account of Partition, the actual event and
its aftermath. The author recreates in vivid detail the consequences of the partitioning for a
Hindu family and its close associates as they journey from Sialkot to Delhi.

The story opens on June 3, 1947 with an announcement by the Viceroy, Lord
Mountbatten declaring the division of the country into two parts – _India_ and _Pakistan_. It ends
with the assassination of Mahatma Gandhi on January 30, 1948. _Azadi_ thus deals with eight
tumultuous months in the history of the Indian Subcontinent.

_{Azadi_ is not merely a historical document. Though Mountbatten, Rajaji, Jinnah, Gandhiji
and Nehru and a host of other leaders are all present, none of them appears in person in the
novel. They are all described through the reactions of the people. _Azadi_ is the story of millions of
people uprooted from their homes for no fault of their own, and is symbolised in the person of
_Lala Kanshi Ram_ and his family in the searing pain they undergo in the process of their upheaval
and alienation from their home-land.
Lala Kanshi Ram, a wholesale dealer in grain, is an Arya Samajist. He has lived and proposed for many years in Sialkot and is unwilling to leave even after the Partition is pronounced. He has always been friends with the Muslims and his dearest friend is a Muslim, Chaudhari Barkat Ali. Lala Kanshi Ram could never have imagined that he would be unwanted in his birthplace and that he would finally have to leave like many other Hindus and Sikhs. Yet his daughter became victim of communal riots – there is no family that has not lost some one. Like millions of other Punjabis, he travels on foot to India with his wife Prabha Rani and son Arun, moves from city to city – Amritsar, Jullundur, and Ambala and finally arrives in Delhi, to suffer more humiliation. His story represents the story of a whole nation, of millions who were forced to leave their homes and to whom azadi brings only untold misery and an uncertain future.

H.S. Gill’s,

Ashes and Petals (1978) records another gruesome aspect of Partition – the killing of one’s own women folk, in order to save their honour. The novel opens with a trainload of Hindus and Sikhs on their way to India. When the train attacked by Muslim hooligans, Risaldar Santa Singh shoots his fourteen year old grand-daughter, Baljeeto. Her seven year old brother Ajit sits through the act as a silent witness. Soon Santa Singh’s action is emulated by the other Sikhs in the train. The later part of the novel, containing a lovestory is set in post-Partition India. When Ajit, now a cavalry officer, seeks permission to marry a Muslim girl call Salma, the old man exclaims:

What have come down to my grandson? Have you forgotten Baljeeto, your sister? Your poor sister I had to shoot down in the train? Have you forgotten all that, but his love seems to be
stronger that hate and finally it is his love alone, whether for his motherland or for his beloved
that transcends all barriers of hatred. 

In Kartar Singh Duggal’s novel,

Twice Born Twice Dead (1979)

We are given a panoramic picture of human suffering. The numerous tales of suffering narrated
by the refugees are juxtaposed against the kindness the two principal characters Sohne Shah and
Satbharai, receive from Hindus and Muslims alike, as they move from one camp to another. No
blame is assigned to any group or individual, for all the atrocities and massacres, instead, we are
asked to, look into ourselves to understand the malady. The Muslim leader’s statement that all
people have gone mad seems to be the only explanation. Hate may be met with hate, violence
may be subdued by still greater violence, but insanity can only be answered by compassion. And
this novel for all its violence is a vigorous cry for compassion. In fact, the writer has adopted a
humanitarian and non-partisan attitude to the whole problem. He has not only brought out the
beast in man but also the divinity in him. This is the saving grace in the midst of mindless
massacre, monstrosity and transgression. The neutral attitude adopted by the writer makes the
novel more sensible and useful for the future generation.

Anita Desai’s,

Clear Light of Day (1980)

is another novel which refers to India’s Independence struggle and the Partition that followed it.
However, this appears only as the background of the events in the life of the Das family.
The novel is broadly divided into four sections. Section I opens with Tara’s visit home with her husband, Bakul, from Washington, and introduces the characters and some of the incidents from both the past and present. Section II concentrates on the family and public events around 1974; Section III dwells deeper into the family’s earlier years and is recapitulatory and elaborative; while Section IV brings us back to the time moment bringing the several threads together in a definite design.

