CHAPTER – IV

Treatment of Partition: A Comparison

One writes of one thing only, one’s experience. Everything depends on how relentlessly one forces from this experience, the last drop, bitter or sweet, it can give.

James Baldwin
The holocaust in August 1947 left indelible marks on the body and soul of the common masses. Partition fiction attempts to assimilate the enormity of the experience and present the lives and experiences of the common people who lived through Partition. That the horrors of Partition still reverberate in the psyche of people is clearly borne out by the fact that Partition continues to engage the consciousness of the writers of the Indian subcontinent even today. The historical experiences and the impact of this significant turning point in the history of women were not necessarily the same as that of men and therefore, their experiences/history could not always be subsumed in the general history of mankind. There are crucial gaps which need to be filled. It is precisely this that the women writers set out to do in their Partition discourses.

Partition was designed and executed by men without giving a thought to what it would mean to women. It brought myriad consequences to women and for them it meant partings at multiple levels and from many things that formed the very core of their existence.

Partition has been a compelling experience, resulting in the creative expression of several Indian English novelists. Some novelists like Khushwant Singh, Manohar Malgonkar, Raj Gill, Chaman Nahal, and Bhisham Sahni stand out prominently among those who have treated the theme of Partition, in detail. As a master story teller Saadat Hasan Manto has also made a significant contribution to Partition fiction.

This chapter is an effort to study the theme of Partition in Khushwant Singh’s Train to Pakistan, Chaman Nahal’s Azadi, Bhisham Sahni’s Tamas and Saadat Hasan Manto’s Mottled Dawn: fifty Sketches and Stories of Partition in comparison with the
gendered perspective of Partition delineated by the female writers like Shauna Singh Baldwin, Bapsi Sidhwa, Attia Hosain, Mehr Nigar Masroor, Anita Kumar and Manju Kapur.

Indian English Women novelists advocate a woman-centered/gendered perception in their accounts. Their Partition discourses are parallel strategies to valorize the diversity of women's experiences before, during and after Partition. They underline those aspects of Partition that before them have been either glossed over or idealized. They write about the reactions of women, of the still hovering shadows of Partition, which they alone can recognize, and the torment and ache which they, as women writers, can sense and share through their feminine awareness. They make a comprehensive exploration of this multifarious phenomenon. They deliberately plan their narratives to betray their inclinations and tackle the real communal angle. Through an involved and candid exploration of Partition historiography they face Partition in its stark reality and thus approximate a realistic approach which could be termed as honest functionality, and through this cathartic attempt they pave the way for a sincere resolution. The male writers, in their zeal to function as secular-humanists, sometimes resort to mechanical counterbalancing in order to allocate blame justly and gloss over some of the complexities of the Partition process.

Khushwant Singh’s *Train to Pakistan* is the first Indian English novel on Partition. It recounts the trauma and tragedy of Partition through the lives of its characters. A bestseller when it was first published in 1956, as *Mano Majra* in New York; the *Train to Pakistan* is now widely accepted as one of the classics of modern Indian English fiction. It deals with events that Khushwant Singh, his family and friends themselves experienced or saw enacted before their eyes. *Train to Pakistan*
has vignettes from Singh's own experience of Partition as a 32-year-old making the painful journey from Lahore to this side of the border.

In the summer of 1947, the frontier between India and its newly created neighbor, Pakistan, had become a river of blood, as the post-Partition exodus across the border had erupted into violent rioting. But in the tiny village of Mano Majra, Sikhs and Muslims continued to live peacefully, their lives regulated by the trains that rattle across the river bridge. But one day a train comes to an unscheduled stop, and the villagers discover it is full of dead Sikhs. Mano Majra turns into a battlefield of conflicting loyalties which none can control. In the stirring climax, it is left to Juggat, the village gangster, to redeem himself by saving many Muslim lives. Instead of depicting the Partition in terms of only the political events surrounding it, Singh delves deep giving a local perspective and providing a human dimension which brings to the event a sense of reality, horror, and credibility. Khushwant Singh describes the social aspect of Partition, providing human accounts with a diverse, detailed character base where each person has a unique point of view. He points out that everyone was equally at fault and that placing blame was irrelevant. Interwoven with this are the subtle questions of morality which Singh asks through his characters, such as whether the bad needs to be recognized to promote the good, and what constitutes a good deed.

Khushwant Singh does not describe the politics of the Partition in much detail. This is mostly because his purpose is to bring out the individual, human element and provide a social understanding. During Partition, the major change was political; the splitting of India into Hindu India and Muslim Pakistan. The effect of the change, however, was significant and as Singh has shown, social, as religious groups
rearranged themselves and clashed violently. Singh makes it clear that many people played a part in this chaos and everyone was equally worthy of blame. At the same time he resolves moral confusion by trying to make sense of an event as momentous as the Partition.

In a relatively short book, Singh is able to recreate the past. Examination of the varied groups of people increases cultural and social understanding of that time and place.

