CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

The research work is a study of the three selected novels broadly classified as belonging to the genre ‘partition novels’ which fuse fiction and history together against the common backdrop of India’s partition into three forcibly separated land masses of India, West Pakistan and East Pakistan. By comparing the three novels, this research work seeks to identify the common threads that connect literary discourse to history. By tracing such generally acceptable common features, there is a way to a better understanding of history whether it has been authentically recorded or not. Secondly, such comparative research efforts also help, primary to the purpose of literary research, to understand the ability of creative literature to respond to, react and recapture the happenings of the past. This recapturing of history in the fictional mode has been one of the most exciting and purposeful pursuits in literary creativity the world over. In fact, postcolonial critical theory and critical approaches like ‘Cultural Materialism’ use history based fiction to a great extent to reinvent and reinterpret human responses and reactions to the world around us. The research work, in a modest way, seeks to sum up its findings from the view point of such theoretical constructs.

The first common thread that links these novels is Partition history. History has always remained a favourite domain of link in fiction. The old historical novel is no different basically from modern fiction based on history except for the political and cultural complexities of the modern era. Whereas in olden times history was basically simple and primordial, confined to conquests, invasions and intrigues, the modern novel on history has to take
into consideration the myriad issues that come into play in shaping man’s
destiny, mostly relating to the power of extraneous factors on the lives of
individual men and women. As Nair (2005, 50) observes,

The historical novel is a work of fiction that attempts to
convey the spirit, manners and social conditions of a past
age with realistic details and nearly perfect fidelity to
historical facts. The subject matter may compass both
public and private events. The protagonist may be an
actual historical figure or an invented figure. The
historical novel combines the dramatic interest of plot and
character with a more or less detailed picture of the varied
features of life of a particular age. The most important
feature of the historical novel is its vivid reproduction of
the life of a bygone era.

The three novels under study adequately and effectively deal with
all these aspects. Khushwant Singh’s *Train to Pakistan*, Raj Gill’s *The Rape*
and Kartar Singh Duggal’s *Twice Born Twice Dead* are, in the first place,
established novels in the genre of partition novels and have come to acquire a
respectable place in the history of Indo-Anglian fiction. The three novels
succeed in portraying a realistic picture of the partition holocaust with the
above mentioned *nearly perfect fidelity to historical facts*.

In a way, there is something unique about the historicity of these
novels. The three novels share the common characteristic of being vocal and
explicit in analysing and commenting on contemporary politics. The political
assessments appear to reflect the Sikh perspective on Indian politics at that
time. On the one side were the British colonisers who were on the verge of
giving up their political control of India. Though the British were basically
exploiters but they presented themselves as the face of western civilization
out on a *civilizing mission*. As Bhaba (1996, 87) points out, the British were
‘*double duty bound*, at once on a civilizing mission and a violent
subjugating force.’ They manipulated the differences and divisions among
the Indians to their advantage. But the British were selective in doing what they wanted in terms of modernization but kept the religious divide strong.

On the other side were the Indian Hindu nationalist leaders who were opposed to partition and dreamt of a free, united, independent India. The third dimension consisted of the Muslim League headed by Jinnah who was hell bent on partition. Caught between these polarities both figuratively and literally, were the Sikhs led by good hearted but politically insipid leaders like Master Tara Singh. The Punjabis or the Sikhs were the real victims caught on the borders between warring communal forces. They were the worst sufferers in the holocaust. Naturally, any writing, whether fictional or non-fictional, cannot present a true picture of partition holocaust without making a necessary analysis of contemporary politics.

Fiction per se may not and does not need politics. But partition novels really and distinctly are rooted in politics because of the simple fact that partition of India was a calculated political process in which religion played a crucial role. Partition was not a natural historical process. It was an expediency that suited the British and it was an artificial division thrust on the people with its attendant violence and massacre. So the three novels under consideration deal with contemporary politics in a big way with only *Train to Pakistan* being a little less direct in its political comments. Looked at from this angle these three novels are not only historical novel but politico-historical novels where the accent is more on politics than on history. None of the novels talk about the past history of Punjab but only about present politics.

