Chapter - I
Introduction
The period between the two World Wars and comprising both was the Gandhian Age in India. At the end of the First World War, there was a general feeling of frustration in India because of unrealized hopes. It was the phoenix hour, and Gandhi the Mahatma gave the signal, and a whole nation awoke from its suspended animation and felt the bloodstreams of a new life coursing through its veins. Life could not be the same as before, and every segment of our national life—politics, economics, education, religion, social life, language and literatures—acquired a more or less pronounced Gandhian hue. Thus it was that Gandhi exercised a potent influence our languages and literatures, both directly through his own writings in English and Gujarati and indirectly through the movements generated by his revolutionary thought and practice. The several regional languages acquired a new versatility and power, and many of the political leaders of the Gandhian Age—for example, C. Rajagopalachari, N.C.
Kelkar, Abul Kalam Azad, Rajendra Prasad, P. Sitaramayya, Jawaharlal Nehru and Vinoba Bhave were themselves thinkers, writers, agitators and social reformers rolled into one. No apology is needed therefore for considering, Gandhiji, as a writer, and as a formative influence, on the writers of his time. His mind was a rich receptive soil to the seeds of creative thought that aimed at the regeneration of man.

Gandhi was the apostle of decentralization, for he thought that the village was the safe save unit of human association, while the city was but a hideous cancerous growth and bred evil fast and spread pestilence faster and faster. The Gandhian theory and practice of Satyagraha directly issued from this acute sense of personal moral responsibility for our day to day actions, irrespective of the distant goals. Difiant sufferance would be better than destructive retaliation. To Gandhi, national realization included the ending of political subjection and economic
degradation, the removal of social inequalities and abuses like untouchability, cast arrogance, occupational prejudices, etc., the reform of education, and giving new life to language and literature.

As we dwell on the phenomenon of Gandhi's life and martyrdom, we come to realize at last that he was indeed a Mahatma that for him there was no hiatus between private morality and public policy, between ethics and politics, between material and spiritual health. According to him, the aim of human life is happiness, not luxurious living, and true happiness is won only through work and good fellowship, and the expulsion of cowardice and violence from our hearts. He was a humanist and a man of religion more than a nationalist and patriot. With the Gandhian revolution in our political life, there came about also a revolution in our writing. Gandhi was not in sympathy with the view that art or literature was absolutely autonomous, and was for more
inclined to make it a handmaid to life. His own weekly papers, **Young India** and **Harijan**, were among the most widely read and discussed organs of public opinion. His prose style had biblical simplicity, pointedness and clarity and as a result, Indian writing in English became recognizably functional.

Indian writing in English since the Gandhian revolution has tended to be wisely utilitarian, cultivating the virtues of clarity and directness and brevity rather than eloquence and elaboration and exuberance. The Gandhian impact on contemporary Indian literature has brought about results at various levels, and in various directions. As regards the writer’s choice of language, the same writer handled with mastery his own mother tongue as well as English. As regards the choice of themes and the portrayal of character, the Gandhian influence has been no less marked. There has been a more or less conscious shift of emphasis from the city to the village, or there is implied a contrast between the two-urban
luxury and sophistication on the one hand and rural modes and manners on the other.¹

History as the theme of creative fiction seems indeed to exercise a special fascination for many an Indian novelist of past and present. The second world war period in India, the growing chasm between the Hindu and Muslim communities and between India and Britain, the Bengal huggers, the 'Quit India' movement, and the mounting frustration and misery are covered in novels like Bhabani Bhattacharya's So Many Hungers (1947), R.K. Narayan’s Waiting for the Mahatma (1955) and Kamala Markandaya's Some Inner Fury (1957).

Novels on the 'Partition' horrors and bestiality are legion but it is not often they transcend sensationalism and achieve the discipline of art K.R.S. Iyengar quotes Dr. Devendra Satyarthi to prove the situation:

"No literature based on hate and prejudice can really be great. It was a drama of degradation and shame, a
drama of human decay, showing how the minds of the two communities were poisoned by the dogma of the two-nation theory."

One of the more satisfying imaginative records of the Partition is Khushwant Singh’s *Train to Pakistan* (1956). The whole horror is there but humanity and compassion are there too.