Muslims said the Hindus had planned and started the killing. According to the Hindus, the Muslims were to blame. The fact is, both sides killed. Both shot and stabbed and speared and clubbed. Both tortured. Both raped.¹

Chaman Nahal's famous novel Azadi begins opens in the bazaar lanes of Sialkot, now in modern day Pakistan, with a vibrant community of Muslim and Hindu families. The narrative brings to light the enormity of political decisions at the time of independence and partition and the subsequent human tragedy of slaughter and destruction. With the main focus on one Hindu family, it describes the break up of communities, loss of life and material wealth and the despair suffered by so many people. Nahal poignantly depicts the mass exodus from one new emerging country to the other, from Pakistan to India and vice versa, depending on the religion of the refugee. The division of the novel into three parts 'Lull', "Storm" and "Aftermath" makes it clear that the novel is about the peaceful atmosphere before the announcement of Partition, the horrible incidents caused by the partition and the pitiable conditions of the uprooted refugees after the partition. Nahal has depicted

seven families of the Muslim-dominated city of Sialkot who represent thousands of sufferers like them.

Chaman Nahal shows his remarkable powers of observation of human nature in general and the political behavior of Hindus and Muslims in particular. Though the novel is tragic in its tone, it is epic in its vast canvas.

According to N.D.R. Chandra,

The greatness of Chaman Nahal lies in his balanced and impartial picture of the Hindu – Muslim hatred and love, their emotional and political relationships and the ambivalent relationship between Indian and British people in a very realistic and elaborate manner. The novel is a landmark in Indian English political fiction providing social material both to the literary critic and the political psychologist for aesthetic enjoyment and dispassionate research.²

Set in a small-town frontier province in 1947, just before partition, Bhisham Sahni’s Tamas tells the story of a sweeper named Nathu who is bribed and deceived by a local Muslim politician to kill a pig, ostensibly for a veterinarian. The following morning, the carcass is discovered on the steps of the mosque and the town, already tension-ridden, erupts. Enraged Muslims massacre scores of Hindus and Sikhs, who, in turn, kill every Muslim they can find. Finally, the area’s British administrators call out the army to prevent further violence. The killings stop but cannot erase the awful memories from the minds of the survivors, nor do the various communities ever trust one another again.

² N. D. R. Chandra, Modern Indian writing in English: critical perceptions, Volume 1. New Delhi: Sarup and Sons, 2004 pg, 152
According to Bhisham Sahni,

Tamas’ was published way back in 1973. It had taken me two years to write it. There had been a communal riot in Bhiwandi or, somewhere else, near about that time, which had brought back to me memories of the days of the Partition and I had felt prompted to write this novel. Writing the novel had meant reliving those days, with the horrors and the passions and the urges of those times... The novel is nothing more and nothing less than a human document - the story of a people who suffer untold miseries when riots are instigated in the name of religion; it tells of how people who had for long lived a quiet peaceful life, are made to fly at one another’s throat.3

Mottled Dawn: Fifty Sketches and Stories of Partition (1997) is a collection of Sadat Hasan Manto’s finest and most powerful pieces on the tragic partition of the subcontinent into India and Pakistan in 1947. The book includes unforgettable stories like “Toba Tek Singh”, “Jinnah Sahib”, “The Assignment”, “The Return” and many more, bringing alive the most traumatic episode in the history of the subcontinent. The fifty pieces which constitute this book document in a powerful and moving way Manto’s humanism and his conviction that no happiness can lie in conflicts over religion and a feeling of segregation. The joy of life is in fellowship and caring, on love and decency, on tolerance and forgiveness. Manto’s greatness also lies with the fact that how he touches the deepest core of women’s suffering and emotional


Through the presence, absence and the precise location of women characters, the women novelists focus on women in their narratives. In their aesthetic endeavours they try to reinstate women to their stature by appropriating a much wider space for them, besides portraying the partition experience in general. Since times immemorial women have always been targeted during the socio-political upheavals. According to Bapsi Sidhwa:

It is the women who bear the brunt of violence that accompanies these disputes. They are the ones who are rooted in the soil; they are not interested in politics. But suddenly they find their bodies are being brutalized. Victories are celebrated on the bodies of women. So, it is not surprising that women became the targets of brutality during the Partition also.4

Women writers present a feminine perspective of partition. Besides giving analytical dimension to the aftermath of Partition, they also expose the relation between gender and the socio-historical milieu of the time.

It is the women protagonists who govern the plot and are presented as central and powerful. Roop (What the Body Remembers), Maheen, Shanti and Sarla (Shadows of Time), Virmati (Difficult Daughters), Laila (Sunlight on a Broken

Column) take the central roles. In the novels of women writers, many of the characters are not only women but women who are not confined to the traditional roles of wife, mother, sister and lover in the society. Besides being intelligent, politically aware and actively involved, it is they who control their fates. Swarnalata in *Difficult Daughters* being a powerful, bold and politically aware woman says, “As women, it is our duty, no, not duty that word has unpleasant connotations. It is our privilege to be able to give ourselves to the unity of the country.”\(^5\) They are not portrayed as the replica of self-sacrificing womanhood. There is no noble resignation of the self. The title *Difficult Daughters* is in accordance with the theme of women’s predicament and search for identity as presented through the protagonist in the novel. According to Mrs. P. Sudha Shree:

> The title “Difficult Daughters” also is a pointer to the message that a woman who tries to forge a self-identity, impelled by her unique needs, is branded a difficult daughter by the immediate family and the society as well.\(^6\)

In these novels women are fully aware of the Partition activities and of their selves. They actually participate in the Partition processions, meetings and assemblies. They assert the right to take their own decisions. Their quest for identity is exhibited through their spirit of rebellion, ability to express themselves and strong determination. They don't suppress their desires. Courage, resilience, sanguinity,

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forbearance, transformation and assertion are the trademarks of these characters that discriminate them from the women characters of the male novelists. Through Godmother, Lenny’s mother and Aunt, Sidhwa draws attention to the fact that the real work of rehabilitating women fell upon the women themselves. Through the character of Roop in _What the Body Remembers_ Baldwin shows us the spirit of resilience and courage. Through Shakuntala in _Difficult Daughters_ and Sarla in _Shadows of Time_ the writers show us the political awareness and active participation of women in the Partition happenings. Virmati’s refusal to marry a boy of her family’s choice and her love for the Professor reflect her assertion of identity and self will before her family. Being a daughter of a traditional Hindu family she is successful in asserting her own wishes over her family’s restrictive orthodox views.

In the partition literature by male writers, the plot centers on the male protagonists. In novels like, _Train to Pakistan, Azadi_ and _Tamas_ etc protagonists like Juggat, Lala Kanshiram and Nathu etc. take crucial positions. Women characters like Prabha Rani, Nooran etc. are on the periphery. They do not influence the major events in the novel. They are shown to be ignorant, passive and unaware of the activities around them. In Nahal’s Azadi, Lala Kashiram’s conversation with his wife is as follows,

He asked what an atom bomb is? And when his wife doubtfully shook her head and said, no, she did not, Lala Kanshi Ram had the time of his life. Pontifically he lurched forward and took hold of the opportunity (with both hands, as it were) of revealing the mysteries of the universe to this peasant woman, whom he had married when she was only thirteen and who could not tell an ‘alif’ from a ‘bai’ – who till this day thought they lived on a flat earth and not a round one. He had since taught her
many things, including how to sign her name, though she still could not read and write. He would teach her more, he said to himself complacently.\(^7\)

Prabha Rani is portrayed as feeble and oblivious. She does not even possess the basic knowledge and awareness of the world around them.

In these narratives, women characters follow the set patriarchal version of womanhood. Characters like Prabha Rani, Sunanda, Isher Kaur, Noor and Chandni (Azadi) and Nooran (Train to Pakistan) etc. play fixed roles of wife, daughter, lover and mother. In Azadi Nahal depicts Prabha Rani as a dutiful wife: "for wasn't her Lalaji the most learned man in the whole neighborhood? Wasn't he an avatar of Vishnu, so far as she was concerned?"\(^8\) Sunanda also reflects the attitude of a devoted wife and a daughter-in-law. Nooran, Nur and Chandni are typical images of submissive lovers. Nur appeals to Arun to become a Muslim because being a girl she cannot impose her decision on her family. She says:

Because I am a girl and am defenseless and cannot force my will on my family and because you are a man, more independent than me, and I expect you to defend me and make sacrifices for me, that's why!\(^9\)

In the end she sacrifices her feelings for her family’s sake. Arun also moves ahead in life leaving his first love Nur behind as he says: “Nur and Chandni he was leaving behind. Nur was only the beginning; he had walked only the foothills with her. But Chandni had taken him up the slopes to the summit.”\(^10\)

In these novels women are passively involved in the Partition event. They

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8 Ibid. Pg. 14.
9 Ibid. Pg. 97.
10 Ibid., Pg. 322.
follow their male counterparts and depend on them. They are obedient and compliant. They do not participate in the decision making. It is the men who are endowed with strength, action and heroic qualities. Juggat in *Train to Pakistan*, ennobled by his feelings of love for his beloved Nooran, sacrifices his life and saves the whole trainload of Muslims migrating to Pakistan from the clutches of violent rioters. In *Azadi*, Lala Kanshi Ram, Arun and Suraj Prakash escort all the women to safer places; in *Tamas* Nathu occupies the work place and takes his pregnant wife and an old mother to the Gurudwara. Prabha Rani, Nooran, Sunanda, Chandni and Noor are guided by the men in their lives.

One of the prominently discernable strategies in women's narratives on Partition is the replotting of female providence. Generally, a persistent plot pattern is that suffering and death are the inevitable fate of sexually transgressed women. This pattern assumes that women are inherently pure and therefore any sexual transgression is a violation of their deepest feminine self. Hence a woman who falls either destroys her very self or is doomed to endless suffering and alienation. In some cases where women are restored and accepted, it is always due to the benevolence and generosity of the male hero and the woman is at receiving end. In the novel *Azadi*, Sunanda was rescued by Arun and felt highly obliged at her reprisal. Nahal comments on the attitude of Arun towards Sunanda as, “Arun was sorry for Sunanda, he should be sympathizing with her and saying words of comfort...”  

