**Introduction:**

The independence and partition of India in 1947 witnessed deep feelings of terror and hostility in its wake. The nation had to pay a great price for its independence; severance of parts which led to people being singed by communal violence leading to a polarization in their identities. As the people were thrust into a world of uncertainties, insecurities and a world governed by religious affiliations they were forced to accustom themselves to the changed and alien situation. Histories and official accounts record the formalities associated with the transfer of power but another viewpoint emerges through literature which represents the responses of the masses, many of whom were uprooted from their centuries old habitats and forced to migrate to an unknown and hostile land and society as refugees. Those who managed to remain behind were no less affected as the familiar coordinates of everyday gave way to a new arrangement. Partition fiction, the area of focus in this research work, has captured effectively these changes and they often lead to a questioning of the official version of the partition of India.

If a survey of partition literature in English is made it shall be noted that partition fiction outnumbers poetry or drama. There are many novels that deal with the experiences of the times, for example *Sunlight on a Broken Column* by Attia Hosain or *A Bend in the Ganges* by Manohar Malgaonkar. Then there are a rich collection of short stories by Saadat Hasan Manto, Rajinder Singh Bedi and others that capture the minutiae of the turmoil experienced by the affected masses during partition. In this work three novels by three different authors have been selected: *Train to Pakistan* by Khushwant Singh, *Ice-Candy-Man* by Bapsi Sidhwa and *Azadi* by Chaman Nahal. This selection has been done
to incorporate variety as the authors come from different backgrounds and the time of the composition of the novels is different. *Train to Pakistan*, published in 1956, is the nearest to the time of partition and it captures the shock and indeterminacy of the event. *Azadi* is more removed in time as it has been published in 1975 but share more first-hand experiences as Chaman Nahal was a refugee himself. More closer to this in time is *Ice-Candy-Man*, quite separated temporally from the actual incident of partition, and sharing an altogether new perspective as the author is at the time of the publication of the novel (1988) a Pakistani settled in the United States of America. The authors offer different responses as they belong to three different religions; whereas there is a similarity between the responses of Khushwant Singh, a Sikh and Chaman Nahal, a Hindu, Bapsi Sidhwa provides us with a glimpse into the world of Parsees and how they enjoyed a certain immunity from the communal violence that singed the Hindus, Muslims and the Sikhs. Moreover she gives us an entry into the woman’s mind as her protagonist is different from the usual adult male, a little polio stricken girl of eight who is almost her alter-ego as she must have been of the same age during partition.

If a study is made on the critical material available on partition fiction it shall be noted that a lot of it centers on violence, the plight of refugees and particularly the experiences encountered by women. This work tries to look at these very issues and some more through the use of objects. In doing so the concept of material culture has been put to use as the views of Claude Lévi-Strauss and Emile Durkheim have been used to delineate the role played by objects in the lives of people and how the objects themselves become pregnant with meanings in this process. Thus it is intriguing to note how not only objects like the *kirpan, dupatta* or the newspaper but even a material like kohl effectively
give expression to the change in the situation as partition becomes a reality. In order to capture these changing meanings the historical background must be kept in mind and books like The Partition Omnibus with an introduction by Mushirul Hasan, Shameful Flight by Stanely Wolpert or Burton Stein’s A History of India give a fair understanding of the turmoil that India goes through. Again books such as Translating Partition edited by Ravikant and Tarun K. Saint or Stories about the Partition of India edited by Alok Bhalla allow us an insight into the changing equations between communities, religions and gender and follow India along her journey from a colonial to a postcolonial existence. Relevant issues of journals such as volumes 420, 461 and 510 of Seminar or several issues of Economic and Political Weekly; articles in magazines (Outlook – 28th May,1997; India Today – 18th August 1997) help in the realization of the various aspects of partition as these findings are correlated to the roles played by objects in this process. However one cannot deny lost opportunities as books such as Thing Theory by Bill Brown could not be accessed which might have offered possibilities in shaping the concept of objects.

There have often been objections against using theories propounded by Western critics for every situation all over the world on the ground that they may not be suitable for all kinds of experiences. In this case too, for example, using a Western feminist like Judith Butler to read an Indian text might invite accusation of confirming this universal applicability of Western hermeneutics. But attention must be paid to the fact that saying Butler is totally irrelevant to Indian praxis is may also encourage a kind of nativism which goes perilously close to fascist notions of cultural purity. Besides, it would be impossible to form a purely Indian, racially pure hermeneutics because the texts being
analyzed are written in a language acquired from the West and also predicated on the notion of the nation which is essentially Western. Moreover, the opinions of Indian writers such as Amartya Sen, Urvashi Butalia, Ritu Menon, Kumkum Sangari, Partha Chatterjee and others have been incorporated to provide the Indian point of view.

The objective of this work is to identify the role played by objects in the experiences of the affected people and discover how animate and inanimate objects are endowed with an identity of their own. Through postcolonial probing and culture studies hitherto undiscovered connotations of commonplace objects are identified. Simultaneous use of feminist theories helps us to identify how objects become gendered and acquire new meanings. In doing so the work has been divided into five chapters that show objects and their valence in critical theory and objects as markers of communities, gender, and religion and also as postcolonial constructs. Through the analysis of the three aforementioned selected texts this research work tries to discover how objects ensconced in their apparently inviolable meanings often acquire new significances with the changed situations of people related to them and simultaneously affect the identity of those very people. Through these alterations we understand how partition defamiliarized the everyday and changed the habitual relation between society and individual.