According to Alamgir Hashmi:

*the novel ‘Clear Light of Day’ is also the story of colonial India’s a growth and maturation into separate statehoods of India and Pakistan. Apart from the personal narrative and family saga which it no doubt is, this novel belongs in the still vibrant strain of writing that pertains to the experience of Independence and Partition of India and Pakistan.*

Anita Desai has woven together the public and the private, and has given a balanced treatment of the historical elements in the book to the study of the characters.

Salman Rushdie’s novel,

*Midnight’s Children (1982)*

covers the period of India’s Independence to the lifting of the Emergency. The novel begins with the narrator-protagonist Saleem Sinai, who is the embodiment of a supreme moment of history. *Saleem Sinai* is Rushdie’s fictional alter ego and also the allegorical representation of India’s Independence, and the life of *Saleem*, Like Rushdie, having been born at precise hour of the end of the Raj.
Saleem Sinai is one of the Midnight’s children, born between 12 midnight and 1 A.M. On the night of August 14-15 1974, the hour of freedom. Out of a total of 1,001 such children, 420 die and 581 survive up to 1957. All these imaginary beings meet and discuss and quarrel in the Parliament of Saleem’s mind, forming a Midnight Children’s conference. These children are metaphor for Indian society, which represents unity in diversity and also one thousand and one ways of looking at things. All these children represent the nation’s psyche and they have special gifts or power or physical peculiarities.

In many ways India is Saleem Sinai and Saleem Sinai is India. He is so much microcosm of India that his face with birthmarks, his skyblue eyes, his protruding temples, his chin and his long nose are all representative of India’s physical features. His queer physiognomy is suggestive of the abnormalities of the time when he was born. History is so inextricably blended in him that, in a sense, his life is symbolic of India’s history – both temporal as well as timeless. The immobility of his eyelids suggest a steady gaze of a true seer at the fleeting phenomena of the material world. His disintegrating and fissured body is possibly, referring to the divisive tendencies and disintegrating political situations of the time. The disfiguring birthmarks on the face seem to be a creation of the holocaust of Partition.

Saleem’s growth mirrors the development of free India. Saleem bears “the burden of history” throughout his life. The gamut of events covered by the novel includes the agitation against the Rowlatt Bill, the Jalianwalla Bagh massacre, the formation of the Indian National Army. The dropping of the atom bombs on Japan, communal riots, the dawn of Independence, the assassination of Mahatma Gandhi, the Hindu Succession Act, the closing of the Suez canal, Language riots, the elections of 1957 and 1962, the Chinese aggression, the death of Nehru, the imposition and the lifting of Emergency.
Saleem is linked to history through different connections. The date of his birth itself is a dividing line between the old world and the new. The boatman Tai, is the timeless being in the novel and embodies charm of the old world, the beautiful nature of Kashmir and the freedom and essential unity of mankind. But he is shot dead standing between Indian and Pakistani armies fighting over Kashmir.

Another similar character is Mian Abdullah, ‘the Humming bird’, an active opponent of Partition, whose joyful ecstasy in work is symbolised by his constant humming and who falls a victim to the knives of Muslim fanatics. With Tai and Abdullah as his model, the narrator views the scenario of history with pungent irony. He is a hater of fanaticism and communalism.

The traumatic experiences seem to have brought about a profound change in the narrator. One who began his life with the hands of the clock joining in respectful greeting, full of gusto and optimism, has now reached a stage of desperation. This change is the most telling commentary on the period of the first thirty years or so of Independent India, and the frustrations and disillusionment created by it.

The sacrifice of Tai the boatman and of Abdullah the ‘Humming bird’ for communal harmony and brotherhood are woven from the threads of sincerity and love which they consider encompass the whole of mankind. The protagonist emerges as Indian at the crossroads of history, gifted with a fertile imagination, having no illusions and mental cobwebs, and cherishing truth, sincerity, love and tolerance even amidst a barren and hostile world.

Saleem Sinai, with all his humanism, talents and inadequacies, is an individual worthy of admiration, sympathy and love. He is unable to live or die in peace, and he is also a provoking metaphor for the contemporary fragmented Indian reality.
Bhisham Sahani’s, 

*Tamas* (1974) (Darkness),

also portrays the tragic period of the Partition of the country. He attempts to depict the communal frenzy that gripped the West Punjab in pre-Partition days. The story is not centred around a character or a main incident or a series of incidents. It is an effort by the writer, to portray the whole situation.

Bhisham Sahani witnessed the turbulence of the period. He saw how in the process of our struggle against the British we forgot to remain united; we fought amongst ourselves, we killed our own people, we raped our own women and how we divided the country in the name of religion.