Unlike Sunanda, Chandni another rape victim in the novel *Azadi*, gets abducted and is never rehabilitated in the course of the story. Arun did try to recover her but got

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disappointed to hear the remark made by Lala Kashi Ram as “And who would now take her as a wife, even if she did come back?” Nahal resolves the issue of Chandni by saying, “that was the end of Arun’s venture in behalf of Chandni. She was gone, her recovery a remote possibility, so why make an issue of her.”

Violence depicted in the works of male writers is exceedingly graphic. Disclosure of a woman’s physicality reaches its pinnacle when they portray any act of violence against women. Moreover, the male writers mostly restrict themselves only to the depiction of rape, abduction, and dishonor of women. They do not probe the psychological impact or their long term ramifications on the victim. Rape scenes depicted in their works are also very explicit and exposed. In Shiv K. Kumar’s *A River with Three Banks*, Gautam, Berry and Gopinath witness the entire scene rape scene as:

The man now began to tear away at the woman’s sari, which came off, then the petticoat, the blouse, the bra till she stood totally stripped, trying in vain to cover up her breasts with her hands... The leader had already pushed her against the wall, and was now pulling at her breasts. Kill me instead, the women sobbed. That wouldn’t help, my love. We’ve so much so much to do.¹³

The entire scene is suffused with an element of eroticism.

In Chaman Nahal’s *Azadi* there are detailed descriptions of the processions of stripped women on the streets with stark nudity. He exposes this scene of the parades of naked women as,

There were forty women, marching two abreast...they were all stark naked...as soon as the women came near, that section of the crowd became hysterical. 'Rape them’, ‘Put it inside of them.’...Many men in the front rows of the crowd lifted their genitals to them. 14

The love relationships are an essential element of the male narratives and reveal certain structural patterns and designs. In these stories the lovers usually belong to different communities, their love is symbolic of communal harmony and they ultimately suffer because of the Partition holocaust. Partition is used as a malevolent fate out to frustrate an inter – community romance. The very structuring of emotions and gestures in these relationships project the male hero as an overbearing lover whereas the heroine is portrayed as a passive and submissive beloved. For example the relationship between Juggat Singh and his beloved Nooran in Train to Pakistan: “Juggat Singh...caught her reproving hand. Her other was already under him. She was defenseless.”

He makes love to her, notwithstanding her protests and he also talks to her peremptorily. When frightened by the gun shots and by the prospect of her absence being noticed, Nooran tells him that she will never come to see him again, he retorts angrily: “will you shut up or do I have to smack your face?” And the narrator comments, “The girl began to sob. She found it hard to believe this was the same man who had been making love to her a moment ago.” 15

A similar situation is depicted through the Arun – Chandni’s affair in Azadi as:

15 Khushwant Singh, Train to Pakistan, Delhi: Ravi Dayal Publisher, 1988. Pg. 15.
Chandni’s protests were silenced by Arun...firmly holding her against the fence, he kissed her hard...the girl struggled and pushed her face away...And then she ceased struggling. A shiver ran through her body and she felt overcome.\textsuperscript{16}

The graphic description of raw passion serves only to titillate rather than enhance understanding. The women remain sex objects; their individuality is crushed under macho love and remains consigned to the parameters of the conventional concept of womanhood.

In their treatment of the issue of female chastity, woman writers not only portray the victimization of women but also their resilience. Though Ayah in Ice-Candy-man finds herself in diminished circumstances and is totally helpless as Mumtaz in Hira Mandi, she does not accept her fate and does not give up her resistance. Like Ayah, Shanti in Masroor’s Shadows of Time inspite of enduring the mental trauma after being raped, gathers her strength and plunges herself deeper into studies.

In their depiction of violence against women these writers do not go into the graphic description of the violence against the victim. They rather focus on the psychological and emotional aspects. Like male writers they also describe the scenes of rape and physical violence but with restraint. These scenes are well placed and are integral to the narrative. They are not superimposed and there is no conscious commodification of pain and sex. The scenes are presented very economically and realistically without diluting or sensationalizing the effect. A rape scene very similar

to that of *A River with Three Banks* is described in Masroor’s *Shadows of Time* but without highlighting the physical nakedness. The writer describes the scene when Shanti, along with her brother, is caught by two men in a dark quite by lane:

> Her sari was pulled up and she was brutally and persistently raped. Her throat was held in a vice like grip while the man released his energies in her...a brutal blow on her cheek knocked her down.  

Like Masroor Sidhwa also describes the rape scene of Ayah subtly. She does not sensationalize the narration but throws light on the psychological suffering to the scene. These writers have portrayed the horrible acts with intense repugnancy but in a matter of fact manner.

The emphasis is on the psychological impact of violence which is depicted as traumatic. They show the long term effects of these acts of violence on women. In some novels like *What the Body Remembers* the female writers are exceptional in foregrounding the sophisticated and subtle working of violence during Partition, which left the body untainted but depressed the mind and pierced the heart forever. Anita Kumar very powerfully describes this process of the continual trauma of Partition by showing the separation of a mother from her child. For Lalita the wretchedness of Partition continues long after the Partition ended. Many female characters like Laila, Lenny, Ayah, Sarla, Virmati and Roop demonstrate the psychological distress and emotional suffering experienced at the time of Partition. Roop’s emotional turmoil is reflected when she sees the terrible condition specially of women of a railway platform.