Similarly, there are fictional characters as well as historical characters that are present in these narratives. The fictional characters, as is generally the case, are possibly modeled on some real time characters at least to certain extent because the three authors in question lived during the
turbulent times as young men and all of them were born in what is today known as Pakistan and they belong to families that went through the horrible experience of murder, loot and rape of the mindless partition violence.

Khushwant Singh was born in Lahore, now in Pakistan, had his early education there and started his law practice also there. By all accounts, but for his religion and the partition, he would have continued to live in Lahore, now in Pakistan. Raj Gill too was born in Lyallpur, Pakistan and migrated through turbulent times as a young man in 1947 to settle down in Amritsar. Kartar Singh Duggal was born in 1917 near Rawalpindi and was forced to flee and whatever he writes about is from firsthand experience. Writing about history by reading history is different from writing about history from one’s own experience of going through the passage of time described.

So, the common thread that connects these three authors and their novels is that the historical process of partition of India happened during their lifetime and the pain, agony, loss, trauma and all the negative markings of partition holocaust have had their impact on the personal lives of the authors. Their personal experiences, painful memories and recollections become part of the narrative and this is the inevitable case of personal experience becoming “a co-text” to the fictional text. (Barry, 1995, 173)

Authenticity of experience, at least to a considerable level, ensures authenticity of the historical experience as presented in the fictional narrative. The three authors are not writing about partition from reading history books. They are not creating a fictional world from second hand information or transferred information but to a great extent from their personal and social experience proximating to near experience. It is somewhat like Chinua Achebe writing about African villages and W.B. Yeats writing about Ireland. As Barry (1995, 195) points out,
At one level Achebe’s use of a village Africa corresponds to Yeats’ evocation of a pre-colonial, mythological Ireland of heroes and heroines.

The same logic becomes extendable to the three novels under study by the Sikh authors. Their closeness and proximity to the time, theme, locale, historical happenings and emotional trajectory is something that stands out very strongly in these novels. The ‘death of the author’ (Barthes, 1977) as envisaged by Roland Barthes does not seem to happen here. The author of the novel becomes a visible presence in the narrative through the omniscient political comments and observations that keep sounding all through these novels, serving the purpose as it does, of the ‘Chorus’ in a Greek tragedy. Though, the fictional characters are seen to utter these comments, the visible presence of the author at times becomes overbearing.

The third common thread is the identity. Any narrative that is rooted in personal experience and involves conflict of one kind or the other, inevitably brings into play the question of identity. In terms of the extremity of the conflict dealt with in the novels, the question of identity becomes paramount. All these novels powerfully and at a subterranean level express the identity conflict which is one of the most important aspects of postcolonial literature. Again what Barry (1995, 195) says in another context becomes very relevant here;

... the double or hybrid identity is precisely what the postcolonial situation brings into being.

At the level of historical reality the three authors themselves, in their personal lives were subject to the identity crisis. All the three, born in present Pakistan were displaced and came to the Indian side. They may not have been directly affected by the carnage but surely they would have been affected in some way or the other. This is also true about the characters, both major and minor ones
inhabiting these novels. There is this colonial identity to start with. All the characters were subjects of the oppressive British colonial rule and all of them, at least passively, were craving for the restoration of the native identity through independence and end to the colonial rule.