The novel begins with a vivid description of how Nathu sweated to slaughter a pig. It is quite ironical that it is poverty which makes him undertake this for the sake of earning five rupees without even realising the possible implications of his action. It is even more ironical that the task is entrusted to him by Murad Ali, a Muslim.

He succeeds in killing the pig and earns his precious five rupees. The pig is then thrown on the steps of a mosque, an act of gravest provocation for Muslims, leading to violence and bloodshed and the polarization of communities in the city. The situation is very complex because
it is a Muslim, Murad Ali who has the pig thrown on the steps of the mosque and then uses this to lash out at Hindu provocation. The incident become a means of widening the differences between the Congress and the Muslim League till finally the Communist party, represented by Devdutt has to initiate action to bring about some harmony.

The writer also points to the nature and role of the British in India. Richard, the Deputy Commissioner of the town, remains passive and allows the carnage to take place. And when he does step in, it is to establish the supremacy of the British rule.

*Tamas* raises many questions. How it is that religion can become such a dehumanizing force? What is there in religion that it can rouse a group of women to such frenzy that they can carry out self-immolation rather than suffer physical humiliation? What is it that gives rise to irrationality to the beast in man?

However, inspite of all that he presents, Bhisham Sahani wants us to believe that there is hope, that there is light at the end of this long tunnel of darkness.

*Tamas* is an anatomy of that tragic period. It depicts how communal violence was generated by extremists in both communities, and how innocent persons were duped into serving their ulterior purposes, how tension and hatred is generated and how, also, realisation ultimately dawns as to the futility of it all, and the inherent goodness in human nature triumphs, with both communities learning to live in amity. They have learnt it the hard way.
‘Tamas’ is in equal measure against fundamentalists and extremists of both communities. Both are blamed for misdemeanours as much as they are praised for their inherent tolerance. The message is loud and clear and directed against the disease of communalism.  

Bapsi Sidhwa’s novel,  

*Ice-Candy-Man* (1988)  

is also a poignant tale of Partition. The novel is set in Lahore in the 1940’s, in the period when Independence and Partition were brewing and it culminates in the ultimate horrors of the holocaust, seen through the eyes of a young Parsi child, *Lenny*.  

On the one hand, we follow *Lenny* in the process of growing up, surrounded by her mother, Ayah and grandmother and on the other, it brings out the tragedy which hits Lahore and the entire subcontinent with the senseless massacre of people, who had suddenly found themselves in opposition to each other. It is also a process of her trying to make a sense of the pointless brutality of Partition. The changes in the *Ice-candy-man* and the nature of his pursuit of the child’s ayah concretize large scale events with something personalized. *Lenny* watches all the incidents in the novel and we see through her eyes, the *Ayah* and *Ice-candy-man* and the whole city of Lahore burning, torn apart with all the communal hatred.  

In the process of growing up, *Lenny* also becomes aware of the differences that exist between the various religious sects, though before the disturbances, the circle of *Ayah’s* admirers included Hindu, Muslims and Sikhs. But with the growing communal trouble the differences get highlighted. All the *Ayah’s* friends continue to form a group for sometime but they are no longer friends of one another. Offensive jokes are pointedly directed at the communities of others in the group. And when the riots break out the *Ice-candy-man* takes *Ayah* and *Lenny* to see what for
him is a spectacle. Bestiality runs rampage. Slowly and gradually the news of Mohallas burning, mobs invading and the two communities were attacking each other, spreads. Communal violence spreads till finally the men come for Ayah, and among them are those who are supposed to be her friends, the butcher, the Ice-candy-man.

They drag Ayah out. They drag her by her arms stretched taut, and her bare feet that want to move backwards – are forced forward instead. Her lips are drawn away from her teeth, and the resisting curve dead child’s screamless mouth. 36

The butchery continues.

Efforts to locate and rescue Ayah continue. She is located in a brothel, then she is said to be married. Lenny, with her godmother, meets Ayah’s husband, Ice-candy-man, and then Ayah herself. Ayah pleads to be sent to Amritsar. He no longer mistreats her, but she can never forget what he has subjected her to. She cannot forget her past, her wounds are too deep to be healed and she is not genuinely alive anymore. The history of Partition has become her story, with her rescue and her departure to India, the novel ends.

