CHAPTER 3

CONFLICT AND THE LOSS OF VALUES

The second novel under study for this research project is Raj Gill’s *The Rape* published in the year 1974. Of the three novels under study, this work of fiction appears to be more strongly rooted in history and historical facts. This is not to undermine the historical rootedness of the other two novels under study. The objective is to draw a contrast and to assess how the three works of fiction appropriated partition history and fuse the historical narrative into the fictional narrative. Partition was a far too complex phenomenon with highly powerful disruptive interactions from the diverse domains of history, politics, religion, culture and conflicting beliefs and world views and as Nayak, et.al (2018, 138) points out,

> It is difficult to sort out the historical, political and social intricacies associated with partition through history and historiography but the fiction writer has the astute ability to examine partition trauma to produce a greater comprehension of the events because he or she inserts racial, religious, socio-economical and political account in front of the reader to present an honest depiction of partition.

Looked at purely from this point of view, *The Rape* by Raj Gill appropriates historical facts and interpretations more aggressively into the core of the fictional narrative, assesses history through fictional characters, evaluates the divisive politics of the colonial masters and also pointedly analyses the strategic failures and political mistakes of the nationalist leaders as well as the pro-partition Muslim league protagonists. The razor sharp political commentaries do not spoil the vibrancy of the fictional narratives
because the political polemics analyzed not only fit the bill in this powerful political drama but also actually helps focus and sharpen our understanding of the how’s and why’s of the apocalyptic sufferings of the people of the subcontinent during and on account of the violent partition of India.

Indo-Anglian fiction written about partition and the early independence generally exhibits a tendency to voice a kind of submissiveness by focusing more on events rather than on the political factors which caused them. As Guha (1982, vii) points out, it is always possible to perceive a … general attribute of subordination in South Asian Society whether this is expressed in terms of class, caste, age, gender, and office or in any other way.

There is clearly visible expression of self doubt and inadequacy born out of being the dominated society which is generally found to give expression to self criticism and self castigation rather than turn the anger against the dominant powers who manipulated the political history always to suit their agenda and priorities. This is the reason why an accusatory book like Katherine Mayo’s *Mother India* written in 1927 became a sensational hit among the Europeans. In that book Mayo indulged in attacks against Indian patriarchy and

page after page she inventories the brutishness of Indian men, the horrors of child marriage, the abjection of widowhood and, of course the atavistic slavishness, illiteracy and unsanitary habits of Indian wives. (Gandhi, 1998, 95)

So when it comes to partition violence, it is always the case of indulging in moral uprightness and talk about idealistic paradigms like secularism, communal harmony and universal brotherhood, which, though principles of a high moral plane, did not help in stopping the excesses of brutal violence and
unprecedented suffering. In the same way there is a general hesitation to target the colonial British who were mainly responsible for the communal holocaust because it is they who failed, as administrators, to plan a smooth transition of power and resettlement of the affected people. It is in this aspect that Raj Gill’s *The Rape* stands out singularly in including in the narrative a strong, clear and non-hesitant political analysis which does not spare anyone.

Names of politicians are strewn across the pages, newspapers reports are quoted in abundance, and several speeches of Gandhi, Nehru and the Muslim leader Jinnah are reproduced verbatim. (Vijayan et.al, 2014, IV)

The political analysis does not affect the fictional content or the literary quality of the novel and this perhaps is the strength of this postcolonial narrative. It is not based on false nationalistic pride or a glorification of nativism or the ‘self” but directly, brilliantly and effectively dissects political positions of all shades through the words of the characters in the novel. This is the defining quality of Raj Gill’s novel and from this perspective the novel can be called one of the most realistically written novels about the partition holocaust. It does not fail in its primary fictional responsibility of dealing with the lives of people and portraying reality as it obtained during those turbulent times. Nor, does it become a mere historical documentary as it is seen to powerfully portray the tragedy of human suffering as it happened. It is in this aspect that the novel scores over others written during the same period and on the same theme.