Native identity, again, is a double identity with all citizens living in multi-ethnic countries like India. The basic identity of the fictional characters being a Sikh or Punjabi takes on the added supra-national identity of being an Indian. In the case of the partition victims they were to become Indian citizens later on, displaced from Pakistan. Added to this is the primary identity, at least in the sub-continental context, the religious identity. In fact, this was the identity that became the core issue leading to partition, the accompanying holocaust and the dismemberment of the Sikh society and its collective psyche. The identity question does not end with these. There are the added identity markers of trauma and devastation like the evacuee identity, refugee identity, displaced identity and above all the outsider identity. To this day the Punjabis or Sikhs who got displaced and came from Pakistan are considered as outsiders. The Muslims from India are even today considered as outsiders in places like Karachi in Pakistan.

Another important phenomenon that the researcher would like to foreground is the disorientation, destabilization and fragmentation caused immediately after the withdrawal of the British. After or during colonial withdrawal, marked by the colonial rulers’ haste, insensitivity, inaction and indifference, the local extreme forces took over viciously and destroyed the semblance of peace and co-existence. The already suffering colonial subjects were made to undergo worse suffering in the name of religion, region, caste or language. This disorienting transition phase is suitably described as self-subalternization (Chow, 1993, 13) in postcolonial terms.
Partition is a self inflicted suffering initiated by fanatics on both sides of the border at demeaning and destroying the other and this is rendering them as the outsiders and the outcasts. Self-subalternization is an apt concept that describes the various negative fall outs of partition. Again, this self-subalternization process thrives at pointing the finger at the other. The other in these novels is always important because for the Hindus and the Sikhs, the other is the Muslim and vice versa. Fanaticism, instead of pointing the fingers at the departing colonial British for the sufferings of the people, points it at the ‘native other’ leading to unnecessary bloodshed and anguish. As Gandhi (1998, 54) points out, “… identity is always under-pinned by the presence of the other…”

The next important part in the identity quest is nostalgia and the glorification of the self or celebration of nativism. Nostalgia always leads to self-glorification and glorification of nativism. Celebration of nativism or the proto-type virtues of native culture has scope for its own conflict as is witnessed even today with conflicting forces confronting each other in the name of caste, region, religion and language – Edward Said in his seminal work Culture and Imperialism (1993, 72) warns of

the third world’s post-imperial regression into combative and dissonant forms of nativism.

Celebrating our own virtues is no sin. But it should not become a smoke-screen for the ills that beset our society. Celebrating the virtues of nativism by turning a blind eye to the inherent evils of our own society is like accepting slavery in a new form. To argue that our own traits and characteristics are good is to recommend what Edward Said (1993, 276) calls “… essentialisations that have the power to turn human beings against each other”. Celebration of nativism also implies that every substrata of caste,
religion or language affirms its own superiority and this presents the mending potential for conflict when our collective virtues are glorified, the lurking dangers of conflict should not be lost sight of whenever we talk about unity, we should also remember our history of diversity.

The myth of national unity is confronted by India’s polymorphous, polyglot reality. (Morey, 2000, 164)

The three novels under discussion have the similarity of highlighting native virtues like communal tolerance, universal brotherhood, secularism and sacrifice carried out to save the other. Jugga in Train to Pakistan, Dalipjit in The Rape and Allahditta in Twice Born Twice Dead and scores of other noble characters like Sohne Shah, Rashid and Kuldip exhibit, in these novels, extraordinary valiancy and humanity to fight fanaticism and save their friends from the other community. No doubt those heroic and noble souls did exist and sacrificed their own lives to save others. These novels brilliantly portray the heroics and sacrifice of these noble human beings, who are individual archetypes. In fact, a common symbolic feature of these three novels is the presence of sacrificial figures. The sacrificial protagonist rises above the ideals of ‘we’ and ‘they’ and dares to possess an individual conscience unconstrained by the rules of the herd. They suffer as a consequence of their ideals and are prepared to lay down their lives in the cause of communal harmony. In this strategy of literary expiation,

We have a reconstruction of the motif of religious sacrifice as exemplified by the crucifixion of Christ. (Burke, 2001, 65)

