Chapter IV:

Objects as markers of religious identity

The partition of India in 1947 signifies the chasm created by the desire to formulate a religious state, the identity of the demanded nation state to be built exclusively on religious norms and considerations. India, since its past, has been a melting pot of various cultures and religions. Though conversions have taken place, never before had it been construed that people belonging to several religions could not coexist, thereby giving birth to an inclusive and composite culture. With the demand of a separately and definitely demarcated land in the form of Pakistan\(^1\) came this notion of exclusivity forcing people to migrate to the ‘Promised Land’ or to migrate outside this space to allow this exclusivity to be retained. Thus the partition of India signifies “both continuity and contrast in the transition from traditional to modern society” which Emile Durkheim identifies as a common trend during such upheavals in *The Division of Labour* (Durkheim, *Selected*, 12). The sociologist explains that the continuity is represented through the codes of conduct and the moral ideals which the society has formulated over several centuries. The contrast, however, is signified through the changes in the nature of these ideals and mores of behaviour that are generated with the changing situations and times. In this context his observations on socialism may be cited. He argues that human happiness is not directly and consequently related to the advancement of economic prosperity: “If the effect of providing for wants is simply to stimulate further wants, then the distance between desires and their satisfaction has not been reduced by this advance, but perhaps even widened” (15). This leads to the formulation of his theory of anomie
that, according to the *Concise Oxford Dictionary* means “lack of the usual social or ethical standards” meaning a breakdown at the level of the entire society where a basic proposition is ignored: when human faculties are created and extended by the society, it is the duty of the formulating agent, that is, the society to make them definite and attainable through the guidance of moral regulation. He differentiates between physical and spiritual requirements in this regard. There is a sense of limitation in the case of physical demands: “Everyone recognizes that the needs of the body are limited, and that consequently physical pleasure cannot increase indefinitely” (15). The requirements of a spiritual type formulate separate desires as they are generated by society and are not integral to the organism. As there is no limitation to the accumulation of wealth, a man doing so is never satisfied because the limit of his desire is expanded forever and leads to perpetual dissatisfaction. Durkheim elucidates this by explaining that “unlimited need contradicts itself. For need is defined by the goal it aims at and if unlimited has no goal—since there is no limit . . . an appetite that nothing can appease can be a source of suffering” (15-16).

Ancient religion, according to Durkheim, has been the controlling force that ensured that these desires were confined within a certain moral limit. He cites the example of Medieval Christianity where a natural hierarchy existed in society so that the poor could accept their position and the rich would forever remain conscious of their obligation towards the deprived strata of society and fulfill that obligation by performing acts of benevolence towards those who are socially inferior. Similar instances can be found in almost all the religions of the world. Islam, for example, considers *Zakat* to be one of the five pillars that support it. It is a form of mandatory alms giving by all
Muslims who have the financial ability or *nisab* to do so. *Zakat*, according to Benda-Beckmann, “literally means that which purifies. It is a form of sacrifice which purifies worldly goods from their worldly and sometimes impure means of acquisition, and which, according to God’s wish, must be channeled towards the community.”

This, along with *sadaqa* or voluntary contributions towards society, promotes a sense of oneness through just redispersal of wealth. Hindu society too advocates the concept of *daana* for the smooth functioning of all its strata. It can mean giving to an individual in problem or in need. *Daana* has been defined as “any action of relinquishing the ownership of what one considered or identified as one’s own, and investing the same in a recipient without expecting anything in return.”

In the preface to the second edition of *The Division of Labour* Durkheim thus specifies the nature as well as the role of various occupational associations. These, he says, are responsible in controlling the moral bonds that tie the separated and variegated segments of industry that work together in tandem according to division of labour. This leads us to his understanding of the modern state which, according to him, should not have predominance over society as the state is entirely dependent on the society for its strength. During the creation of Pakistan more importance is given to the concept of the state than to the existing pattern of society that had been created through several years of living together and sharing of cultural as well as religious values. Formulated by the political leaders the concept of Pakistan as a state is still an enigma to the common man, as reflected in Bapsi Sidhwa’s *Ice-Candy-Man* when the rattled villagers ask a Gurkha soldier who has come to evacuate them: “Is Pakistan already there?” (Sidhwa 110).
Durkheim defines state as a “moral agency” that is constituted of a group of officials who are to represent the various voices heard in society and it can be considered as “the brain of the social organism” (Durkheim Selected 18). The primary function of the state is to articulate the feelings and the thoughts that are generated in the lower echelons of the society. It is also supposed to play an important role in channeling and creating as well as shaping the desires of its people. Thus the state leads and is also led by its people thereby allowing the development of individual rights. Ensuring the betterment of the individual is the primary responsibility of the state. In doing so the identity of the state is separated from the identity of the individuals constituting it. When the new states of independent India and Pakistan are created there emerges a conflict between the attitudes of the people and the statehoods constituted by them. These fledgling states are weak as the leaders are forced to act according to the whims and fancies of the populace thereby lacking the agency to enforce an independent and impartial rule of law. The docility maintained by the state prevents it from being an independent decision making body that can strive for a better future.

It is this conception of the state and democracy that relates to Durkheim’s concept of the nature of religion throughout the ages. In The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life he identifies three main themes regarding religion: i) religion signifies the gradual awakening of self-consciousness in society, ii) religion becomes the original source from which all further manifestations of human thought generate and branch out, iii) the concept of society attains a certain superiority and because the religious symbols are formulated by the society, they are attributed a certain esteem that differentiates them from ordinary objects. Thus religion can be termed as “the symbolic self-consciousness
of society” (21). That which is thought to be supernatural or beyond human control is gradually viewed through the prism of rationality and the workings of the natural as well as the social world is explained. Society through evolved religious thoughts is raised to a level higher than that of the intellectual process of ‘lower animals’. Thus religion is the matrix on which the modes of morality and conceptual thought generate. If man receives these concepts without any active involvement then he acts as an object and falls short of human qualities: “he receives it passively, unconsciously, without knowing why, – and in this case, he is nothing more than a thing” (21). On the other hand when there is an exchange of novel and original ideas between the individual and society only then can society become an intelligent entity. These various exchanges lead to the development of certain moral values which reposition themselves as religious concepts over several years. Though Durkheim accepts that Indian Hinduism and Buddhism had reached a highly rational level, he considers Christianity to be the first religion to recognize “individualistic morality” as it forces the individual to analyze and dissect his own attitudes and impulses: “It was the first [religion] to teach that the moral value of actions must be measured in accordance with intention, which is essentially private, escapes all external judgments and which only the agent can completely judge” (22). Durkheim advocates moral individualism, which, in his opinion is entirely different from egoism as it values the dignity of fellow human beings and respects them. He formulates religion as an entity that is “nothing other than a system of collective beliefs and practices that have a special authority” (23). It is motivated by sympathy for fellow human beings and a desire to eradicate human misery by upholding justice. Religion, therefore, acquires a sort of moral superiority as it reflects the desires of collective representations. Durkheim
proposes that religion is indispensable but not unchangeable and only the religion of humanity can survive the test of time. As the modern man is motivated by varied interests each individual is gradually being entirely different from other fellow human beings and it is only their humanity, Durkheim avers, that will bind them together. Each human being thus contains an identity that is inviolable. Hence Durkheim’s concept of religion is directly related to his concept of social development. Through the study of primitive religions he formulates the truth that what is termed as ‘sacred’ in religion survives the changing faces of religion and this is inviolable and constant. It is this concept of the ‘sacred’ that is violated in the name of religion during the partition of India by fanatics who claim to be upholders of their respective religions.

Religion, as Durkheim defines it, comprises “a set of symbolic beliefs – beliefs relative to ‘sacred’ things” (24 italics mine). These beliefs are translated to certain set religious practices. The practitioners of religion divide the objects of this world into two broad groups – sacred and profane. To the former belong those which are worthy of special admiration and veneration and the latter consists of insignificant, everyday objects. It may so happen that through ceremonies of purification the mundane and profane objects may be transformed to sacred ones. This is how the totem is considered to be the most sacred object by the totemic clan as it is representative of divinity – consequently investing the object with a religious power. Similarly the individuals garner their religiosity through participation in collective meetings which awakens in them a consciousness of the superior being to whom they owes their allegiance. Thus the divine is actually the representation of the collective consciousness. This identification with the collective consciousness uplifts the human, according to Durkheim, from the level of an
animal as it enables them to relate to incidents that are not spatially or temporally limited and belong to the society thereby liberating concepts from individual attachments by making them social. However, through these collective ceremonials overzealousness creeps in that is often the cause of violence against other religions represented through property or fellow humans as has been seen during the partition of India. Religion plays an important role in the ascension of man from an animal like existence to the level of a rational being. Durkheim follows Rousseau’s arguments that society helps in the upliftment of the human because if we “deprive man of all that comes to him from society . . . he is reduced to his sensations” (27). This reduces the human to the level of an animal whereas the collectively intelligent and the morally conscious force generated by society allow them to develop a personality. Durkheim’s views are anthropocentric as he praises this collective force as, in his opinion; it has the power to neutralize “the blind and amoral forces of nature” (27).

The supreme gift of religion is to make the human aware of freedom by liberating them from certain dominating forces such as nature and their own yearnings. These, if not tempered with rational thoughts, may play havoc with the human mind and exercise such control that may give birth to anomie. Primitive religions and societies ensure that this anomie is suppressed by what Durkheim calls the conscience collective. However, with the growth of individualism and the diminishing power of the ‘conscience collective’ the individuals are prone to the caprices of their own unfettered whims leading to the generation of anomie. Though they consider themselves absolutely liberated it is not true as they have no control over themselves. Freedom, according to Durkheim, does not mean indulgence in every whim or fancy but occurs in “the autonomous control of reason
over human conduct” (27). ‘Regulation’ over certain actions results in the true ‘freedom’ of human beings. This regulation signifies moral regulation that may not be always compatible with his personal desires; nevertheless it is through adherence to these strictures that he emerges as a rational being. Unfortunately these teachings of religions are not always adhered to resulting in a complete breakdown of social structure as experienced during the partition of India that shall be elaborated and analyzed hereafter. Enforcement of moral authority is a very problematic affair and the same action may have varying moral implications in different circumstances: the murder of a man may be approved during war but will surely be punished during peace and this makes the analysis of the attitudes of the people who kill during the partition all the more difficult. Moral ideals thus offer dual benefits; according to Kantian idealism they are identified with duty or obligation whereas utilitarian philosophy stresses on the inherent satisfaction such an adherence entails. Durkheim concludes that there exists a fusion of the two in most moral acts: “desirability and pleasure permeate the obligation” (29).

Durkheim ascribes the genesis of religion to two sources: the desire to comprehend and sociability. Herein the importance of objects is noteworthy as it is through the use of these that people are linked with fellow human beings and form a sense of solidarity. We must not forget that gods are created by assigning them distinctive attributes differentiating them from common human beings. Religion, therefore, takes us back to ancient thoughts which must be pursued to understand its true self. Durkheim identifies two kinds of social sentiments: the first being a relation between the individual and his fellow beings and the second that relate him to the society as a whole, termed as “inter-social” (219). The first concept preserves the individuality of the man whereas the
second considers man as a part of the whole and is obligatory in nature. Durkheim opines that while it may appear that the relationship between man and God is personal in nature, we must remember the fact that gods in primitive societies were linked not to the individual but to the whole society. Society plays an important role in the formation of divinity as “it is inter-social factors which have given birth to the religious sentiment” (220).