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If she does not see people she has seen before, how is she to know if she is not dead and already in the next life? She must smell them, come close to them, touch them, skin to skin...A familiar voice says, clearly in Roop’s mind, ‘we are each alone, though a crowd of our quom might mill about us, little sister. Always each woman is alone.’ Roop looks around, mystified; reminds herself she has one bad ear. But even with only one ear Roop hears of women abducted, mutilated, always by them – never by us. 18

Shauna Singh Baldwin and Anita Kumar not only probe the emotional sensibility and suffering of women but also attempt to depict the trauma and mental conflict of men. Bachan Singh in *What the Body Remembers* and Arun in *The Night of Seven Dawns* suffer the feelings of helplessness, emotional breakdown and psychological loss. Bachan Singh says in the novel, “But Kusum, she was my responsibility...I said to myself: Kusum was entrusted to me by Jeevan, she is young, still of childbearing age. I cannot endure even the possibility that some Muslim might put his hands upon her...No, I said: I must do my duty.” Bachan Singh kills Kusum with his own hands and can never forgive himself for the rest of his life. Arun undergoes the emotional turmoil of being deserted by his own parents at the time of Partition. He always felt the loss and misses his parents throughout the novel. He admits that during his life he always felt that something was missing in his life. Later when he meets his mother as an adult he is bitter and unforgiving. Sidhwa through *Ice-Candy-Man* also tries to depict the mental disbalance of man during partition. Ice-

candy-man’s transformation from a fun loving man to a violent savage is an example of what the Partition did to many men.

The love relationships portrayed by women writers depict women as bold, intelligent and dignified companions having self esteem, who maintain their individuality and draw the respect and admiration of their lovers. Laila (Sunlight on a Broken Column) seeks identity in her love-affair with Ameer Husain, lower in status and class than her Taluqdar family. Laila’s love affair gives her life a meaning and purpose. It is not just physical beauty which binds the lovers. They are enraptured by the magnetic personalities of their beloveds as in The Night of the Seven Dawns, Dr. Vishnu Chakravorty tells Shubhra Mahadevan, his beloved: “You are the kind of woman king Soloman had in mind when he said the price of a good woman is above rubies.”

There is no overt physicality or commodification of sex and the experience is transmuted artistically as the love relationship between Sarla and Farhan in Shadows of Time illustrates: “They grew more loving, more demanding, more understanding of each other’s needs and desires.”

There is a feeling of exquisite togetherness and sense of shared companionship between the two. Their union is poetically described as:

Farhan felt he was floating in space where light from hundreds of stars caressed him gently...Sarla felt she had entered into a garden where the flowers were a riot of colour, the only riots permissible in

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the leafy bower of love. 21

The protagonists are not only on an equal footing with their lovers but also have an edge over them because it is they who are in control of the action throughout the narrative.

Women writers celebrate women’s sexuality and articulate the pleasure and beauty of the female body without shame or apology. Masroor describes Sarla’s beauty: “She seemed like a painting from the Ajanta caves, her saree not yet fully draped, her rounded body bare from the waist upwards, her hair arranged in a bun while some tendrils hung loose over the ears.” 22

The awareness of their sexuality becomes a source of empowerment for women. Attia Hosain describes Nandi: “Her body wore the coarsest cloth like sculptured drapery revealing the firm, fluid lines of some ancient bronze...her body moved like sensuous music. Ghulam Ali became her slave.”23

Ayah in Ice-Candy-Man is an epitome of sensuousness and female vitality. She is the magnet that draws male admirers. She is aware of the effect of the sexual warmth that radiates from her and makes the best of it.

Women writers take into account the importance of minor characters also. They give voice even to those characters that have comparatively a less significant place in the novels. Characters like Nandi, Saliman (Sunlight on a Broken Column), Godmother, Lenny’s mother, Muccho (Ice-candy-men), Nuzhat (Shadows of Time), Swarna (Difficult Daughters), Shubhra Mahadevan The Night of Seven Dawns) and

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22 Ibid., pg 310
23 Ibid. Pg. 227-228
Kusum (What the Body Remembers) contribute to show the different aspects of femininity.

Unlike male writers women writers refuse to accept the narrow and constricting role assigned to them under vague terms such as ‘honour’, ‘shame’, and ‘modesty’. They establish an order through defiance and assert their views and ability to live life on their own terms. Sarla in Shadows of Time is depicted as a woman of regal bearing and in control of her life and passions. She does what she chooses to do with a splendor of will and not with the tremulous guilt of weaker creatures. As she satirically comments on the fate of woman, “Could there be a more inhuman concepts than the one which considered a woman’s right to live depends only on her husband’s whim.”

Nandi, Nuzhat and Sarla are not depicted within the traditional concept of ideal self sacrificing womanhood. This is a part of the strategy to make a conscious effort to show woman as a woman and not as an object or a puppet.