These novels also follow the same moralistic approach of stating that everyone was guilty which includes Hindus, Sikhs and Muslims. The utterly barbaric and evil scenes of partition violence are indeed described in
these novels but not the causative ideological powers that were behind the carnage. The partition had cost both Hindus and Muslims, the lives of innocent men, women and children. There are horrible, shocking stories of the atrocities in this communal frenzy…..stabbing, looting, burning and raping, all these atrocities were rampant on both sides of the border, during those days. Women from sixteen to sixty are abducted, raped, their breasts cut, made naked and are most humiliatedly paraded in the streets. Above all these descriptions, some individuals stand out for their sufferings. The individual suffering of Juggat Singh in *Train to Pakistan*, Dalipjit in *The Rape* and Sohne Shah in *Twice Born Twice Dead*.

There is a scope to argue that it is not the work of fiction to pin point the ideological forces but it can also be said that there is scope to do that considering the fact that these are political-historical novels. The present day feud between the Hindus and the Muslims is only another link in the chain of battles between these two communities. Feet planted in the twenty first century but heads lost in the medieval era, the Hindus and Muslims believe that they are settling scores with their traditional enemies. The irony of ironies is that religion should serve as a divisive force. Religious leaders convert the congregation to violence and the politicians use that as an appropriate opportunity under the cloak and call it ‘jihad’. The fictional characters train their guns only on nationalist leaders like Gandhi, Nehru, Tilak, Tara Singh and on the other side Muslim League leader Jinnah. The accusing finger points less at the religious ideologues or the colonial rulers who allowed the mayhem to take place and also do not delve too much on the divisive politics of the British which was responsible for the strengthening of the already existing communal divide.
The next common thread is the expiation syndrome. The Indian writers’ effort to get rid of the ‘taint of sin’ so as to achieve a literary expiation is evident in the Indo-Anglian novels on the theme of partition which have continued so many decades after the event. Khushwant Singh’s *Train to Pakistan* being the pioneer, Raj Gill’s *The Rape* and Kartar Singh Duggal’s *Twice Born Twice Dead* are the later additions to this field. The emotional response to partition in the Indo-Anglian novels is an amalgam of shame, guilt and despair. A sense of shame that this violence should have erupted after decades of non-violent discipline and a sense of guilt for the inhuman violence and a sense of fatalistic despair engendered by the magnitude of the evil let loose among men.

Another feature common to most of the novels on this theme is the depiction of nightmarish scenes of violence, which however are never felt to be the outcome of any inclination on the part of the writer to exploit violence for its own sake. Thus, painting the details of the grossest savagery, the novelist seems to be trying to purge himself of the guilt of fratricide, for confession requires a remembrance and a re-enactment of guilt. Partition has certainly compelled the novelists to recognise the reality of violence in India. While many horrors are described in unsparing detail the authors also confess that every form of inhumanity and immorality was let loose under the cloak of religious fervour by unscrupulous elements in society. Side by side there is also a discovery that the mildest of men could be spurred on to acts of savagery by what they have seen and suffered. Since the guilt of communal hatred and the violence of partition are strongly felt, the search for scapegoats is also rigorous. Indian leaders and politicians are the most hated group of scapegoats in the fiction on partition. There are several lengthy passages in
The Rape violently denouncing the politicians of every shade and opinion in pre-independent India.

In short, in terms of fictional interpretation of history, there is, in these novels, less of anti-colonialism and only a general celebration of secular co-existence and a very subdued castigation of ideologically rooted religious fanaticism. It cannot be forgotten that the British were responsible for the mass killings because they, as rulers, failed to prevent the massacre. In addition, we need to remember

... the British role in fostering communalism, including the establishment of separate electorates under the Morley-Minto Reforms of 1908 which encouraged Indians to think and vote communally and the compounding of this policy in the 1932 Communal Award, and the Government of India Act (1935). Such moments can be seen as the most visible markers of longer-term British support for the Muslim League as a bulwark against the recalcitrant and predominantly Hindu, Congress party. (Morey, 2000, 163-164)