Gurucharan Das’s

A fine Family (1990)37
is another Partition novel that traces the fortunes and misfortunes of *Lala Dewan Chand’s* family from the year 1942 to the post-Independence era, right through till the 1970’s. The story centres around the *Vermas*, a properous and successful Hindu Family, residing in Lyallpur. *Bauji*, the central character, undergoes the trauma of Partition and the hardships in migrating with his family, leaving his land and property in Lyallpur.

*Bauji* is closely associated with *Anees*, a sensitive Muslim woman readily able to cross communal barriers, but who in the festering atmosphere of the time begins to realise that the social and cultural divide between the two communities is too great to bridge and advocates a separate Muslim state. *Bauji* is utterly astonished by her ideas and wonders why the Hindus and Muslim cannot live together. *Bauji* is quite articulate about religion though he belonged to the first generation in his family to acquire Western Education and become a lawyer. His daughter *Tara* and her husband, *Seva Ram*, belong to the second generation who are India-born. *Seva Ram* represents the generation espousing technical training, because canals, roads and bridges needed to be built for developing country, and finally, there is *Arjun* who represents the third generation, which aspired to managing private enterprise in a free country.

*A fine Family* is low key exposition of the extensive formative influences on individuals and how these changes over time through the three generations of the family of *Lala Dewan Chand* of No 10, Kacheri Bazaar in Lyallpur.

The effect that the Partition has on *Bauji’s* daughter *Tara* is troubling. Her anger and resentment, when she hears of the death of her sister and chachi (aunty) is understandable, but not her reconciliation to this loss which is typical of the post-Independence generation to which she belonged.

Gurucharan Das not only deals with the Partition of the country but also reflects upon the Partition of the Indian society itself – the Partition of its values and its cultures.
A major event in Post-Independence India that affects Tara was the introduction of the Hindu Code Bill in 1955 by Nehru, which gave equal share of property and money to both men and women. This causes a rift between Bauji and Tara, for Tara writes to her sisters asking them to demand equality. Bauji represents the traditional male chauvinist in Indian society who cannot digest the idea of sharing his ancestral property with his daughters however good and gracious they may be. On the other hand Tara represents the progressive post-independent woman. The bill makes her grateful to Nehru and even forgives him for his miscalculations regarding Partition.

Tara’s and Bauji’s redemption comes in the form of Arjun who seems to shoulder the burden of restoring the lost wealth, glory and status of the Vermas and reaching a set goal. One can see Gurucharan Das identifying himself with Arjun.

Although the writer has not described the plight of those who were perhaps the worst affected during the Partition, but he has certainly traced its impact on the members of the Bauji family and especially the impact of the Partition on the three women, Anees, Tara and Priti. A Fine Family provides a means of understanding the past in order to understand the presents.

The holocaust of the Partition has been a recurring theme in the writings of many other writers such as B.Rajans The Dark Dancer, Collins and Lapierre’s Freedom at Midnight and these writers have highlighted their own points of view in their own subtle way. From the survey it becomes clear that the horror and trauma of Partition was undergone by many Indian novelists in English and its dramatic potential was also captured by many regional novelists like Yashpal in Jhoota-Sacha (Hindu) or Qurratullain Haider in Aaq ka Darya (Urdu). But the first to use Partition as the central theme was Khushwant Singh in his first novel, Train to Pakistan. This is by far the best known and the most powerful novel on Partition. Symbolism, sarcastic satire and
ruthless realism are the hallmarks of this novel which depicts the holocaust through a simple plot building up to a spine-chilling climax.

_Train to Pakistan_ is not only the first novel in English dealing with the Partition but also perhaps the most realistically presented.

The purpose of the novel is not merely to depict history but in fact to describe the impact of this crucial moment of time on our lives and future. It attempts to shake us from our slumbers, to make us aware of our underlying bestial tendencies which can suddenly overcome us and cause wide-spread damage. In the midst of all the horror he presents, however, Khushwant Singh also sees a ray of hope for mankind.

**References:**

original Urdu title of the above book, received in Pakistan. Here he recalls his days in Bombay.


21. Ibid., p. 289.


24. Manohar Malgaonkar, A Bend in the Ganges in the Prefatory Note of the author.


28. Ibid., pp. 179-80.


34. Justice Bakhtawar Lentin of the Bombay High Court and Justice Sujata Manohar (in their judgement for the telecast of the serial Tamas on Doordarshan.) Cited in Tamas, p. 6.


36. Ibid., p. 183.