The end of the narratives of women writers is usually women centered. They end on the note of hope. All the six novels Difficult Daughters, Shadows of Time, What the Body Remembers, Ice-Candy-Man, The Night of Seven Dawns and Sunlight on A Broken Column end on the note of optimism, rehabilitation, survival and assertion of identity demonstrated by the leading female protagonists like Virmati, Sarla, Maheen, Roop, Ayah, Lalita and Laila. The protagonists are shown to be developing characters who transform themselves during the events depicted in the novel. Protagonists like Laila, Roop, Virmati, Sarla and Ayah find their identities

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which make them remarkable and memorable to the reader.

In the male narratives the female characters are so restricted in the traditional concepts of shame and modesty that they forget their true selves and individuality and are treated as objects. In *Train to Pakistan* when Nooran reaches Juggat’s home to tell him her misery she has to hear his mother’s scathing remark as, “Does your father know you go to strangers’ houses at midnight like a tart?”

It can be observed that each novel depicts the perspective of the community to which its writer belongs. Traditional Muslim viewpoint is depicted through Masroor’s *Shadows of Time* and Hossain’s *Sunlight on a Broken Column*. Baldwin presents a comprehensive analysis of the beliefs and judgment of the Sikh community at the time of turmoil. In terms of perspective the Parsi community and its neutral stance are depicted in a very detailed manner by Sidhwa. Sidhwa has given voice to the insecurity and apprehension of this minor community at the time of Partition. According to Seema Malik “The narratives of the Indian English women novelists are consciously designed and do betray their inclinations by making a particular community/religion as their principal reference point.”

However it must be asserted that these writers belonging to different ethnic colours and hues tackle the ‘real politic’ of the communal angle in a very impartial and unbiased manner.

The novels depict the culture, rituals and beliefs of different communities. *Sunlight on a Broken Column* abounds in descriptions of Eid, visiting friends, bowls of Sewai, the butchers during Bakra Eid, big platters of meat and feasting for days and night. Laila remembers the rich silk, embroidered ‘achkans’ worn by her father when

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she was a child. Her memories are marked by Muharram, weddings and festivals. In *What the Body Remembers* Roop wears only a *salwar kameez*, Jeevan wears a turban and Roop very early in the novel notices that she is different from her friend Huma as no one makes her learn the *namaz* prayers or asks her to cover her whole face with a *Burqua*. When Roop’s mother is sick, Roop’s *nani* spends a lot of time with the *Guru Granth Sahib* in the prayer room.

These writers differ from each other in the depiction of the theme of Partition. Sidhwa, Masroor, Anita Kumar and Shauna Singh Baldwin have taken the theme of Partition as their principal theme which runs parallel with the other socio-cultural and personal issues. Attia Hossain and Manju Kapur have dealt with the theme of Partition only as the backdrop to the novel. The chief concern of the novel is the journey of the protagonist towards selfhood. Issues of gender and femininity are discussed in more detail by Baldwin in *What the Body Remembers* and Manju Kapur in *Difficult Daughters*. However Sidhwa and Anita Kumar portray the other important issues like psychological predicament and violence against women with utmost accuracy.

The novels end on the note of hope, optimism and survival. The approaches of the protagonists are also different as far as Partition violence is taken into consideration – some are physically violated by it, some are mentally traumatized, some suffer from the feeling of nostalgia for the past, the lost culture and the scattered families and selves. But the common factor which combines them all is that they all live to tell the tale and give strength to their male counterparts to accept reality with hope and courage. Even the titles of the novels reflect this utopian and optimistic note. The title of the novel *Sunlight on a Broken Column* has been taken from a poem of T.S Eliot's *The Hollow Men*, “Eyes I dare not meet in dreams, In death's dream
kingdom These do not appear: There, the eyes are, Sunlight on a broken column, There is a tree swinging. And voices are, In the wind's singing, More distant and more solemn, Than a fading star.” Some lines from the poem have been used as an epigraph in the novel. In the poem The Hollowmen the sunlight on a broken column reflects an image of hope, Hossain has used this image as the title of the novel suggesting sunshine and happiness. The 'broken Column', here literally implies a pillar that has been damaged and the phrase is used as a metaphor for the past that is now no more. The sunlight and this ray of hope is falling on uncertain and unstable old order, abandoned family house, the Laila, now a widow of thirty five and the orderly garden growing wild. The last section of the novel works consistently with the image of sunlight. “First the sun breaks through the clouds, then it warms up to touch the last drops of dew from the leaves and finally it leaves her standing in the 'cold shadows of the sightless house with its locked doors'. As the day ends, another day is promised. Asad has come to take her away.”

In order to provide the holistic view of partition the writers differ from each other in the handling of techniques and narration which in turn makes their work more interesting and clear. An analysis of all these novels on the basis of technique and style makes the readers realize the worth, the appeal and the remarkable value of these writers in the archives of Indian English Literature.

