The partition of India on communal basis into the sovereign states of India and Pakistan on the eve of the country’s freedom caused one of the bloodiest upheavals in the history of the human race. This catastrophic event was the culmination of a thousand years old love-hate relationship between the Hindus and Muslims and as far as India was concerned it was the beginning of a future. In public memory, however, the violent, disturbing realities that accompanied partition have remained blanketed in silence. The statistics are staggering. Twelve million people were displaced; a million died; seventy five thousand women are said to have been abducted and raped; families were divided; properties lost; homes destroyed. And yet, in private, the voices of partition have never been stilled and their ramifications have not yet ended. As an event of shattering consequences, partition retains its importance even today.

Many factors emerge as responsible for the partition of India and creation of Pakistan. After the end of the World war, Britain was economically crippled and was not in a position to retain her overseas empire. Secondly, the uneven development of the Hindu-Muslim section of the Indian bourgeois and the disparity in the economic life of the two communities was an important factor. The British government was interested in accentuating rather than, softening the communal conflicts. British imperialism found it convenient to exploit the fears and passions of the Muslim community for the fulfilment of its political ends. The British policy of “divide and rule” created a schism between the Hindus and Muslims resulting in the development of the two-nation theory.

Partition was a typical male construct where women were made the object of macabre enactment. Women became the special target of communal fury. Men needed women as objects on whom they could vent their anger; in this masculine revenge drama of mutual humiliation women’s bodies were violated by men of the other community.

Literature is a mirror to society. The partition of India is a benchmark in its history, not only for its political significance in the emergence of the sovereign states of India and Pakistan, but for its lasting impression of monstrosity and horrific emotional duress. Indian authors who were witness to this holocaust have expressed their anguish through their works. Partition continues to cast its dark shadow across Indian affairs and
works of Indian writers. The event, its prelude and impact have since evoked great interest among scholars throughout the world.

The horror accompanying the transfer of population during partition and the chaos and bloodshed caused by it, have become major themes in the works of many writers. Many Indian writers have captured the sordid reality of partition and focused on the holocaust that followed the independence of India. Indian authors who were witness to this holocaust have expressed their anguish through their works. Khushwant Singh’s *A Train to Pakistan* (1956), Bhishm Sahni’s *Tamas*, Chaman Nahal’s *Azadi* (1975) and Manohar Malgonkar’s *A Bend In The Ganges* (1964) stand out prominently among the fiction written on partition by male writers. As a master story teller Saadat Hasan Manto has also made a significant contribution to Partition fiction.

During the last few years, we see some women writers of the subcontinent coming forward and discussing boldly the condition of women during the freedom struggle. In the male narratives the focus is on the graphic description of the violence. The writers depict rape, abduction and dishonour to women, but they do not analyze the psychological impact of these acts on the victims. In the fiction written by women novelists dealing with the theme of partition the focus of the novelists is on the portrayal of women in the pre-independence era. Women writers visualize partition as a continual process where memory serves to keep the wound raw. There is a strong plea to see the woman as a human being, as an individual having an identity of her own and not merely as a sex object. Thus, women writers foreground the marginal by placing women at the centre rather than at the periphery.

Various Indian women novelists have written on the theme of partition, but to limit the study to a permissible length, few women novelists have been selected for analysis. Of these women writers writing on the theme of partition, six stand out prominently: Attia Hossain, Bapsi Sidhwa, Shauna Singh Baldwin, Manju Kapur, Mehr Nigar Masroor, and Anita Kumar.

These women writers may have been explored from the point of view of the topic undertaken but the extant criticism deals with an analysis of one or two writers at most.
A study of the treatment of the theme of partition dealt with by women writers may yield significant results. This study, thus proposes a comprehensive analysis of the novels of Bapsi Sidhwa **viz.**, *Ice-candy Man*, Attia Hossain *viz.*, *Sunlight On A Broken Column*, Shauna Singh Baldwin *viz.*, *What The Body Remembers*, Manju Kapur *viz.*, *Difficult Daughters*, Anita Kumar *viz.*, *The Night Of Seven Dawns*, Mehr Nigar Masroor *viz.*, *Shadows Of Time*, with special emphasis on the theme of partition which each of them depicts. An attempt will be made to assess the novels from the female perspective.

**The Objectives of the study therefore are:**

1. to probe the milieu in which these women writers have written with reference to the theme of partition.
2. to analyze the psychological impact of partition and the trauma undergone by the characters and the female protagonists in particular.
3. to trace any progressive development or growth within the protagonists.
4. to analyze women related themes like status of women in pre-independent India, sexism and quest for identity.
5. to make a comparative study of these women writers in their approach and treatment of the theme of partition.

I can not close these prefatory remarks without acknowledging my indebtedness to those who helped me in the preparation of this thesis.

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