Raj Gill, whose full name is Hari Raj Singh Sher Gill, was born in Lyallpur now in Pakistan. He, along with his family, migrated to India in 1947. He settled down in his ancestral village, Jagdev Kalan, Amritsar. He was a Post–graduate in Philosophy. He wrote in three languages, English, Punjabi and Urdu. He had gone through a long route of jobs ranging from teaching to managing a motor workshop before settling down with his
last job, that of Assistant Editor with the Hindustan Times, New Delhi. He lived his last years in Delhi and passed away on March 12, 1999. “Source: www.tribuneindia.com”

His versatility in writing is established from most of his novels, especially, his study of human behavior in The Rape, involvement of innocents in the crime world in The Golden Dawn, human lust in The Infidel and morality, religion and politics in Jo Bole. Having witnessed the partition days, the ghoulish events and the mass exodus and migration, he depicts clearly the human psyche and the behavior of people of both the communities in his novel The Rape.

Raj Gill’s The Rape opens in March 1947 in Lyallpur, a village in West Punjab – soon to become a part of Pakistan – where Dalipjit, a Sikh boy and Jasmit, a Sikh girl, meet secretly at the familiar village well. It ends on the Indian side of the border some nine months later. A good few of the characters are all already dead – some due to illness, others at the hands of the Muslim fanatics, while on their long trek to India. Among the last to die are Jasmit, and Dalipjit’s old father, Ishar Singh. But before Ishar Singh dies, he rapes a Muslim girl called Leila whom his son had rescued and who has been living with the boy.

The action of the novel begins shortly before the declaration of Mountbatten plan. Though by and large illiterate, the villagers of Lyallpur are quite aware of what is happening elsewhere. They are troubled by the turn of events. To the people who are receiving distressing news about the communal riots in Gurgaon, Gujranwala and Amritsar and elsewhere the partition award is a bolt from the blue. The prevailing mood of the villagers is made clear from the significance they attach to that evening’s initiation ceremony.
The novel opens with the hero of the novel Dalipjit, a boy who is past eighteen – the age when a boy grows into a man – is going to attend the initiation ceremony to be conducted in the Gurudwara that evening.

It was a call to rise in faith and fight the Muslim tyrants and fanatics who were perpetrating the massacres of the non-muslims (TR, 11)

The frightened Sikhs and Hindus are to rise in a crusade after the initiation and stem the tide of hatred, arson, murder and loot set off by the Muslim league. Dalipjit goes in and performs obeisance to the Holy Scripture – the Granth that is being recited continuously. He comes out under the mulberry tree. The three envoys from the Sikh population of Rawalpindi and Lahore address the gathering. The three lace their speeches richly with rapid details of the Muslim brutalities over the non-muslims invariably omitting the retaliative acts of comparable brutality. The talk is absorbing and exciting but Dalipjit is not interested in it. He does not believe in initiation. He has often argued with his father that faith is “What you practiced and not what you merely believed in.” (TR, 14) He has joined the initiation ceremony to join Jasmit in taking an oath of their abiding love.

Dalipjit sits with dozen others along railing of the huge ‘takhat posh’ – a place for idle gossip and informal community exchange. The conversation turns to the political situation. Dharam Gopal, who had been in service at one time and took to politics later, accuses Cripps of having ‘a glib tongue and a scheming brain’ and says,

Cripps is a fox, who was specially sent to India, to perpetrate the policy of divide and rule. First it was only to divide the sects, communities and regions. But now it is to divide the nation and to cause fissures in the national integrity. (TR, 27)
Their conversation leads to certain criticism of great leaders like Jinnah and Nehru.