The one common thread identified through all religions is that a certain number of people share certain beliefs that are very intensely held. Such a conviction generally acquires a religious colour. Thus religion revolves around the conscience collective which prompts Durkheim to formulate the fact that “wherever we observe religious life, we find that it has a definite group as its foundation” (223). This common faith acts as a unifying factor for a group which distinguishes between objects and ideas as sacred (religious) and profane (commonplace). All these characteristics brought together gives us the formula of religion as laid down by Durkheim: “A religion is a unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things, that is to say, things set apart and forbidden – beliefs and practices which unite into a single moral community, called a ‘church’, all those who adhere to them” (224 italics mine). This is not specific or limited to primitive societies as even the most advanced concept of God reveals a similar ambiguity and is associated with a force that is “at once cosmic and moral”(227).

The enquiries into religion posit before the human an existential question – the problem of his identity which has been defined by the Concise Oxford Dictionary as “the fact of being who or what a person or thing is.” The identity of a person has many aspects: it can represent one’s memories, ethnic positioning, gender, religious affiliation
and many other attributes. Our focus here is on the religious identity of an individual. This “identification of an individual with a religious tradition” has been introduced by Hans Mol.⁶ As religions are traditions shared by communities, the ethical concepts developed in an individual are often shaped by the religion they belong to. Religious identity is the strongest one that shapes the individual’s outlook towards the world and the conceptualization of his own individuality. This establishment of the individual identity is a process continuously in flux and forever changing through negotiations with several external factors such as societal pressure and the choices offered to an individual. Moreover, these negotiations vary from gender to gender and from one age group to another; the identity negotiation in adolescents is different from that of the older people. Whereas the former are often motivated to bring about a change in other people’s perception about them through affiliation to or rejection of certain religious norms, adherence to already established religious identities are evident in older people. Construction of individual religious identities is dependent on established religious beliefs and patterns. Negotiation of religious identity is flexible in nature and depends on the cultural and social impulses that shape it. Often indoctrination and influence of dominant social trends regulate the construction of such identities in an individual. Thus we may agree with Daniel Moulin when he asserts:

the process of understanding oneself to be, or seeking to be recognized, or representing oneself in a particular way, as part of identity negotiation, contributes to religious identity construction – the identification with, rejection of, or partial or full integration, or presentation of elements of a
religion tradition (or ties with members of that religious tradition) with an individual’s worldview, lifestyle, beliefs, practices, actions.7

Religious identity can be compared to other group identities such as national or ethnic identities. According to Vamik Volkan individuals begin identifying themselves with such large groups from their very childhood.8 This reminds us of Erikson’s theory of pseudospeciation and gives us a clear understanding of man’s quest for new identities and the bonds shared with ancient lineages. Erikson opines that “all through history groups of men have entertained systematic illusions regarding the God-given superiority of their own kind” (Erikson Dimensions 27). This sense of self bestowed importance has led men to subjugate and abrogate fellow beings with other identities. Here the sense of identity stems from a sense of belonging to a particular community – a community bound by age old ties of sharing and companionship. Thus identity becomes two pronged in its origin: it speaks of (a) individuality that is defined by its (b) communal origins. Erikson makes us aware that a “sense of identity means a sense of being at one with oneself as one grows and develops; and it means, at the same time, a sense of affinity with a community’s sense of being at one with its future as well as its history – or mythology” (27-28). He uses the term pseudo to signify the fact that human beings construct their identities not on the realization that they belong to the same species, rather on the differences in castes and creeds, nations and tribes, political and religious beliefs. This leads each group to believe that they are the “one chosen species” (28). Often during situations of crisis this sense of superiority overpowers all other considerations and any logical or ethical attitude is sacrificed to the sense of supremacy as is seen during the partition of India when one religious community tries to wipe out the other.
According to Erikson the construction of true identity must be based primarily on three aspects: factuality, sense of reality and actuality. Identity must be formed on a basis of a storehouse of facts, techniques and data which are related to the functions and attitudes of the times; this he terms as factuality. This factual information ought to be unified into a whole that “has visionary qualities and yet energizes the participants in most concrete tasks” through consolidation over a prolonged time period so that a sense of reality can be developed (33). Through a sense of understanding of each other over a long period and a realization of the worth of active motivation that can invigorate all fellow members can a sense of the actuality be developed for the consolidation of an individual’s identity. But it must be remembered that the forging of a new identity requires a certain kind of freedom, both from future bondages as well as from past lineages that can challenge the present and the future.

This brings us to the realization that in order to consolidate itself the newly established identity requires an opponent, another identity that is positioned somewhere ‘below’ as Erikson discovers. Thus certain people are required who are at the bottom of the social order – the other against whom the positive identity holder must be continuously measured as this bottom rung is considered to be an aggregate of the “negative identity” symbolizing all the negative aspects which the individual or his group must avoid (36). Predominant identity formation singles out the sick men, the slaves and the mentally challenged as the ‘Other’. People who are defiant enough not to follow the established norms of society are also targeted and penalized. Erikson further identifies that women too belong to the peripheral realms of society as “the very center of this world seems to be occupied by the ideal of the self-Made man” (36). The process of
identity formation, therefore, becomes essentially patriarchal and exclusivist and the functioning of society inherently dependent on a particular line of thought that upholds the dominating male psyche.

Consolidation of a new identity not only satisfies man but also poses before him certain problems. The historical identity that we possess influences us to assert it as it is the only way through which we can leave our footprints on the present time. Death, which is a certainty, fails to move us so much as does the fear of a wrongly – lived life and we try to establish our identity as something extraordinary that can impact the future course of history. By accepting certain commonalities in their concepts of mortality or immortality – that of rebirth on this earth or in the afterlife offered by their respective religions, people are prepared to die a heroic ‘death’ that may involve mass suicide. On the other hand they are also prepared and rather eager to annihilate those on ‘the other side’ – those who are imbued with a similar zeal to cleanse the society of their opponents. Erikson identifies this process as that of “kill and survive” (42). He does not, however, forget to draw our attention towards those few religious leaders who have countered this attitude by emphasizing on self-negation which is an idea that “prefers self-sacrifice to killing” (43). In their search for the true religious identity they realize that this earthly identity cannot be infinite and that only through this acceptance can deliverance be achieved. Instead of assertion the denial of one’s identity can be a means to establish a universal communication. Erikson identifies Mahatma Gandhi’s non-violent ideals as an important example of this method and opines that such religious leaders “in their own words represents the naked grandeur of the I that transcends all earthly identity in the
name of Him who *is* I Am. The motto of this world view could be said to be ‘die and become”’ (43).

The consolidation of the religious identity oscillates between identification with the lower self on the one hand and on the other a developed sense of being which Erikson refers to as the higher self. He informs that associating with the former is easier and often pleasurable like the forbidden fruit as social morality, to uplift the spiritual ideals of man that is often difficult to follow, advocates the tenets of tolerance and fellow feeling. In this regard he mentions Konrad Lorenz’s theory that it is an inherent requirement in man to obliterate some of his own species – an urge that is absent in animals in the cycle of evolution. This prompts Erikson to deduce why in the present world “all war threatens to be war on the species itself” (97). Only through the strictures of the ethical morality of religion can we learn to suppress our frivolous selves that seek pleasure in the destruction of fellow beings and strive to create an identity that elevates us from the baser level.

Erikson in *Identity, Youth and Crisis* explains the process of identity formation as one of “simultaneous reflection and observation” (22). It is a process in which an individual measures himself against the perception of his peers, what becomes important is not the expression of his own self but how others see him and evaluate him in comparison to themselves or the ideals created by their group. The individual at this point is solely defined by the requirements of the group and his individual identity is actually overshadowed by the collective identity though the individual is rarely aware of this overpowering influence. As a child grows up its identity is shaped by such influences generated by the expanding horizon of its acquaintances. Often it has been noted that with certain changes in his circumstances such as wars, displacement and destruction of
age-old traditions the individual is faced with an identity crisis as noted during the partition of India that shall be analyzed later on. Erikson accepts the fact that the true identity of man is intricately related to what he terms as “sociogenetic evolution” (Erikson, *Identity*, 41). Citing the findings of Waddington, Erikson argues that an inseparable feature of this evolution is acceptance of authority that is group specific as authority is valid only within the extent of a group identity and one is reminded of Gramsci’s notion of hegemony in this regard.

Due to pseudospeciation humans consider their own tribe or group as the chosen one and this applies to religion as well: “every religious association has become *the* human species, considering all others a freakish and gratuitous invention of some irrelevant deity” (41). Every tribe or religious subgroup tries to establish itself as the supreme one to which all others are subordinate and they formulate certain myths which later on lead to the construction of new histories. Significantly as the germination or existence of other religions or tribes cannot be explained they are taken as convenient negative identities that symbolize the undesirable attributes which every tribe possesses but wishes to avoid. This validates their hatred towards the other group and finds fulfillment in mass slaughter that justifies in a twisted manner the annihilation of evil represented by the other group. Thus the concept of identity as something benevolent can be questioned due to this unaccountable hatred that is a burden accompanying it.

This leads us to the true nature of the individual identity which, as Freud says, is placed between the biological *id* and sociological norms. The *ego* which he identifies as that part of the personality that mediates between the demands of the *id*, the superego and reality\(^1\) is terrorized by “both the anarchy of the primeval instincts and the lawlessness of
the group spirit” (46). As it is the concentration of properly arranged knowledge and thoughtful organization its stability is endangered by the extreme opposites that have to be negotiated. The ego eventually submits under the dictates of the superego which is a summation of all restrictions, either in the form of parental pressure and strictures in childhood or certain norms established by the society and upheld as inviolable. The ego is also perpetually in fear of resembling the evil identity that is symbolized through the castrated body and the ethnic group to which he does not belong. The most significant endeavour of the ego is to organize the several threats and deal with them in such a manner that he is not ostracized from his peer group; he has to negotiate various alternatives to ascertain that his religious or ethnic affiliation is not compromised. Jung shows us that the weak ego cannot hold its own and is modified by social compulsions that force it to negate parts of its identity as they act contrary to the established “front” Thus the ego process, as Erikson identifies it, is a natural progression through which the individual consolidates his identity: the establishment of a cohesive existence that signifies a continuity in his own experiences as well as his responses towards the society.

Religion serves as that platform which allows man to anchor to it during periods of turmoil. Whenever the youth feel threatened they try to find support in what Erikson calls a “synthetic identity” that comprises of class consciousness, racism or extreme nationalism (89). The tendency then is to identify and stereotype an enemy and denounce it. This attitude is the outcome of a fear of loss of one’s own identity and leads to an organized process that advocates terrorization and obliteration of the ‘other’ through several detrimental activities. The other age groups in society too actively participate in this posturing or are numbed into acceptance of such violent methods. Only religion can
deliver human out of this danger as the trust imposed in it is transformed into faith – a much stronger belief. It provides human an impetus to strengthen the belief in themselves and their clan, at the same time providing them with that strength which allows them to combat the evil represented by that other group. Thus through religion “individual trust becomes a common faith, individual mistrust a commonly formulated evil, while the individual’s plea for restoration becomes part of the ritual practice of many and a sign of trustworthiness in the community”(106).