The Partition narratives by women novelists are intentionally planned to foreground the marginal. According to Seema Malik:

The sequential movement of these narratives follows a pattern of

26 http://www.egyankosh.ac.in/bitstream/123456789/23553/1/Unit-22.pdf.
‘order-disorder-order’ revealing repetitive formulaic patterns. The movement is from the pre-partition communal harmony to the Partition holocaust and then the Post Partition period with the restoration of ‘order’.27

The Partition discourses by women writers neither have a set formulaic pattern nor do they closely echo each other in the sequential development of the stories or in the functions of the characters and narrative patterns. While most of the male narratives begin with Partition or just little before Partition, the narratives by women writers commence much earlier depicting not just one or two families but present a saga of generations. These novelists have used double narratives and digressions to enrich their works. They have interwoven various other subplots against the backdrop of Partition. Ranna and Papoo’s story in Ice-Candy-Man, Kusum’s story in What the Body Remembers etc. are the examples of such digressions. Some of the novelists like Masroor have given epical scope to their novels as far as the depiction of partition is concerned. She has covered a vast span of time and included a variety of characters to give it a comprehensive treatment.

Different narrative strategies used by these writers give variety to the description. Attia Hossain uses first person narrator Laila to narrate the whole story. Bapsi Sidhwa has used a child narrator Lenny to narrate the whole event of Partition to give it an unbiased and unprejudiced perspective. Sidhwa gives a very pertinent explanation for the use of a child narrator in the novel as she says in an interview:

As a child, you lack prejudices—the hatred and biases you learn as you grow up. I didn't think of it in so many words, but when I was imagining and beginning to write the story, suddenly the narrator's words came out as this child's voice. As I continued, I found it was working perfectly. Lenny is an innocent, bewildered child; when you see things through her eyes, the atrocities are in a way more chilling. I guess a writer works out these things unconsciously.  

The correct and apt use of interior monologue, flashback technique and the stream of consciousness technique depict the inner thoughts of the characters and give a psychological treatment to theme of Partition. Most of the time readers are exposed to the feelings, thoughts, conflict and anguish of the characters through interior monologue used by the raconteur. Cunningham in the novel What the Body Remembers is the depiction of Sardarji’s consciousness, the Englishman hidden inside him. Often Sardarji talks to him and debates over Indian and British views. Sardarji says to him, “perhaps we should revisit that debate sometime. I may attempt to take the other side, now.” Through Ida we come to know about her conflicting emotions about her mother. By going deep into her mother’s past Ida too achieves some sense of identity and belonging by the end of the novel. As she says, “The one thing I had wanted was not to be like my mother. Now she was gone and I started at the fire that

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28 Interviewed by Julie Rajan: An intimate chat with Pakistani, Parsi writer Bapsi Sidhwa on life, words and all the cracks in-between. http://www.monsoonmag.com/interviews/i3inter_sidhwa.html


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rose from her shriveled body, dry-eyed, leaden, half dead myself...” 30

Attia Hosain, Manju Kapur and Anita Kumar use flashback technique in narrating the story of Partition. Laila, Ida and Lalita go into the past to reconstruct the Partition trauma. Flashbacks are used by them to recount events that happened prior to the story’s present sequence of events. Laila recounts her past saying, “when I lived there was peace; only hill-men and their women came along the steep paths carrying the heavy bundles of wood and charcoal. There was no sounds but of the wind in the pine trees.” 31

Bapsi Sidhwa and Attia Hossain have also used autobiographical accounts in their novels. In writing Ice-Candy-Man Sidhwa admits that she drew on personal experiences:

The earlier part of this novel has elements of autobiography, in that I have borrowed circumstances from my life and turned them into fiction. Although mother, father, godmother, and some of the other Parsi characters are based on people I knew and loved I’ve placed them in fictional episodes. For example, I had Polio as a child and because of it I was not sent to school. I transformed these experiences to my fictional ends. 32

In an interview with Nilufer Barucha, Attia Hosain comments on the use of autobiographical elements in her novels,

All first novels are autobiographical. But the characters in the book do not have a one-to-one relationship with real-life people. It’s the attitudes that are real rather than the people. It’s not purely fictional, it is factional. Laila has something of me in her. 33

A narrative strategy used by some of these women novelists is “Bildungsroman”. The novel Ice-Candy-Man and Sunlight on a Broken Column show the growth of the protagonists Laila and Lenny from childhood to adulthood and their incessant search for self. The progress of the story revolves around the phases primarily related to the heroine.

As far as the use of diction is concerned these writers have used words of Hindi, Punjabi and Urdu language to give authentic feel of the community or the background in which the novel is set. Hosain and Manju Kapur both have used the device of ‘native colloquialism’. Hosain uses the Urdu words like, ammi, apa, tazias, khuda hafiz, Abbajan, Nikah, Murdana, Tazia etc, and some important festivals like Tazia, Bakra Eid etc. to bring out the impact of the Muslim culture. Shauna Singh Baldwin has used typical Punjabi words like Hanji, Chudail, Dipty, Kismat, Papaji, Nani etc. Kapur has used the local Indian words like shor shaar, seedhe saadhe, puja saamagri etc. Kapur also indulges in some flagrant Indianism by borrowing metaphors from Punjabi or Urdu usages such as “the barat is coming and she says she does not like the boy.” 34