A lawyer by training, Khushwant Singh’s most enduring work has been done in the field of Sikh history and biography and his full-length portrait of Ranjit Singh vividly brings about the leader, the rulers and the man. He wrote only two novels, *Train to Pakistan* (1956) and *I shall Not Hear the Nightingale* (1959) and two collections of short stories, *The Mark of Vishnu* (1950) and *A Bride for the Sahib* (1967). He also translated Rajinder Singh Bedi’s Urdu novel *Ek Chadar Maili Si* into English as *I Take This Woman* (1966).
His *Train to Pakistan* projects with pitiless precision a picture of the bestial horrors enacted on the Indo-Pakistan border region during the terror-haunted days of August, 1947.

The leader's had sowed the wind of communal suspicion, and Partition was the result; like a whirl wind, the mad act of Partition was uprooting masses of humanity, mangling them, and throwing them across the border in heap after heap. Khushwant Singh narrates the situation in the opening pages of the novel:

"The riots had become a rout. By the summer of 1947, ten million people – Muslims and Hindus and Sikhs – were in flight. By the time the monsoon broke, almost a million of them were dead, and all of northern India was in arms, in terror or in hiding."³

The exceptions were isolated villages, one of them being Mano Majra, a border village on the banks of the Sutlej, with a railway bridge spanning the river. Indeed there are tens of
thousands of villages like Mano Majra where the law has always been peaceful co-existence and not communal strife. But 1947 was not like other times. Suspicion and violence filled the air and an ill-wind carried them even to little oases of communal harmony like Mano Majra. The events, so recent, so terrible in their utter savagery and meaninglessness, must have defied assimilation in terms of art.

Khushwant Singh, however, has succeeded through resolved limitation and rigorous selection in communicating to his readers a hint of the grossness, ghastliness and total insanity of the two-nation theory and the Partition tragedy. The pity and the horror of it all! — and the novel adequately conveys them both.

Khushwant Singh’s second novel, *I shall Not Hear the Nightingale* has been dealt with the ambiguous and disturbed pre-partition period, and concentrates on the inner tensions and external movements of a well – to – do Sikh family in the
Punjab from April 1942 to April 1943. It was the period of the 'Quit India' conflagration, and naturally the relations between the bureaucracy and the people were more than strained. While Buta Singh the Senior Magistrate is anxious to be on the right side of the Government, his son Sher is involved in the activities of a terrorist group of students including Madan who is a brilliant cricketer doubled with a rake. Sher's young wife, Champak, is little more than a bitch, and the novel describes at some length her exercises in sensuality. The novelist observes as with a microscope, and records his findings without any squeamishness; and his analysis of the complex of relationships within the family and in the wider world, and his unraveling of the tangle of conflicting loyalties, show both understanding and skill.

Humour is blended with brutality, mere sentiment is eschewed, and the picture that emerges is arresting as well as amusing. The triumph of the novel is really the portrait of
Shabhrai, Buta Singh's wife. Her faith in the Guru and in the Adi Granth is Unshakable. When Sher is arrested and all others feel dazed or made, Subhrari say quietly: "We shall have a non-stop reading of the Granth for two days and nights. The Guru will be our guide." When the consensus in the family is that Sher should sense his release even going to the extent of betraying his comrades, Sabhrai keeps her own counsel. She spends a whole night in the Gurudwara, seeking light, seeking a clue. When, in the morning, she meets sher in his prison cell, and he asks her what he should do, she doesn't falter; her faith is like a rock of adamant. Thus the novelist succeeds to highlight illiterate, susperstitions and old-fashioned as she is and this is how she strikes others. She is sustained by the old-world tenacity and purity of her faith and this evokes the respect and admiration of everybody. Joyee Taylor, the Deputy Commissioner's wife, feels specially drawn towards Sabhrai. After her demise, anything must be an anti-
climax, and the widower Buta Singh, now a companion of the Indian Empire, can be expected to play his appropriate role.

In comparison to Train to Pakistan, the novel, I Shall not Hear the Nightingale is not tightly constructed and it lacks its consistency of tone and power of artienlation. Inspite of these demerits, the novel has a vivid sense of time, place and the social milieu; and the figure of Sabhrai wholly redeems the dimeness and murkiness of the general atmosphere. The fever of sensuality is easier to describe than the radiance of Faith, and this is the reason why Sabhrai almost 'steals' the novel.

Thus the literature has been the means of giving form and utterance to the hopes and despairs, the enthusiasm and apathy, the thrill of Joy and the stab of pain, in a nation's history as it moves from freedom to slavery, from slavery to revolution, from revolution to independence, and again from
independence to the tasks of reconstruction involving further experiences of success and elation or futility and failure.

REFERENCES