Identity is hinged on two opposites: ‘intimacy’ and ‘distantiation’. Whereas the individual finds it imperative to establish a sense of intimacy with men belonging to the same community and consolidate this bonding, all people outside this periphery are viewed with a certain amount of mistrust. These feelings are used and exploited during extreme situations of rational or social upheavals such as during the partition of India to secure “the loyal self sacrifice and the readiness to kill” for the cause of religion (136). Much violence towards members of the opposite group comes through a sense of inherent insecurity and threat perception from the Other. At this juncture there is often a cancellation of the existent identity and adoption of a “negative identity” which consists of all the attributes forbidden by religion and ethics.12 In a situation when the ideal conditions are not present assumption of the negative identity shows the desperation of the human to attach themselves to at least something tangible, as opposed to the unattainable ideals which cannot be achieved in this situation. True ethics that is everlasting as compared to morality gives us the message through all religions that goodness, truthfulness and reverence of mankind are essential to the preservation of the
continuation of mankind. Unfortunately men pay attention only to the ritualistic aspect of these teachings without paying heed to the wisdom inherent in religion.

There have been great debates over the fact of religion being acquired or innate in human. William James has emphasized that no religious instinct exists in human beings, religious objects are loved and revered in the same manner as other objects are appreciated and admired: “There is no religious fear, religious love, religious awe, religious joy and so forth. But religious love is only man’s natural emotion of love directed to a religious object; religious fear is only the ordinary fear . . . (italics mine).” J.J. Smith supports this view when he opines that a child at birth is absolutely non-religious and untouched by any concept of morality. He does not have any of these concepts embedded and successively acquires them through several experiences in life. There are others like Basil Yeaxlee who differ in their approach to this issue. He identifies religion as “an innate capacity” though he agrees that religion is a summation of all the reactions of man towards his varied experiences. We must not forget that religion is also a reflection of our inner desires and motivations as according to the Gestalt school of psychology we see only that we want to see and internalize only those things which we prefer both intellectually and emotionally. The consolidation of such responses is termed as prejudice and our appraisal of particular objects, men and even concepts are based upon such preconceptions or prejudices.

Identification with any particular religious group obliges man to act with reverence to certain objects identified as totems in primitive religions. This reverence is not generated by the fearfulness of the object itself but by the moral obligations attached to it. Here respect becomes the compelling force instead of fear and it is this emotion that
morally binds the members of the same religious group. The totemic force has both ethical and universal connotations and these uplift it from the commonplace to the level of divinity. The attachment to such a force instills a kind of confidence in human by providing a unique identity that differentiates them from other lesser ones. When a particular object becomes revered by a certain group it is not for the object itself but for a belief that illuminates it. Totemism, the genesis of objectified religion is, as Durkheim says, a religion of “an anonymous or impersonal force” (225). It survives generations of believers as all contribute towards the creation of this concept but none possess it in its entirety. Moreover, “it is so wholly independent of the particular subjects in whom it incarnates itself that it precedes them and survives them. Individuals die, generations pass away and are replaced by others; but this force always remains the same, real and vital” (225). One such object mentioned at the onset of the novel Train to Pakistan is a “three-foot slab of sandstone that stands upright under a keekar tree beside the pond. It is the local deity, the deo to which all the villagers – Hindu, Sikh, Muslim or pseudo-Christian repair secretly whenever they are in special need of blessing” (Singh 10-11). This hints at a state of society that is metareligious, where social identity becomes more important than religious identity. It speaks of a commonality that has been the essence of Indian culture before partition set in. Despite belonging to different religions the villagers pay obeisance to an indigenous form of deity, localized and free from external influences. With the increasing identification with several religions, this common bond is severed when the villagers override their identities as that of belonging to the soil and actively identify themselves with modern religions. This revered sandstone slab is thus “an
impersonal God, without name or history” that is inherent in all manifestations of this universe and mingled in the infinite variety of objects (Durkheim, *Selected*, 225).

There comes a stage when society consciously distinguishes between sacred and profane objects. This distinction is made through the realization that some objects are infused with certain high values that dignify them and raise them above the mundane objects of everyday life: these are identified as religious symbols. These objects become special not because they are intrinsically different but because they are “metamorphosed” by our “religious imagination” that is a result of our surrounding social influences (232). So ordinary objects are transformed into sacred objects that propel men to act on behalf of religion. These entities stand separately as there is “a break in continuity between them and profane beings” (233). These sacred things exist only in our thoughts as they do not naturally exhibit any special characteristics but the extraordinary qualities are “superimposed upon them by belief” (235). A collective group is essential for this imposition as only through interaction among a great number of people and the sharing of ideas among them can such identities be consolidated. When such gatherings are infrequent and men return to their respective social duties, the fervour associated with religious objects gradually weaken. Therefore, it is necessary to reaffirm the faith in these special connotations by regular group discussions where the spirit of religious identity is revived. Such meetings reaffirm the faith in their respective religions and provide a support to negate all the skepticisms that may have appeared in the meanwhile. As the thoughts that had prompted the consolidation of the religious identity are now reactivated, men feel stronger and confident of their own religious identity. This is how the five sacred objects related to Sikhism acquired their designated connotation.
The five sacred objects revered by the Sikhs are kesh (uncut hair), kangha (small wooden comb), kara (steel or iron bracelet), kacchera (undergarment) and kirpan (short dagger). These objects are an integral part of Sikh identity. The Sikh who has all these five objects on his body is known as Khalsa or “the pure one”. Initiated by the historical event of Guru Tegh Bahadur’s execution by Aurangzeb the Khalsa identity was irrevocably intertwined with these objects by Guru Gobind Singh. The use of these objects was made mandatory so that an external appearance was fixed and no one belonging to this sect could evade their duties of protecting the poor and serving the underprivileged. These religious objects, thus, bind men under an identity that cannot be reversed and the associated duties become imperative.

The easily identifiable feature of a Sikh is his uncut hair or kesh which is tied up and covered by a large turban known as Dastar. There is a doubt whether it is the “kesh” or the keski (a small turban used to secure the hair under the larger turban) that is a sacred object as the former is a gift of God over which men have no control. On the other hand the latter has been a gift of Guru Gobind Singh. Whatever may be the fact the hair has been the most identifiable feature that separates a Sikh from men of other religions. Accordingly during the partition of India this has been the primary target of other religions as defilation or cutting of the kesh has been a direct affront against the Sikh identity.

In Azadi by Chaman Nahal there is a specific reference to what extent this external identification mark can be associated with the identity of a man. Here the kesh becomes an object that gets both separated and linked with the person simultaneously. While it stands separated from the body of Niranjan Singh almost as an independent
object, at the same time it becomes crucial to him as it signifies his Sikh identity. The character in focus here is a young man whose whole being is concerned only with one identity – that of being a Sikh. At the very beginning of the novel when partition is declared on the radio we are acquainted with him in his Sikh identity. He is introduced as the “young and volatile husband of Isher Kaur”, a man who feels betrayed by the announcement of the partition and the ineffectuality of the leaders, both Congress and the Akalis, to prevent it (Nahal 51). His youth and strength feel cheated at the allowance of such a severance to take place, he would rather punish the leaders for their failure to keep the promises they had made to the people of their respective religions and their countrymen. In this situation his Sikh identity is exercised by the objects he carries: “he nervously clutched the hilt of the long sword he carried” as “what he wanted to do was to take out his sword and hack Nehru to pieces” (51). With the sword Niranjan Singh wants to carry out the dictates of his religion – to avenge the wrongs committed, but it is noteworthy that the Sikh religious leaders are spared and Nehru who is a Hindu is held solely responsible for the debacle called partition. By safeguarding his own religious leaders Niranjan is actually violating the teachings of Sikhism which prohibits the Khalsa from any kind of nepotism and believes in the remittance of free and fair justice.

When the Muslims take out processions to celebrate the declaration of partition the Hindu and Sikh population are almost in a confrontation with them as the former insist on taking a procession through the streets inhabited by the latter. The Hindu majority accept that it is in best interest to let the procession go by without any confrontation. Niranjan Singh’s Sikh identity abhors this decision as he thinks that it is the timidity of the Hindus that forces them to withdraw themselves instead of facing the
situation. His faith in his identity is reaffirmed by repeated uses of the associated religious objects: “He loosened his beard, and quickly running his small comb through it a number of times, wound it up into its little knot below his chin. He then adjusted his turban . . .” (59). Repeated handling of the kesh and kangha or the comb helps him to consolidate his identity as a Sikh and blame the Hindus for his ineffectiveness in this situation as the audacity of the Muslims is perceived as a direct threat to his religion. He is afraid of failing his duties as a true Sikh for “Guru Maharaj had given him strength for occasions such as this, and they wouldn’t let him use it” (59). He is contemptuous of Hindus though they are not his direct religious opponents but disrespected as they are cowards when compared to Sikhs who are not afraid of confronting Muslims. The reference to the docility of the Hindus is necessary to consolidate the identity of the Sikhs as a martial race who can match the alleged blood-thirstiness of the Muslims. Consequently Niranjan Singh feels affinity towards all other Sikhs, who he thinks, “must be sharpening their swords” and are surely physically virile and courageous like him (59).

The Sikh identity of Niranjan Singh is challenged again when the question of migration arises. Threatened with an imminent attack by Muslim mobs they are forced to leave their homes and take shelter in a refugee camp where arises the question of choice as reports of atrocities against Sikhs come pouring in. The common perception is that only by cutting off the hair can a Sikh escape unnoticed, thereby escaping the danger of being murdered. This creates a tension in Niranjan Singh whose whole entity revolts against this option as he has been taught to accept the dictates of religion unquestioningly: “The Sikh faith enjoined strictly against it. It was one of the tenets of the faith the hair of the head and beard be not cut. It was a kind of badge of courage,
which in olden days distinguished you as a warrior” (214). The kesh, thus, becomes an object that proclaims the identity of a Sikh who is courageous and loyal to his religion. Interestingly the attitude of the elders in the family varies from Niranjan. Sardar Jodha Singh, the grandfather of Isher Kaur and a devout Sikh himself, urges his son Teja Singh and Niranjan Singh to cut their hair in order to survive. He offers further practical advice to perform penance at the Golden Temple in Amritsar once they reach India safely, thereby atoning for his sins. His son accepts this proposal and agrees that for practical purposes it would be better if they cut their hair. However, even the entreaties of Isher Kaur, the pregnant wife of Niranjan, fail to move him as to him all these suggestions are humiliating as they question his religious identity – the only identity which he chooses over the many identities that constitute him. He is faced with a choice, as Amartya Sen points out: “It is not so much that a person has to deny one identity to give priority to another, but rather that a person with plural identities has to decide, in case of a conflict, on the relative importance of the different identities for the particular decision in question” (29).

Niranjan Singh chooses his religious self as his predominant identity and when this is threatened he feels insulted. He understands the feelings of Sardar Jodha Singh who is an old man and sympathizes with his urge to protect his progeny even at the cost of religious beliefs. But he feels that these acts of acceptance compromise the core of his existence. These are enticements to “deflect him from the path of dharma” and dharma for him lies in the observance of the dictates of religion as he tells his wife about the teachings of dharma: “Lose your head, if need be / Don’t lose your Sikh faith!” (Nahal 214-215) So what appears as “a few trivial hairs” to his wife becomes the projection of
his identity.  