While some writers have used the glossary, others have not. Shauna Singh does not provide any glossary at the end and when she is asked the reason she states in an interview,

I am against glossaries because I feel these and the practices of italicizing non-English words are quaint hangovers from colonial times and should be dropped in our Internet era. Nothing is "foreign" or "exotic" now, except if we continue to make it so. We don't use dictionaries to teach children new words; we believe context is the best teacher. Glossaries have never been provided for books shipped from Europe/North America to anywhere east of Suez, so we know it is possible and common to read novels about far-away settings, times and cultures sans glossaries. A glossary makes you jump back and forth between the text and the end of the book and jolts you out of the story, besides making it very clear that all the concepts defined in the glossary are "foreign" and "other," to be promptly erased from your memory when you close the book. The alternative way I've chosen, definitions embedded within the text, always immediately after the Indian word or in the same paragraph, has the disadvantage of being repetitive for the bilingual/multilingual reader but is more helpful for the monolingual reader.”

Suggestive images, symbols and figures of speech/ idioms are used to create the desired atmosphere. In Sunlight on a Broken Column, Attia Hosain uses the name ‘Ashiana’ which is symbolic of ‘The nest’. The name suggests that the Muslims had made India their home. Manju Kapur in Difficult Daughters and Baldwin in What the

Body Remembers use symbolic names as Virmati symbolizes courage, Ida symbolizes a blank beginning, Roop symbolizes beauty and Satya symbolizes Truth. In Ice-Candy-Man Bapsi Sidhwa uses dreams as symbolic of the mysterious horror which is to arrive.

Lenny’s nightmares act as premonition of the awaiting tragedy and are effectively used by Sidhwa. They are suggestive of the impending cruelty that would engulf the innocent. In one of the nightmares she hears an alarming siren “tee-too tee-too!” She continually sees a Nazi soldier in perfect uniform and cape coming to get her on his motorcycle. Another nightmare is about the children in warehouse where mother and Ayah move about attentively. As Lenny says:

Godmother sits by my bed smiling indulgently as men in uniforms quietly slice off a child’s arm here, a leg there. She strokes my head as they dismember me. I feel no pain. Only one abysmal sense of loss – and a chilling horror that no one is concerned by what’s happening.36

Maheen’s suicide by merging herself into river Indus, in Shadows of Time becomes the symbol of a perpetual connection exists between India and its people; even after leaving India they are not able to ignore their roots.

Not only the characters and situations are suggestive but also the titles of the novels are figurative. Most of the writers have used titles which are symbolic or metaphorical. Shauna Singh Baldwin states in an interview about the title of the novel,

The title has a multilayered meaning. A surface meaning rises from the fact that Roop means body, form/shape. So in a sense, the story of *What the Body Remembers* is what Roop remembers, is meant to remember, is expected to remember, and in some ways what she "re-members" at the end of the novel by remembering Kusum and maturing into a stronger, less ornamental woman. Remembering Kusum and all the women like her who were sacrificed during Partition would make history more whole. In addition, the title refers to ancestral memory, collective memory/the subconscious and how it feeds our fears, appropriate or not. Fear then influences our actions, especially when the State sanctions violence by promising not to hold anyone accountable. At another level, the metaphor of the 30s and 40s in undivided India was the body - the country as body, woman as womb for the tribe. And the story (of Partition and loss of the country's "children") is what the whole country remembers as part of its creation story, its birth pangs.\(^{37}\)

Sidhwa explains why she changed the title of the book *Ice-Candy-Man* to *Cracking India* in an interview, when she states,

There are so many books published in America each year, that unless the title says something about the book, it can fall through the cracks. My American publishers felt that at least people interested in India would buy the book. The title *Ice Candy Man* would mean nothing to an American. I think they're right.

Further Sidhwa justifies the title *Cracking India* when she is asked in an interview that the title calls to mind the image of India as a riddle with so many cultures... as a riddle to crack, she states the meaning of the title as,

Yes, like a nut, like cracking open a nut. Riddle also fits the title because the complex mix of religions and the interwoven fabric of family and community life in India are confounding to the uninitiated—the novel attempts to explain that.38

*Shadows of Time* indicates the shadows of past memories floating in the present life of the characters of the novel. The shadow of Partition which is still hovering in the mind of the characters and is present like a festering wound is indicated by the title.

Almost all these six novels deal with multifarious issues. Issues like polygamy, quest for identity, survival, women's predicament, various cultural aspects, sexual abuse, illicit relationships, honour, humiliation and audacity are given voice in the novels. All these issues along with the main premise of Partition make the novels inclusive, extraordinary and extensive. Through the stories of women and an accompanying narrative that locates them in social and political context we get another view from the margins as it were, of that momentous time, and look anew not only at how history gets written, but at those age – old boundaries of religion, community, gender and nation.

38. Cracking Sidhwa: An intimate chat with Pakistani, Parsi writer Bapsi Sidhwa on life, words and all the cracks in-between. Interviewed by Julie Rajan) http://www.monsoonmag.com/interviews/i3inter_sidhwa.html

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