The next common feature seen in these three novels is the effective use of symbolism and metaphor to convey some of the powerfully disturbing emotions to the readers. As already pointed out, the train in Train to Pakistan serves both as powerful symbol and a central metaphor denoting both connection and separation. The three foot sand slab worshipped by all communities in the same novel becomes a secular symbol idealising a desired state of unity and oneness. The well or the traditional spring well too becomes a symbol of love and regeneration as well as a symbol of termination and death as in The Rape, when the fleeing Punjab’s evacuees plan to push their own women into the well in order to save them from the ignominy of rape.Again, the disappearing train across the bridge becomes a symbol of part of Punjab that was gone forever to become Pakistan. The caravans consisting of refugees moving slowly towards either death or escape as well as the trains
carrying thousands and thousands of people across borders present powerful images of displacement, dislocation and desolation. Rape as a recurrent brutal image and as the most violent sexual act is used by all the three novels to describe inhuman barbarity and the recurring instances and occurrences of rape in these novels also becomes a kind of metaphor to signify The Rape of the land, the violation of human dignity, genocidal decimation of women, ethnic cleansing and all such horrors.

There are other powerful images which are symbolic of certain basic religious and cultural meanings. Burning Gurudwaras and temples, holy scriptures of the Sikhs being thrown into the wells, cows slaughtered in Hindu temples, poisoning of drinking water wells, a buried old woman’s hand moving from under the wet soil and scores of such very powerful signifiers dot the fictional landscape of these novels providing very disturbing yet powerful visualisation of partition horrors. The chain of disturbing images is so overpowering that the morbid visual becomes more powerful than the language that describes it and we at times feel like “... the narrative breaking down and the represented world dissolving” (Pillai, 1991, 64)

The partition novels, thus, as re-creators of history provide the scope for critical analysis from some important theoretical perspectives. In the first place, the theme and treatment of history in these novels can be looked at from the postcolonial point of view. These novels, from a technical point of view, particularly from the point of view of narrative techniques, cannot be strictly classified as postcolonial novels. But they can be interpreted from a postcolonial angle. The first of the aspects that need to be considered is that postcolonial literature per se attempts to reclaim and reconstruct the past. This approach sprang from Frantz Fanon’s seminal work The Wretched of the Earth on post colonialism in which he proposed the theory of Cultural resistance to colonialism and this involved in the colonized
people finding a voice and an identity and to do this they have to ‘reclaim their own past’ (Barry, 1995, 192)

Secondly, colonial rule devalues and debases a nation’s past and its identity and it thus becomes necessary for colonized societies to erode the colonial ideology and create a rebuilt architecture of their own. But this cannot be done, as already pointed out, through mere self glorification and celebration of nativism. Reconstruction would inevitably mean becoming aware of our own weaknesses and schisms. Total remediation may not be possible for deeply entrenched social problems like religious fanaticism and bigotry, but awareness is essential in order to try for at least the maintenance of balance and equilibrium. From this postcolonial angle, the three novels can be looked at and it could be convincingly argued that these novels succeed in recreating the disturbing part of India’s modern history. This kind of graphic recreation is possible only in fiction and not history. The details of partition and the horrific and gory details have not been recorded adequately in history. In the absence of such history, fictional recreation becomes a kind of surrogate history and when it is written by authors who were directly touched by those tragic events, this fictional recreation of history significantly gains in authenticity. Fiction has the ability to fill in the gaps for history.