Any violation of the religious dictates establishes him not only as an opportunist but also as a traitor to his faith as Bhai Sahib Singh Rahatnama proclaims, “The stamp of the Guru is the keski, if after being given Amrit, one takes it off, know them as a Bemukh (apostate).” Thus instead of weighing what Amartya Sen identifies as the constraints of “feasibility” Niranjan Singh is firm in his allegiance towards the objects that assert his religious identity. In the process he negates the other affiliations he has; the role of a husband, a son-in-law or his duties as a future father are relegated to the background; his religious identity becomes his sole existence. He gains this strength from an absolute belief in the omnipotence of God and when challenged by the fact that the Guru cannot protect his own shrine, let alone his followers as is evident by the massacres at Nankhana Sahib, the birth place of the founder of the Sikh faith, Guru Nanak, his faith remains unwavered: “His life was entirely in Guru Maharaj’s keeping, and cutting the hair would be denying the power of the Guru. He was certain Guru Maharaj would protect him from harm” (216). When Lala Kanshi Ram offers arguments against the troubled times and stresses that “these religions are meant to be practiced only where human life exists. You can’t practice them when beastly times prevail”, Niranjan Singh retorts that such a view is equivalent to “making religion a matter of convenience” and violates the universal nature of religion (219). He overrides Lala Kanshi Ram’s contention that by letting go of certain dictates one actually allows religion to flourish because as he says “If you perish, religion will perish with you” (220).

When relentlessly pursued by his wife Niranjan Singh has to make a choice, he has to decide which affiliation to choose and this involves two considerations; “(1) deciding on what our relevant identities are, and (2) weighing the relative importance of
these different identities” (Sen 24). It is noteworthy that even the wife feels uneasy and guilty about the violation of religious dictates though she decides to atone through a penance at the Golden Temple once they reach India safely. It seems that Niranjan gives precedence to his other identities over the religious identity as he ultimately agrees to cut his hair before the day of their journey though in reality it is just a ruse to ensure that his commitment towards his faith remains steadfast and culminates in his suicide for the cause. As we are witness to his decision we are forced to pay attention to what Durkheim opines in this regard: “If, in a given moral environment, for example in the same religious faith . . . , certain individuals are affected and certain others not, this is undoubtedly, . . . because the former’s mental constitution, as elaborated by nature and events, offers less resistance to the suicidogenetic current” (Durkheim Suicide 323). Niranjan Singh becomes a martyr to the cause of his religion and even when on flames proclaims, “Life I’ll gladly lose, my Sikh dharma I won’t!” (229). His suicide, the ‘supreme sacrifice’ that would have been considered a criminal offence in normal conditions is elevated to the level of martyrdom and venerated by all. He is raised to the level of a saint and even deified as his ashes become “a Samadhi, a place of religious veneration” (Nahal 230). Nothing remains of Niranjan Singh, not even the kesh which he so ardently protected as he is reduced to “a handful of bones.” Other men, however, consider it their duty to protect his remains as they stand “sword in hand”, supremely conscious of their Sikh identity on Pakistani soil and against the predominantly Muslim army under whose supervision they presently exist (230).

Religious objects associated with modern religions remind us of totems worshipped by the clans as they work on the same principle; they represent the clans
themselves. Man is bombarded with images which remind him continuously of the emotions and concepts that represent his respective religion. It is association with these symbols that elevates him to another level than his ordinary self. His emotions are unadulteratedly attached to these symbols and acquire a kind of permanence. The commonality of the totem or the symbol is important as this ensures a relation with all the other members of the clan. It appeals also due to its permanence as generations may die whereas the totem or the symbol remains constant. The emblem or the sacred object becomes the focus of attention as it is from which the attributes of god, both malign and benign, are emanated. This realization prompts Durkheim to opine that “the totemic emblem is like the visible body of the god” and any cult or religion addresses itself to this symbol that reigns supreme in the hierarchy of sacred objects (Durkheim Selected 257). This godhead or the supreme symbol holds sway over men who find themselves infused with the same spirit and consequently raised to a “higher form of life”(258). Thus men of all religions consider themselves to be superior and imbued with a sacred spirit radiated from the totem, though they are aware of the fact that this sacredness is not intrinsic but temporarily acquired and is dependent on the reverence of the totem or the sacred object. Moreover, the sacredness of the object spreads to several other objects associated with it and is identified as ‘sub-totems’ by Durkheim. These objects are socially constructed as they are produced by the collective consciousness.

In Ice-Candy Man by Bapsi Sidhwa the description of Master Tara Singh, the prominent Sikh leader represents militant Sikhs in all their paraphernalia: in “a white kurta, his silken beard flowing creamily down his face . . . his chest . . . diagonally swathed in a blue band from which dangles a decoratively sheathed kirpan. The folds of
his loose white pyjamas fall above his ankles; a leather band round his waist holds a long religious dagger” (Sidhwa 133). His warmongering is evident when he holds “a long sword in each hand, the curved steel reflecting the sun’s glare as he clashes the swords above his head” (133). His instigations against the religious opponents incite other Sikhs who “wave and clash their swords, kirpans and hockey-sticks” and openly and violently proclaim their zeal to destroy Pakistan (134). So religious tolerance takes a back-seat and that part of the Sikh identity that negates this aspect is asserted through the use of certain weapons. The kirpan, ‘a short dagger’, that is supposed to be used exclusively for self-defense or for the protection of the defenseless is now used to perpetrate violence on another religion, thereby violating the dictates of Sikhism itself.\(^\text{20}\) The kirpan is also used to remind man of the vagaries of fate: just as a weapon can change the course of a battle, God can change the workings of human fate. These religious fanatics, however, fail to grasp the permeability of human power and consider themselves to be omnipotent enough to alter the course of human history.

Pre-partition peace is signified through the easy going nature of the Sikhs – their identity blends with their surroundings and is not proclaimed to the world as they are described as “a bunch of bearded Sikh peasants, their long hair wrapped in loose turbans or informally displayed in top-knots”\(^\text{54}\). The benign nature of these people show the existence of a shared community life that gives way to mistrust and assertion of identities as partition draws near. The peaceful cohabitation is threatened as people from other places start pouring in, here in the form of Akalis who are distinguished by their “blue turbans with staves and long kirpans” (107). Incidentally, the Sikh granthi or the priest who is a true religious man is weary of these overzealous protectors of religion described
as “angry hornets in their blue turbans” who can only foment violence and disrupt the age-old fabric of sharing and co-existence among separate religions (107). It is this sense of belonging that compels the Sikhs to escort their Muslim neighbours to their villages who feel the “first stab of fear” reminding them of the stab of a kirpan (108). Circumstances change the identity of men as a puny Sher Singh, the zoo attendant, feels it necessary to sharpen a bundle of swords and daggers which consists of his family’s entire “religious arsenal” as he has to prepare himself against the Muslim attacks. Lenny, the eight year old protagonist of Ice-Candy Man is surprised at the weapons brought out by the exigencies of self-preservation as well as the activities needed for the assertion of religious identity: “Knives, choppers, daggers, axes, staves and scythes” (150). The existence of so many weapons is unknown in times of peace and we share the surprise of Lenny: “I never knew there were so many daggers and knives in Lahore!” (151).

The Sikh identity is intertwined with the five objects stipulated by Guru Gobind Singhji. Thus we see the guard who is in charge of the destitute home for women display most of them: “The Sikh guard squats . . . in his white cotton drawers . . . his hair . . . is flung round his neck like a coarse scarf to keep it from trailing in the mud . . . a large key hangs from the steel bangle around the Sikh’s wrist” – so the three requirements of kesh, kara and kachera are fulfilled in the Sikh, while obviously the other two, namely kirpan and kangha must have also been used. He fulfills the duty of a true Sikh – that is the protection of the weak but does not harm others unwarrantedly (189). A totally opposite attitude is shown by the Sikhs who come to attack Pir Pindo though they too display all the identifying markers of their religion as they are “tall men with streaming hair and thick biceps and thighs, waving full-sized swords and sten-guns, roaring, ’Bolay so
Nihal! Sat Siri Akal!” (199). They attack and kill unassuming villagers who till date had been their companions and rape Muslim women – an act that is absolutely prohibited by their religion. The violation in the mosque is so appalling in nature that even a child like Ranna is instinctively shocked: “He knew it was wrong of the Sikhs to be in the mosque with the village women. He could not explain why . . .” (203). Thus “violence is fomented by the imposition of singular and belligerent identities on gullible people, championed by proficient artisans of terror” such as Tara Singh (Sen 2). It should be noted that the Muslims are here ready to forego their religion at the cost of life – they plead to the Sikhs to convert the children and allow them to live, a plea that has no effect. We are reminded of Sardar Jodha Singh who considers life to be more important than religion. The common concept of Muslims being aggressive is challenged here and we understand that the desire to protect one’s progeny develops irrespective of religion.

The vandalisation of religious shrines takes on serious implications as they are done to establish one religion as victorious over the other. In normal times there is a healthy attitude of tolerance and even reverence towards the shrines belonging to other faiths as we see Lenny and Ranna, one a Parsee and the other a Muslim, awed by the huge size of the Guru Granth Sahib, considered to be the holiest object in Sikhism. As this holy book is venerated as a living Guru there are specific instructions for placing it and reading it, it is supposed to be kept “under a canopy and on a throne, covered in decorative cloths(rumalas) at night, and a chauri(whisk) is waved over it while it is being read. When entering the presence of the Guru Granth Sahib, one must be barefoot, have his or her head covered, and prostrate before the book.”21 Ranna playfully wishes that the holy Koran belonging to their religion was much larger. But this thought does not defile
the Guru Granth Sahib as does the attitude of the militant Sikhs who barge in Mano Majra in Khushwant Singh’s *Train to Pakistan* to arouse the Sikhs of the village to avenge the atrocities committed on members of their faith by Muslims. They lack any kind of respect towards the elders and the leader is dressed in weapons: “He wore a black leather Sam Browne: the strap across his narrow chest was charged with bullets and the broad belt clamped about his still narrower waist. On one side it had a holster with the butt of a revolver protruding; on the other side there was a dagger” (Singh 170). When he accuses the Sikhs of Mano Majra of being impotent as they are ineffective against and even protective towards their Muslim brethren, the people at the gurdwara are stunned into silence as “this was not the sort of language one used in a gurdwara with women and children sitting by” (170). The Sikh fanatics try to whip up frenzy in the men of the village by listing the atrocities committed in other places by Muslims. The defilement of other members of their religion requires vengeance by these people failing which they cease to remain true Sikhs. The Sikhs are sarcastically reminded of the fact that they are supposed to be the martial wing of the Hindus and all they do is lead their lives in fear. Thus they fall short of the expectations of their religious leaders. When the men enquire about the course of action they must take to atone for their ineffectiveness, the young and American-cowboy-like leader charts a course of violence:

“For each Hindu or Sikh they kill, kill two Mussulmans. For each woman they abduct or rape, abduct two. For each home they loot, loot two. For each trainload of dead they send over, send two across. For each road convoy that is attacked, attack two. That will stop the killing on the other
side. It will teach them that we can also play this game of killing and
looting” (171).

The only voice of sanity countering this exhortation comes from Bhai Meet Singh who
reminds them that though Guru Gobind Singhji suffered a lot in the hands of Muslims yet
he “made it a part of a baptismal oath that no Sikh was to touch the person of a Muslim
woman” (172). What he does is to assert the “human commonality” as an instrument of
“resistance” against the divisive politics of the aggressive religious leaders and we
understand that they exhort people to suddenly “discover” a “radical reorientation in
identity” that supports the instigation of violence (Sen 7). The people who are too excited
to pay little attention to the various considerations prefer to be swept away by the wave
engulfing the society. They consider themselves to be fortunate enough to be able to
perform deeds such as ambushing a trainload of Muslims going to Pakistan as this would
fulfill their duties towards their religion, forgetting the fact that they had lived
harmoniously with many of the Muslims on board throughout their lives. Age old ties are
thus broken and they seek the blessings of God by proclaiming:

“In the name of Nanak,

By the hope that faith doth instill,

By the grace of God,

We bear the world nothing but good will” (Singh 175).

It is ironical that they hardly realize that their action is the exact opposite of what they
promise to God, thus being transformed into heretics who negate the dictates of religion.
We get an insight into the apparently inexplicable transformation of common peace-
loving broadminded people into killer mobs and how “hundreds of thousands perished at
the hands of people who, led by the commanders of carnage, killed others on behalf of their ‘own people’” (Sen 2).

The precipitation of events place the simple villagers of Mano Majra in a dilemma, they have to chose among their several identities; as a human being, a neighbour or the religious identity that demands immediate attention. This disturbs the social stability as “the incitement to ignore all affiliation and loyalties other than those emanating from one restrictive identity can be deeply delusive and also contribute to social tension and violence” (21). Thus common agricultural villagers learn to plan and execute mass murders. They prepare to be armed with their own domestic weapons like spears and swords and also use the weapons brought by the visitors, weapons such as rifles and sten guns which they have never handled and are quite unfamiliar with. Noteworthy is also the transformation of Juggut Singh, the noted budmash of the community. Till faced with the possibility of losing Nooran, his Muslim ladylove, he is almost an irreligious person concerned only with physical and material pleasures. But when threatened with the possible murder of Nooran on board the train to Pakistan which the Sikhs decide to ambush, he seeks refuge in religion. It is interesting that the part Meet Singh reads out to him is about the variety that is life, reminding that it is God “who made creatures of diverse kinds/ With multitudes of names”22, thereby urging us to accept diversions and not confine ourselves within one dimension of our identity. It is this person with a criminal bent of mind, forever in conflict with law, who realizes the true teachings of religion as explained by Bhai Meet Singh: “If you are going to do something good, the Guru will help you; if you are going to do something bad, the Guru will stand in your way. If you persist in doing it, he will punish you till you repent, and then forgive
you” (Singh 199). It is this teaching that he remembers, giving for the first time importance to his duty to his fellow beings and using the ‘small kirpan’ justly by cutting the rope that had been tied by the religious fanatics to kill the Muslims going to Pakistan though in the process he is repeatedly shot at and run over by the train.

Objects that have religious connotations are easy targets for followers of the opposing faith like the “mosque with its uneven green dome” where the Muslims congregate to save themselves from the attack of the Sikh and Hindu mobs that have been setting fire to Muslim villages, plundering them and raping and parading naked women (Sidhwa 198). The connivance of the administration leads to the mayhem spreading unchecked and instills fear in the people. Mention worthy is the fact that green is considered to be the traditional colour of Islam\(^{23}\) and often green flags are unfurled atop mosques which are designated places of worship in Islam where there are “stringent restrictions on the uses of the area.”\(^{24}\) This identity is violated when men are massacred and women raped inside the mosque. A common weapon against any religion becomes the desecration of the religious sites as the Muslim villagers of Mano Majra discuss: “they had heard of mosques being desecrated by the slaughter of pigs on premises, and of copies of the holy Koran being torn up by infidels” (Singh 141). Thus through the machinations of religious incitement the shared community breaks up into religious identities – “Quite suddenly every Sikh in Mano Majra became a stranger with an evil intent. His long hair and beard appeared barbarous, his kirpan menacingly anti-Muslim. For the first time, the name Pakistan came to mean something to them – a haven of refuge where there were no Sikhs” (141). Similarly Sikh shrines are also desecrated, not only in the present situation but through a bloody history that stretched over the Mughal rule and
which now they recall: “their temples had been desecrated by the slaughter of kine: the holy Granth had been torn to bits” (142). Objects thus become markers of religious identities instead of being subsumed by the humanity of the user. Whenever there are sporadic attacks on villages along with men the religious shrines are the first target as this symbolizes a comprehensive attack on the opposite faith itself. In Azadi the foot convoy passes through villages which are strewn with dismembered human bodies and scattered household objects. The Hindu and the Sikh population are entirely driven out or annihilated and only “bearded Muslim” faces are visible: “Hindu and Sikh places of worship had obviously been defiled, because outside of them were obscene words written in Urdu” (Nahal 248). The pre-partition tolerance that had been the hallmark of Indian society gets deleted through the emergence of an identity that is essentially and exclusively religious. We are immediately tempted to contrast the earlier participation of Muslims in Hindu festivals such as the Ramlila or Holi that has been referred to earlier. As in the case of the former though the festival essentially signifies the triumph of Rama (signifying good) over Ravana (signifying evil) in which effigies of the latter are burned, the effigies are created by Muslim artisans and the firecrackers are also made and supplied by them.

Violation of religious sanctums of the other faiths shows a consolidation of power over the other religion and often includes desecration of fire altars and deities of Hindu temples during partition.25 A similar fire altar is used by Parsees as along with water, fire is an agent of ritual purity.26 This fire is symbolic of regular domestic life and its essentialities; of cooking on a fire to ensure the continuation of life. Thus the uninterrupted burning of fire at the altar symbolizes “the tending of a domestic fire, for
the temple [fire] is that of the hearth fire raised to a new solemnity.”

The priests, ceremoniously dressed in a “swollen froth of starched white muslin” and wearing “cloth masks”, sit on “a white sheet amidst silver trays heaped with fruit . . . and flowers” and “the malida cooked by the priest’s wife” (Sidhwa 33). The predominance of the white colour signifies the purity of the whole exercise. It is noteworthy that this is the lowest grade of sacred fire known as the “Atash Dadgah”, a term which can also be applied to the oil lamp or the hearth fire that is common to most Parsee households.

In Ice-Candy-Man we find mention of the rituals of the Parsee religion that are celebrated through the offerings of frankincense and sandalwood to this fire as “the Parsees of Lahore” hold “a Jashn prayer to celebrate the British victory” in the Second World War and also for the well being of the Parsee community in these troubled times (31-32).

It is interesting to analyze the position taken by the Parsees during the partition. They form a substantial part of Lahore but are immune from vandalism by Muslims or Hindus as they remain neutral. It is their ability to remain self-effacing that helps in maintaining peace just as they had done when they took refuge in India after they were persecuted by the Arabs thirteen hundred years ago. Their ability to get assimilated in the crowd allows them to carry on their existence and avoid being targets of fanatic religious mobs. However, it is true that instances of Parsee-Muslim riots had been reported in the years 1851, 1857 and 1874 and two Parsees had even been murdered in 1857, and no Parsee can forget “a thirteen-hundred-year-old memory of conversions by the Arab sword” (39-40). Infact they are threatened by almost all the dominant religions of India and cannot decide whom to support: “If we’re stuck with the Hindus they’ll swipe our businesses from under our noses and sell our grandfathers in the bargain: if we’re stuck
with the Muslims they’ll convert us by the sword! And God help us if we’re stuck with the Sikhs!” (37). Through discussions on their future course of action the Lahore Parsees decide to remain in the background and conduct their businesses in such a manner that they do not appear as a threat to any other religion. There is some doubt whether they should migrate to Bombay or not as the Muslims of Pakistan may directly threaten their existence. But the Parsees decide to accept the laws of the land unquestioningly and be subservient to any religion that comes to the helm of affairs, thereby ensuring a secure existence: “Let whoever wishes rule! Hindu, Muslim, Sikh, Christian! We will abide by the rules of their land! . . . As long as we respect the customs of our rulers – as we always have – we’ll be all right! Ahura Mazda has looked after us for thirteen hundred years: he will look after us for another thirteen hundred!” Thus their strength comes from religion itself and it is this religious identity that protects them in times of religious polarization. The Parsees may, therefore, be contrasted with the Sikhs or Muslims who try to exert their religious identity and also the Hindus who are obsessed with the concept of ‘purity’ regarding themselves. It is this attitude that allows Lenny’sParsee household to be a place where people from several religions can co-exist, without feeling the necessity to exert their religious identity.

The shared life among the various communities becomes circumspect as the raging conflict between religious identities threatens to tear the social fabric asunder. There is an underlying belief that the long history of inheritance would help them tide over the threat posed by other religions and this makes most of the people unprepared for the change that is about to set in as we see a character in Krishna Sobti’s Zindaginama speaking: “The truth is that this land has been invaded a thousand times, but at the end
Lahore has remained with those who live in Lahore and Kabul with those with those who live in Kabul! What I mean to say is that kings and sultans have changed, kingdoms have changed, governments have changed . . . but the people who live here have never been driven out!” Thus most of the people do not consider migration to be an option to preserve their religious identity. There is no doubt that religion is an inseparable part of their identity as a Muslim villager of Mano Majra says: “If we have no faith in God then we are like animals . . . All the world respects a religious man” (Singh 63). However the example he cites is that of Gandhi who according to common perception “reads the Koran Sharif and the Unjeel along his Vedas and Shastras” (63). So the ideal that appeals to him is religious tolerance or at least the acceptance of the plurality of religion. It is this identity that prompts the Sikhs of Mano Majra stand up in protection of their Muslim tenants though they are unsure of their loyalties and the actions they should take: should they stop the refugees coming from Pakistan entering their village, if so then they would be violating the sanctified concept of treating a guest as God (Atithi devobhaba). Should they turn out their Muslim brethren, they would violate the duty of serving a fellow villager, loyalty to whom can never be compromised. Thus they offer assistance on their part to the Muslims but the troubled times make them unsure and skeptical about the multitudes of refugees gradually filling the village. The lambdar Banta Singh is prompted to suggest that the Muslims take shelter in the refugee camp while their material property is watched over by the Sikhs of the village. The answer is the extreme pain voiced by Imam Baksh, the mullah of the mosque who says that it will take them some time to “clear out of homes it has taken our fathers and grandfathers hundreds of years to make” (148-149). Identity politics breaches the social fabric in such a way that it
cannot be mended. The houses, the household objects, the identity, all that has been constructed and accumulated over a period of time are to be relinquished for an unsure future.