Man has created so many specialised means of unveiling the truth of the world around him and the world within him – the physical sciences, the psychological sciences and the disciplines of economics, historical research and theory. In effect the impact of each of these on truth is partial. It is within the rightful sphere of fiction to embrace the many-sidedness of man. In other words, there lies within the fictional form the ultimate possibility of raising the truth – unconsciousness of mankind to the level of such intensity as to transform those who study it. Partition novels spring from the well of disturbing reality and closely linked to historical happenings and as
Graff (1977, 222) argues, ... *artistic meaning is a pure fiction, without any corresponding object in the external world.*

The historical novels based on actual incidents are coloured with the imagination of the writer and through the characters of the novel he reveals his salient thoughts. These historical novels remind one of the facts that history repeats itself, that those who forget history are condemned to repeat it and those who do not read history create bad history. Hence, there is the need and justification for a thorough examination of the subject of partition.

Secondly, it has to be seen that these novels establish savagery involved in the violent attempt to establish their *identity* both by the Hindus and the Muslims with Sikhs being the third segment. The creation of nation-states anywhere has always involved conflict and bloodshed. Even in the non-colonized Europe, the creation of nation-states involved big wars, bloodshed and treaties. The *identity rush* by different groups led to conflict and in the Indian situation where there were so much of divisions the conflict became very violent. In fact, it is argued that Gandhi was not in favour of a modern nation-state and he,

... desired that the Indian national congress disband upon independence to give way to autonomous, self-sufficient and self-regulating village / local communities. Once again, nowhere did Gandhi conceive of the nation-state as the logical fruition of the anti-colonial movement. (Gandhi, 1998, 121)

Gandhi, perhaps, foresaw the violent conflict that would ensue in the creation of not one but two nation states. Nation-states and their creation is an important component in postcolonial narrative and the three novels very graphically recapture history and present the details that went into the fanatic
efforts of religious groups who wanted to create political nation states for themselves.

Another important construct in the postcolonial discourse is the generic identity of religion and region which is in a kind of binary relationship to individual identity. The East or the orient is,

... seen as homogenous, the people there being anonymous masses, rather than individuals, their actions determined by instinctive emotions rather than by conscious choices or decisions. (Barry, 1995, 193)

In other words, collective identities like caste, region, religion, language become primary identities in societies like India and the individual identity becomes insignificant. In the Western world, on the other hand, individual identity is seen to be supreme and rests above the collective identities of nationality and religion. Hence, it is argued by postcolonial critics that in oriental societies like India, peoples’ emotions and reactions are predominantly determined by considerations of race, religion, region, language and the nation-state. Partition holocaust as described in these three novels describes the violence of emotions triggered by the above factors. Frederick Jameson in his seminal work in postcolonial theory called Third World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism puts forth this kind of an argument,

... the split between the private and public domains, characteristic of the industrialized, individualistic bourgeois West, does not exist to such an extent in the community oriented ‘third world’. With the result that in third world literary productions the fate of the individual is always inextricably linked to the fate of his or her collectivity, understood within late colonialism in terms of the nation. (Morey, 2000, 161)
With the never ending possibilities of interpreting and reinterpreting literary texts becoming possible with the expansion of theoretical approaches and perceptions, this research seeks to sum up with the statement that every interpretation is only limited. Poststructuralist thought coupled with postmodernism and postcolonialism have helped us to understand that meaning is never fixed and is always in a flux, getting changed into reinterpretations and reinventions. Language itself is in a flux and literary meanings are capable of acquiring new shades of meaning. Against this backdrop, this research work has sought to interpret three novels belonging to the partition novel genre.

The study has been done with the primary aim that partition fiction is part of Indian history. It is both fictionalised history as well as history getting converted into fictional discourse. It is fiction that has sought to permanently freeze certain select frames of Indian history. These novels not only possess the depth to take a peep into history but also use the fictionalised historical narrative to make an assessment of contemporary social life. This research work would like to conclude with Nietzsche’s famous remark “There are no facts, only interpretations.” (Barry, 1995, 63)

SCOPE FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

Partition Literature provides very good scope for further research, partition fiction in particular. The study of intertextuality between partition fiction and history texts on partition is one area of very good research potential. The other area would be the study of stylistics and language related research on partition fiction.