Lala Kanshi Ram in *Azadi* faces this dilemma when news of atrocities on Hindus start pouring in and they have to decide if they can remain in Sialkot or have to migrate beyond the borders of Pakistan. Initially he finds it impossible to be uprooted from his home to go to a refugee camp and his hurt is reflected in his question, “I was *born* around here, this is my *home* – how can I be a refugee in my own home?” (Nahal 108). The walls of his room stand for the years of toil and desire that have gone in creating the stability for his family which now is threatened by the burgeoning sea of intolerance. His shop, built with so much love and care, now becomes a hindrance to his migration as neither can he sell it nor can he forego it. But the deepest pain lies in forfeiting the land of his ancestors, the earth that has shaped him and the air that has constituted his being. He is prepared to forego his religious identity and become a Muslim, if necessary, to preserve his place in this part of the world that he has known as his own. The pain of these people who are forced to leave their homes is reflected in the voice of a refugee: “Kaun ujarnchahta tha?” (“Who wanted to be uprooted?”).31 As Prabha Rani, the wife of Lala Kanshi Ram, lovingly takes out the cashmere shawls, white silk handkerchiefs, hand embroidered silk blouses and innumerable glass vials of perfumes she reveals that side of her personality which has been unknown to her family members and even to her husband for all these years. The objects that are left behind thus signify an amputation of a part of a person’s identity which can never be replenished again. Sadly the migrants still hope to return once the unrest has subsided as does Lala Kanshi Ram as he decides to look at the
empty rooms only when he comes back to resettle in them, not knowing that this will never be possible. As Alok Bhalla says, “they were predisposed to believe that the piece of earth on which they had built their homes was more tolerant than their priests, and the ritual of the days they had spent together was more enduring than all their brittle political differences . . .” but sadly they are cheated by the wave of religious identification that severs all other ties shared for so many years (Bhalla 14). The tolerance of other faiths, other identities is questioned as power hungry leaders instigate men to assert only one facet of their identity, the religious. Through these incitements men are divided into sects and intolerance fomented so that these fragmented societies can be controlled easily by the political and religious leaders. We can agree with what Alok Bhalla has to say about this transformation:

“Their faith in the inter-religious arrangements in each district, kasba, and village was shaken. They forgot their shared “life-worlds” and became Hindus and Muslims and Sikhs – merely ideological and self-serving. And as the violence increased, their imaginative resources became narrower and meaner; they ignored their holy books and their friendships, and became nastier. Identity politics made them – as it always makes people – paranoiac, resentful and vengeful . . . . Raging to protect the iman (the honour) of each of their particular gods against various kafirs, they closed their ears to the call, the kara, the Koran of the moral thinkers they had inherited . . . . Only later, as they fell out of their habitat of culture into barbarity, did they understand how grievously they had been betrayed by the communally charged politics of the day” (14-15).
However, certain religious objects can save a person by asserting his religious identity as in the case of Iqbal, the communist who comes to Mano Majra to reform the strife torn people of the area. He is an irreligious person for whom the concept of God is unimportant. Fired by the desire to spread socialism and to lend his education and experience to the betterment of the workers and peasants of the area he is confronted with a religiously volatile situation he had hardly anticipated. His identity becomes an object of enquiry. Devoid of any visible markers like long hair or beard, his Sikh identity is questioned in the predominantly Sikh village of Mano Majra. His zeal to introduce the concept of equality and make people aware of their social rights alienate the uneducated villagers who are weary of such city-bred educated people and consider him to be a spy sent by the Muslims of Pakistan to watch over them. The administration, too, is unsure of their attitude vis-à-vis this educated intruder and considers it safe to imprison him on charges of complicity in the murder of Ram Lal and the dacoity in his house. The sinister machination of establishing him as a Muslim is also at work here as this would engender violence against the Muslims of the village and force them to evacuate the village. It is the words of Bhai Meet Singh that assert his Sikh identity by referring to his kara: “He had an iron bangle on his wrist like all of us Sikhs and told me that his mother had wanted him to wear it so he wore it. He is a shaven Sikh. He does not smoke” (Singh 143). Therefore, the object kara\(^{32} \) becomes a marker of Iqbal’s identity – a definite anchor that binds him to the Sikh religion, though confronted with the demands of a mob his circumcised penis would prove otherwise. When he is released from the prison and he comes back to Mano Majra he is faced with a religiously charged community that wants to ascertain his religious affiliation immediately. When enquired about his faith he can no
longer emphasize on his irreligiosity and tacitly accepts his Sikh identity by remembering that he was born so. This brings about a “radical reorientation in his identity” and brings his Sikh identity to the surface (Sen 9). He is tempted to face the mob and “tell them in clear ringing tones that this was wrong – immoral”, though he realizes that this will be of no avail as “[t]hey would kill him just as they would kill the others. He was not neutral in their eyes. They would just strip him and see. Circumcised, therefore Muslim.” (Singh 194).

This brings us to the problem not only of self identity but also of how others perceive us. Though we form a concept of our own identity it is not imperative that others will also view us similarly, more so in such troubled times when the religious identity becomes the only co-ordinate to define any person. The Hindu grain merchants of Sialkot whom Lala Kanshi Ram represents may consider themselves to be the sons of the soil, Punjabis who have taken years to build up their businesses; but to Abdul Ghani, the Muslim hookah manufacturer, they symbolize the kafirs who have taken over his rightful position, he who has been “in his mind the direct descendent of Prophet Muhammad” and whose ancestors have ruled and subjugated the Hindus for centuries (Nahal 37). Thus, “even when we are clear about how we want to see ourselves, we may still have difficulty in being able to persuade others to see us in just that way” (Sen 6). Lala Kanshi Ram, who has always helped Abdul Ghani in his need, living peacefully and on equal grounds, feels betrayed as the latter influenced by the Muslim League starts identifying him as a Hindu who should be eyed with suspicion. Thus “sometimes we may not even be fully aware how others identity us, which may differ from self-perception” (6). When Iqbal’s self-perception is modified and he for the first time wishes to bridge the distance between
his city-bred self and the villagers by making them aware of the wrongs that would be committed if the train to Pakistan is ambushed, he faces a dilemma: whether he should try to reason with the mob or let history take its own course. He realizes that “the bullet is neutral. It hits the good and the bad, the important and the insignificant, without distinction” (Singh 194). Thus his endeavour to reposition himself and face the world with the new identity, that of an irreligious neutral saviour, ends in a failure, as he realizes that “our freedom to assert our personal identities can sometimes be extraordinarily limited in the eyes of others, no matter how we see ourselves” (Sen 6).

Personal identities can be fluid too and not incarcerated within the one imposed by birth as in the case of Gangu Mull, the husband of Bibi Amar Vati, the landlady of Lala Kanshi Ram in Azadi. When we are introduced to him he is a Hindu who sits like “an archaic relic the whole day long on the parapet at the street entrance of the buildings, smoking a clay pipe” (Nahal 44). From the very beginning he is presented almost as an inert object who has no mind of his own and is at the mercy of Bibi Amar Vati, the owner of two huge buildings located at Fort Street of Sialkot. His identity is eclipsed by the overbearing personality of his wife as it is rumored that she beats him on occasion. When the Hindus of this place are forced to migrate he accompanies them unwillingly and within a few days disappears from the refugee camp. We encounter him next when Bibi Amar Vati is about to start her journey with the foot convoy scheduled to leave for India as a familiar face from the crowd of Muslim viewers try to draw Lala Kanshi Ram’s attention: “a haggard pair of eyes; red, paan-smeared, charred lips; a vulgar, commonplace smile . . . a Muslim Fez on the head . . . it was Gangu Mull” (235-236). He proclaims his changed identity with the ‘fez cap’ as we come to know that he has
embraced Islam and changed his name to Ghulam Muhammad. He confirms that the sole reason to change his religious identity is to get the ownership of the two houses owned by Bibi Amar Vati: the inert objects – the houses signifying material property become essentially important to Gangu Mull – an inseparable part of his identity. We are tempted to draw a contrast with Niranjan Singh who does not fear to sacrifice himself for his spiritual belief, he prefers death over dishonour. Thus we realize that just as religious polarization is often the cause of a changing environment, greed too plays an important part as in the case of Gangu Mull. He is further interested in changing his religion as he hopes to get a Muslim wife in the bargain. Here the status of the wife is reduced to that of an object that can be purchased along with this new religious affiliation. Material objects even prompt men to loot their fellow religious beings as we see that many residents of refugee camps in Sialkot going back to the city “to loot [the property] of other Hindus, bringing it back to the camp as their own” though they are not sure whether they will be able to carry these with themselves or not (150). We are immediately reminded of Manto’s short story *Khol Do* (Open It) where a Muslim girl Sakina is raped by her saviours belonging to the same religion and used as an object that can be used by anyone breaching the trust she had placed in them.

What is a matter of choice in Gangu Mull is forced upon Hari, the gardener of Lenny’s family in *Ice-Candy-Man*. Faced with a changing society where friends no longer remain friends; he converts to Islam to ensure his existence in Pakistan. In the pre-partition society he is surrounded by a varied crowd who are unconcerned about their religious identities. Hari’s name reminds us of his profession as a gardener (‘hari’ is the feminine of green in Hindi) and also reminds us of the god Vishnu, thereby projecting
two aspects of his identity – professional and religious. A common sport of the other staff of this family is to target Hari’s dhoti which he assiduously tries to protect. The dhoti becomes an object which is intricately linked to Hari’s identity. Not only Imam Din, the cook and Yousaf, the odd-job man or the sweeper Moti lunge for Hari’s dhoti but children like Lenny and Papoo, Moti’s daughter too try to play a part in it. But there are certain rules that can never be violated: “Hari plays the jester – and he and I and they know he will not be hurt or denuded. His dhoti might come apart partially – perhaps expose a flash of black buttock to spice the sport – but this happens only rarely.” (Sidhwa 45). As the partition sets in, the languid and tolerant life of Lahore is whipped up to a frenzy. With the arrival of trains full of mutilated dead bodies, usually Muslims, from the Indian side of the border, identities of the affected people gradually start changing and Hindus and Sikhs are pressurized to migrate to India. When suggested the same by his friends Hari expresses his inability: “I’ll ride the storm out. I’ve no where to go” (157). This shift in the way in which people start reappraising their comrades is mirrored in the changing perception of Lenny: “I still see through to their hearts and minds, but their exteriors superimpose a new set of distracting impressions. The tuft of bodhi – hair rising like a tail from Hari’s shaven head suddenly appears fiendish and ludicrous” (94-95). The friendly banter that included tugging at Hari’s dhoti suddenly turns evil as those very people now turn violent and strip him, though under the veneer of a joke: the shawl, the old lady’s cardigan and the shirt he wears are ripped off and “that preposterous and obscene dhoti! worn like a diaper between his stringy legs – just begging to be taken off!” is flung aside (118). The warm participation that had been displayed by Hari earlier is numbed into silence as “like a withered tree frozen in a winter landscape Hari stands
isolated in the bleak centre of [their] violence: prickly with goose-bumps, sooty genitals on display.” (118). It is this situation that prompts him to convert and change his name to Himat Ali. The religious icon, the bodhi that is sported by him in his Hindu avatar is shaved and he has to circumcise his penis by a barber. His dhoti, the marker of Hindu identity has to be substituted by a draw-string shalwar. Yet nothing can protect him from humiliation when a Muslim mob comes to the Sethi household to assert their identity that is represented through their “singlets and clinging linen lungis”, their “eyes lined with black antimony” and their roaring of “Allah – o - Akbar!” Hari is asked by the mob to undo his shalwar so that all doubts may be put to rest. No amount of assurance by Imam Din can lay the question of his identity at rest until the nai, the barber vouches for him. Hari is ordered to recite the kalma34 and “astonishingly, Himat Ali injects into the Arabic verse the cadence and intonation of Hindu chants.” (181). We are tempted to question the efficacy of such conversions as “one is left wondering why those who joined the mob and shouted religious slogans as they stripped Hari/Himat do not feel ashamed that their religious side had won such a poor, scared and forked creature.” (Bhalla 35). Hari is caught in the vortex of intolerance and disregard for plural identities; he is wrenched out of the agnostic world that existed in pre-partition Lahore, a world that allowed the cohabitation of different religious identities depicted by their religious markers or specific dresses. The vibrant city of Lahore is transformed into a one-dimensional entity with “only hordes of Muslim refugees” (Sidhwa 175). All the other identities are exterminated, as the city is shorn of “the colourful turbans, hairy bodies, yellow shorts, tight pyjamas, and glittering religious arsenal of the Sikhs . . . there are no Brahmins with caste marks – or Hindus in dhotis with bodhis.” (175).
The clothes worn by the men and women thus represent their religious affiliations. The pre-partition world is often coloured by necessities and the clothes are according to the needs of the environment. Lenny realizes this when she goes to Pir Pindo wearing her short dress and finds it uncomfortable to sit on the rough grass whereas the long shalwars of the Muslim girls of her age provide them immunity from any such trouble. She is also attracted by the high heels and satin dresses worn by the little Muslim girls sitting by their burqa-clad mothers in the Queen’s Garden. Her drab dress is easily distinguished from their bright ones and somehow we are prompted to relate Lenny to the American mother of Rosy and Peter who “always wears a white cotton sari with white borders” that equates her to the Salvation-Army band-women (60). Thus the colourfulness and gaiety of the Muslims are contrasted with the insipid dresses of the Parsees and the Christians. Interesting is the dress that the Ice-Candy-Man wears and the objects he carries when he poses as a religious man in the Queen’s Garden. It is a long, green, sleeveless straight dress up to his calves, which gives him the appearance of a holy man. Noteworthy is the green colour of the dress as it is a colour of importance in Islam and thus signifies his sincerity to communicate with Allah. He also carries a “five-foot iron trident with bells tied near its base” an object that is a prominent symbol in Hinduism due to its associations with Lord Shiva.34 This is probably done to make himself accessible to men of other religions such as the Hindus and the Sikhs. He consciously tries to maintain an ambiguity regarding his identity by the use of the trident along with the dervish like dress. At this point the Ice-Candy-Man is a man who identifies himself more with the people who inhabit his daily world than with his religion. When the need arises he even provides his assistance to Sher Singh, the Sikh zookeeper,
to evacuate his Muslim tenants. His assertion is noteworthy: “I’m first a friend to my friends . . . And an enemy to their enemies . . . And then a Mussalman! God and the politicians have enough servers. So I serve my friends.” (122). The train full of dead bodies of Muslims coming from Gurdaspur alters his identity beyond repair and forces him to view everyone according to their religious affiliations as he fires grenades through the windows of Sikhs and Hindus whom he has known all his life. After he orchestrates the abduction of Ayah he poses as a poet, though he is explicit in his Muslim identity as he appears in “flowing white Muslin . . . kohl-rimmed eyes and lamb’s wool Jinnah cap” (244-245). The transformation of the Ice-Candy-Man is thus revealed through the changes in his external appearance as his clothes become the markers of the various phases of his identity.

Though belonging to the same soil there is a difference between the dresses of the Muslims and the Sikhs that easily demarcates them. Dressed in all finery during the Baisakhi festival the Sikhs appear in fairs at Dera Tek Singh to commemorate the birth of their religion and the wheat festival, “their hair tied in turbans and wearing calf–length shirts over tight churidar pyjamas . . . wielding long swords and staves” (105). It is a world where the celebration of agricultural cycles is more important than the religious aspect as Muslims have joined these fairs through generations. Thus Lenny finds Dost Mohammad of Pir Pindo leading all the men folk of his Muslim community walking to Dera Tek Singh, “his head wrapped in a crisp white puggaree, his lungi barely clearing the mud behind his squeaky-new curly-toed shoes, a hookah swinging in his right hand”; the veritable representation of a wealthy landlord (105). The stability and continuity of these shared histories are threatened with the arrival of outsiders; the “blue turbans” and
the “long kirpans” of the Akalis who “talk of a plan to drive the Muslims out of East Punjab” (107). What they do is to create anomic where there is none and try to annihilate all other aspects of attachment and belonging. One is forced to focus on “one’s religious or ‘civilizational’ affiliation as an all-engulfing identity” and this disrupts the social equilibrium in its entirety (Sen 67). The turban of the Sikhs is repeatedly mentioned in the fictional representations of partition often acquiring different connotations. The most commonly worn three colours are white, deep blue and saffron orange. Whereas orange represents the wisdom of life; white turbans represent the purity associated with the saintliness of a person. The blue or navy blue turbans which are commonly worn by Indians are regular representations in partition fiction. This blue signifies “a mind as broad as the sky, with no place for prejudice.” It must also be remembered that blue is representative of the warrior that is the essential part of the Sikh identity and the oath of protecting others which the Sikh has undertaken. In Ice-Candy-Man the tiny zoo-keeper Sher Singh wears a blue turban but that along with his young beard only adds to the immaturity and inconsequence of his personality. The same blue colour instills fear not only in the minds of the Muslims but also in the granthi of Dera Tek Singh when the Akalis move about in it as he realizes the potential threat to the religiously tolerant daily lives shared by various communities through centuries. The blue band across the chest of Master Tara Singh from which hangs a ceremoniously decorated kirpan elucidates similar response as he instigates Sikhs to pay heed only to the militant part of their identity. Amartya Sen’s analysis of the times can be quoted in this respect:

The political instigators who urged the killing (on behalf of what they respectively called ‘our people’) managed to persuade many otherwise
peaceable people of both communities to turn into dedicated thugs. They were made to think of themselves only as Hindus or only as Muslims (who must unleash vengeance on ‘the other community’) and as absolutely nothing else: not Indians, not subcontinentals, not Asians, not members of a shared human race (172).

Thus, religious leaders, instead of making men aware of their plurality, emphasize on exclusive religious affiliations so that discontent can be brewed resulting in the negation of the development of amity and upliftment of humanity. The tolerance that is lacking in the militant Sikhs represented by the blue turbans is evident in the personality of the aged Jodha Singh in *Azadi* whose “white turban shone like a distant star in the sky” (Nahal 52). His saintliness is evident in his renunciation of the world and his pain at the incidents of intolerance. Despite being a true Sikh he shows his openness and pragmatism when he suggests that both his son Teja Singh and grand son-in-law Niranjan Singh cut off their hair to save their lives. Thus he is equated to a distant star as his tolerance and compassion seems unattainable in these troubled times.

The Sikhs with their “swords, kirpans and hockey sticks” directly challenge the Muslims who try to fend them off with their “axes, knives, scythes and staves” (Sidhwa 134,198). As Amartya Sen makes us aware, “the denial of plurality as well as the rejection of choice in matters of identity can produce an astonishing narrow and misdirected view” and it is this focus that can turn the shared tradition of playing holi with colours into a holi with Hindu and Sikh blood (Sen 67). When the Sikhs in the violent procession against Muslims are portrayed in their “wild long hair and beards rampant”, waving like a flag “a naked child, twitching on a spear struck between her
shoulders”; they in their overzealousness to protect their religion actually violate it (Sidhwa 134). Not only are they physically unclean as instead of tying their hair they let it go wild, but spiritually too they are tainted as they inflict violence on others. The Muslims retaliate through more violence as they tie the legs of “an emaciated Banya wearing a white Gandhi cap” to two jeeps and tear him apart. With the bazaar of Shalmi burning as each religion tries to outdo other in violence people are turned into objects as “stiff figures looking like spread-eagled stick-dolls leap into the air” and “charred limbs and burnt logs” fall from the sky (137). The effect of this trauma on the society is represented by Lenny who is suddenly interested in dolls as she tries to enact what she sees by tearing apart a life like doll with the help of her brother Adi only to be mentally seared in the process.

Intrinsically man is aware of his entity being constructed of “two radically heterogeneous beings: the body and the soul” (Durkheim, Selected, 266). The soul has never been, since the ancient ages, identified with the body which has been considered not only inferior to it, but often in contradiction to it. It has been believed that the soul has the capacity to leave the body and exist independently as the body is destroyed at death whereas the soul leads an existence of its own. Though the soul resides in the body it is not its true place and so it escapes these confines whenever the tenure of the body is completed to return to its undefined origins which is considered to be the realm of the sacred. Thus the soul is considered to be associated with divinity whereas the body is profane. This dichotomy is at the very essence of our inner life. Durkheim proposes that our thoughts also branch out into two different routes: they combine “sensations and sensory tendencies” on the one hand and “conceptual thought and moral activity” on the
other (267). Not only are these two separate from one another but are diametrically opposed to each other. Our sensory perceptions are essentially egoistic as they are controlled by our individual responses to the world around us. While satisfying our physical demands we try to fulfill cravings which are individualistic. But when we listen to the dictates of ethics the attention is not towards our own being but towards others, towards a universal concept of which we only form a part. Their commonality among all the human beings makes the concepts of religion and morality “the supreme instrument of all intellectual exchange” (268). However it must be remembered that the individual imprints these concepts with his personal thoughts and preferences, imparting it a new identity that is essentially his own. Each identity is assailed by this duality – it is individual as well as universal. While the former is only concerned about its narrow self, the latter expands itself to an existence that defies the confines of individuality thereby generating “a double centre of gravity” in “our inner life” as Durkheim observes (268). Our individuality is thus related to our body that modifies our approaches towards religious and moral concepts. The soul which is divine, spreads itself beyond the profanity of the body as in common perception it is through the former that we establish a communication with God. Reason and morality are the offshoots of the soul which are relegated to unimportance when the body takes over and manifests itself through individuality. This is precisely what happens during the partition of India when people completely negate the teachings of religion and consider humans belonging to other religions as their opponents. Bodies and body parts, then, are taken as objects on which violence can be inflicted to establish their own superiority. In this context it must be remembered that religiosity is not inherent in the sacred, it is “superadded” to it
(Durkheim, *Religion*, 138). Also the part signifies the whole as it has the same attributes and consequently each part of the designated object becomes as sacred or profane as the whole would be.

History has made us witness the fact that in times of social or religious turmoil a large number of people assemble together inspired by a common cause. The individual identity is relegated to the background and a person’s social identity becomes the compelling factor which motivates them to act in a manner that is often unlike their original selves: “men become other than themselves” (Durkheim *Selected* 231). The collective consciousness of the society generates passions which are extraordinary as was exhibited during the Crusades or the French Revolution. The partition of India has also been a witness to such aberrations as the men feel the urge to prove themselves through “violent and unrestrained actions, actions of superhuman heroism or of bloody barbarism” (231). It is noteworthy that the pressure felt by individuals is mostly religious in nature as the men find it imperative to prove themselves to be true upholders of their respective religions through such behaviour. Religious fervour acts as a moral force that compels us to behave in a manner that is considered inhumane during ordinary times. This behaviour, in fact, can be said to form a part of certain religious rites that are sad in nature.  

37 Durkheim proposes to term this type of rites “piacular” as they try to atone for the sins that are responsible for the turmoil the society is going through. He gives an explanation of this situation in detail:

> When a society is going through circumstances which sadden, worry or irritate it, it exercises a pressure upon its members to give evidence, by various significant actions, of their own sorrow, anxiety, or anger. It
imposes upon them the duty of weeping, groaning or inflicting wounds upon themselves or others . . . (236-237).

We must keep in mind that these rites are essentially evil in nature and work upon the thought that only through sacrificial offerings can the hostile evil forces be satisfied. The lost power can be restored to the groups through a reaffirmation in their faith through these negative rites which are, according to Durkheim, contagious in nature and hence forbidden during normal times. This explains the spate of violence during the partition of India when men or women belonging to other religions are considered to be impious and thus killed, almost in a ritualistic manner.

The expiatory act of sacrificing others is prompted by the desire to liberate oneself from the profanity that has been acquired by its contagious nature as any connection with a member of the other religion amounts to sacrilege because any object attached to the other religion is profane. This association marks the person with “a stain or blemish” which must be removed (237). The irritation generated in the person is transferred to the object which appears as a threat and is comprehended as being violent and destructive in the mind. If through an act of expiation this threat is removed the human mind finds peace and calms down. Acts of self-destruction are also included in this system as it removes the possibility of any further violation as in the case of Niranjan Singh. This is how certain objects which were thought to be contaminated because they could not actively participate in the restoration of the glory of religion are now taken as instruments of sanctification. They become sacred and “an instrument of purification” (238). This is how weapons such as kirpans, swords or spears acquire a certain religiosity when they help in destroying others; through aggression they are sanctified and raised in
stature as they play an active role in establishing one’s own religion and exterminating men of other religions. Similarly bodies or body parts are considered profane when they belong to men or women of other religions but signify a sense of achievement once they are mutilated objects on which one’s religion has been imprinted. The train from Gurdaspur thus arouses the religious identity of the Ice-Candy-Man as he encounters mutilated bodies, all Muslims and “two gunny-bags full of women’s breasts” (Sidhwa 149). This prompts him to attack Hindus and Sikhs who have been his acquaintances throughout his life: “I want to kill someone for each of the breasts they cut off the Muslim women . . . . The penises!” (156). The identity of human beings become fragmented as the parts become potent symbols compared to the whole leading to a disintegration in the being of the human that can no longer follow the actual teachings of religion and we realize that “the distinction made between sacred and profane things is very often independent of the idea of god” (Durkheim Religion 87).

Religion is essentially obligatory in nature: it imposes certain concepts which are transformed into rules that must be followed. Since ancient times there was little distinction between religious and social laws as can be seen in the attitude toward one’s fellow men. This explains why neighbours are to be protected at any cost; it is an action that shows our reverence towards God. Objects too gather religious connotations through this kind of an association: commonplace objects are elevated to the sacred position only because they are attached to the godhead or the obligatory impositions of religion which make people conceptualize them differently. Thus the imperative nature of religion forces people in its fold to view situations in the same way. Anyone who wishes to have a different view is shunned. When religion becomes the moving force as during the
partition of India, all humans are obliged to follow the dictates of their respective religion and objects are also viewed or used according to their religious connotations. As Durkheim says: “where a religious society corresponds to a political society, it is in the name of the state, and very often by the state, that these sanctions are applied” (89). This explains the use of weapons by the army during partition. The complicit roles played by the army in destroying people they are supposed to protect negate their neutrality and destroy the faith invested by people in them. When Lala Kanshi Ram and his family journey towards India with the foot convoy in Azadi, not only are they attacked by Muslim marauders with sticks, guns and knives but the Indian army accompanying them fails to protect them as the Pakistani army provides backup support to the attackers by firing from machine-guns. Similarly the administration that is in charge of evacuating Mano Majra of its Muslim inhabitants is very much inconsiderate and ensures that they are forced to leave their homes through they are not allowed to “take too much with them” (Singh 32). People often take recourse to fabricated concepts, often patriarchal, to justify their actions, as does Hukum Chand, the magistrate: “We Hindus never raise our hands to strike women, but these Muslims have no respect for the weaker sex” though the reality is otherwise (31-32).

Objects become associated with religion through our appraisal of them, they do not contain intrinsically any spirit different from other commonplace objects; it is only that we view them differently. Moreover this viewing is often through the collective consciousness that differs from the individual’s viewpoint. An individual has his own way of looking at every object and this is devoid of any confusion as it is generated from his own thought process. The gaze of the society, on the other hand, is different as it is a
culmination of various thoughts, passions and emotions and consequently not wholly decipherable by the individual. This lends to the object what Durkheim calls ‘an air of mystery’ which actually resides in our own concepts. Sacred things are thus given a seat of importance by the society while profane things are not as revered as the former due to lack of universality in their attributes. Through participation in the cycle of common reverence attributed to sacred objects individuals are admitted into the religious fold and this gives them a new identity. They are given respite from the isolation as an individual and allowed to reinvent themselves. Religion, therefore, grants them a new identity and often association with certain objects helps them in this transformation. But it must also be remembered that each individual is coloured by their personal upbringing and preferences that bear on their attitude towards these religious objects. In normal times despite mingling within society the personal identity of a person develops simultaneously with their social identity, but during the partition of India the social identity becomes more pronounced and often the tenets learned by the individuals from religion are sacrificed for social demands of that moment. This explains why Sikh men have forced sex with Muslim women though it is absolutely prohibited in their religion.

The religious identification of objects is not confined only within the totem or the human members of the totemic clan but extends itself to several other objects as well. We are prone to associating the concept of a thing with the concept of its representative symbol. This Durkheim calls a sort of contagion where the passion generated by the original concept spreads to the object that commonly represents it. This becomes all the more necessary when the concept of religion is abstract or difficult to fathom and understand as we find it more comfortable to attach ourselves to the representative
symbol. Thus, the “sign” becomes more important than the original concept: “It is this which is loved, feared, respected; it is to this that we are grateful and for which we sacrifice ourselves.”38 (Durkheim Selected 256). In Azadi the chagrin of the Gurkha Major when disallowed to unfurl the Indian tricolour on the Pakistani soil voices this association with an object. The fluttering of the white and green flag of Pakistan is taken as an insult and as a direct challenge to his nationhood which is defined by his religion that he shares with the refugees whom he has come to evacuate and provide protection to. The Pakistani Camp Commandant Rahmat-Ullah Khan, on the other hand, draws his confidence to deny any right to the Other as he stands secure on “on his own soil – the Pakistani soil” (Nahal 223). He becomes an embodiment of evil identity, an oppressor who takes his strength from a sense of solidarity with and proprietorship on the soil that is beneath his feet. Thus a particular identity permeates the soil which is almost totemised and contributes in the gradual awakening of a sense of nationhood that is drawn on religious lines. It is this identification that prompts Lala Kanshi Ram and his wife Prabha Rani to pay obeisance to the Indian soil once they cross the border into India.

The partition disrupts not only the social stability but also the integrity of man as religious identities become the markers of individuals and societies. Lenny’s hurt and surprise is genuine: “It is sudden. One day everybody is themselves – and the next day they are Hindu, Muslim, Sikh, Christian. People shrink dwindling into symbols.” (Sindhwa 93). The awareness of identity can be beneficial in that it may encourage us to strive for the betterment of relations with our fellow beings or practitioners of the same religion. It can prod us to come out of our self-centered lives and contribute towards the well-being of our peers. But “a sense of identity can firmly exclude many people even as it warmly
embraces others . . . . The adversity of exclusion can go hand in hand with the gifts of inclusion.” (Sen 2-3). This happens when instead of analyzing the depths of religious teachings we concentrate only on the external differences. Appearances matter more than realities and we get tangled in certain set concepts. Khushwant Singh sees the various religions with clarity:

For the Hindu, it means little besides caste and cow protection. For the Muslim, circumcision and kosher meat. For the Sikh, long hair and hatred of the Muslim. For the Christian, Hinduism with a sola topee. For the Parsi, fire-worship and feeding vultures. Ethics which should be the kernel of a religious code, has been carefully removed. (Singh 195-196).

This generates an atmosphere of skepticism and mistrust in which centuries-long companionships are doubted and people start violating the laws of society. We are forced to remember the warnings of Mahatma Gandhi to both the Hindu and Muslim communities: “When religion poses as religion, as it often does, even true religion suffers”.

In this atmosphere of doubt Durkheim helps us to identify the main contribution of religion: it helps in the fabrication of relationships among objects which are otherwise unrelated. The power of the mind is established thus as it is only the mind that has this special ability to see relations where apparently none exists. The mind is by the aid of religion, freed from its slavery to palpable representations. It dominates over what is apparent and endows it with a new meaning and relates those objects which are “separated by the senses” (Durkheim Religion 142). This is possible only because of the social origin of religion as what one mind perceives becomes gradually endorsed by
many. The collective consciousness that transforms the relation between disparate objects is a great intellectual force. It is very disheartening, therefore, when during the partition people use the same principles in establishing certain objects as religious but are concerned only with the destruction that becomes associated with it and not the principle of preservation or self-realization that is the inherent spirit of any religion. For the true realization of the values of religion we must learn to have a re-look at religion and religious identities and condition and conduct ourselves in a better way so as to avoid the compartmentalization of our minds and negation of the parts of our identities that must be conjoined for the forging of a better future. Our deliverance can be obtained only if we train ourselves to see beyond religious identities, as the people of Jassar, the last village in Pakistan enroute to India in Azadi do; despite being Muslims they do not attack or inflict any abuses on the foot convoy in which Lala Kanshi Ram and his family travel, as they realize that these people are only but living corpses who have to gather their lives from the dregs and carry on living only because they do not even have the courage to put an end to it. Or one can gain hope from the show of solidarity exhibited by a riot torn Calcutta on 15 August, 1947 when “Moslems and Hindus danced together in the streets, were admitted to each other’s mosques and temples.”40 Thus our analysis of several objects and their changing connotations allow us a deeper insight into the workings of religious identities and how we may learn lessons so that the future is not tarnished by divisive politics.

Notes:

1. The concept of Pakistan was first mooted to Jinnah by Rahmat Ali in 1933 though Jinnah rejected it by referring to it as “an impossible dream”. After the elections of 1937 his views changed as he
was convinced that Congress would not allow Muslim League their lawful position and Pakistan was the only alternative to consider. Lapierre, Dominique and Larry Collins. Freedom at Midnight, New Delhi: Vikas Publishing House, 2010. (155-156)


4. Durkheim talks about “sympathy for all that is human, a wider pity for all sufferings, for all human miseries, a more ardent desire to combat and alleviate them, a greater thirst for justice” (Introduction Selected Writings 23)

5. Durkheim avers that natural forces such as rain, thunder, hailstorm etc. affect the tribe rather than the individual. He further says that “among the cosmic forces, only those are accorded divinity which have a collective interest” (220).


9. Erikson informs that “We also have a lower self which we may enjoy with conspirational pleasure, until our higher self succeeds in making us see that we have, again, stooped too low” (Dimensions 92 italics mine). The pleasure is here derived from the defiance of the prohibition.

10. <psychology.about.com/od/eindex/g/def_ego.htm> Web. 22 Mar. 2015.

11. Erikson considers this to be a culmination of the biological process (creation of an organism) and the social process (historical, geographical and cultural contextualization of groups) (Identity 73).

12. Erikson opines that negative identity is “a projection which up to a point, makes [man] feel superior, but also in a brittle way, whole” (Identity 304).


17. The approaches towards religion vary according to the gender of the person, what is a matter of life and death to the man is insignificant to the woman, perhaps because preservation of life is a primordial instinct in the female.


19. “. . . the choices we can make are constrained by feasibility” (Sen 30).


22. a piece from the Morning Prayer (Singh 198).


28. Same source as above.


30. Passage from Krishna Sobti’s Zindaginama, New Delhi: Rajkamal Prakashan, 1979, p.99; translated and cited by Alok Bhalla (14)


32. The kara is an iron bracelet to be worn by Sikhs as a “constant reminder that whatever a person does with their hands has to be in keeping with the advice given by the Guru” <en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Five_Ks> Web. 25 Feb. 2015.

33. The kalma or the six kalimas in the concept of Islam “are six religious and significant parts of one’s belief mostly taken from hadiths”. Some traditions believe in five kalmas. <en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Six_Kalimas> Web. 19 Apr. 2015.

34. The trident or trishula is “representative of the trinity of Brahma, Vishnu and Mahesh and stands for the balance between the forces of creation, preservation and destruction.”<www.ancient-symbols.com/hindu-symbols.html> Web. 25 Feb.2015.


37. These are different from common rites which are directed towards assurance of future bounty in the form of rainfall or birth of domestic animals and are essentially joyful and enthusiastic in nature.

38. Durkheim mentions the flag that symbolizes the country for its soldier and for which he is prepared to die though it does not affect the fate of the country if the flag is in the hand of the enemy (256).