Partition of the country had become an established fact. Lord Mountbatten had maneuvered to bring around the Congress leadership to agree to the partition formula using the native astuteness of an Indian Civil Servant, V.P. Menon. The bait before the Congress was quicker transfer of power to the natives. The Congress had bit at it avidly just as the Muslim League had succumbed to the temptation. The original demand of the Muslim League was declaring of the Muslim majority provinces as Pakistan. What they had to settle down to in the end was division of such provinces, the Punjab and Bengal. (TR, 57)

For most of the leaders, the partition had become an accepted fact either willingly or unwillingly. The person who was still hesitant about the partition formula was Jawaharlal Nehru. Nehru wanted independence for an undivided India, at least an India, which was not divided on religious grounds. “But how would Nehru react to Sardar Patel’s agreeing to partition over his head” (TR, 57), Dalipjit thought amusedly. He does not hold Nehru in contempt or underrate his charm or intelligence. However, it is much more difficult to understand Gandhi. Dalipjit has not been able to understand his diplomacy. Gandhi had voiced his consent for the genuineness of the demand of the Muslim League for Pakistan but less than twenty-four hours later; he brought down thunders by saying that he did not accept the principle of division and began to talk of unity and brotherhood of the nation. He stunned both the high priests of the Congress and the Viceroy when he announced at a prayer meeting:

Even if the whole of India burns we shall not concede Pakistan, even if the Muslim League demanded it at the point of the sword. (TR, 60)
This announcement, when Patel and Nehru had announced their individual acceptance of their partition formula, threw everyone into confusion. Why he made his statement was an enigma to the leaders then and it would stay an enigma to historians forever. This is the assessment of Dalipjit.

Dalipjit thinks of the fate of the people entrusted in the hands of such leaders. What worries Dalipjit most is the status of the Sikhs. Will they be reckoned simply a minority and ignored? Their leader, Master Tara Singh who was a great instigator but not so great in political foresight, did not seem to be gaining any ground despite an extremely inflammatory speech he made in Lahore. He said waving his long sword,

> O! Hindus and Sikhs, Be ready for self-destruction. If we can snatch the government from the Britishers, no one can stop us from snatching the government from the Muslims. Disperse from here on the solemn affirmation that we shall not allow the League to exist. (TR, 61)

The reaction to his speech was that riots broke out the next day in Gujranwala. The speech echoed and re-echoed in the Sikh villages till it become a haunting legend which every son and daughter of the Sikhs had to live up to. All this swept down to the villagers in a continuous process of distortion and fanned the riotous spirit of the people and aggravated the fear of having to abandon their land and property.

Dalipjit is aware of greater rumbling besides the political unrest and distrust. The rumbling is from the brewing religious fervor, which is bound to boil into a fanatical madness of unprecedented magnitude. He wonders if the leaders are aware of it, aware of the hell fire about to be let loose under the banner of religion. Hatred mixed with faith would turn the Devil pale. The Hindus had not yet stopped crying over Noakhali and the Sikhs were licking their gaping wounds in Rawalpindi. What started purely as a gesture of
intimidation for political blackmail with the little violence thrown in with the sanction of the leaders was turning into primitive hatred and fear.

Dalipjit grasps the situation quickly and without panic after going through the newspapers that the partition of the county is imminent. He watches the people of his village gradually slide into a dark brooding mood. They talk less, work less, snap and snarl and quarrel over non-existent issues and go about their daily routine under dark shadows. They are changing into living ghosts. Values change, principles disappear, regard for life vanish, deference to age goes. Honest toil is replaced by boisterous living and diligence gives way to recklessness, grace to boozing and good manners to churlishness. Dalipjit watches all this and becomes worried. August 15 is declared as the date for transfer of power. Leaders appeal to the hysterical public to observe August 15 solemnly. The word ‘celebration’ hits Dalipjit in the chest like a brick. It is a sheer nonsense to expect one to celebrate. Dalipjit’s father says that they were dreaming of that day for centuries and they would become free from slavery from the British rule. Dalipjit replies that the people would become slaves to our own people instead of the British people. Dalipjit’s mother expresses her hurt feeling at the word ‘independence’.

Ashes on the head of such independence”, his mother cuts in. “Making people homeless is independence? True it is, ina way, you are made free, no land, no house, no cattle and nowork. All the time is yours and all the world is yours to wander about.(TR, 65)

Raj Gill through the tormented discourse of the anxiety ridden main characters succeeds in presenting an account of the feelings of the Punjabi people on the eve of partition. Their fears, doubts, uncertainties and distrust of the multilayered native political structure and their total distrust of the British colonists are well wrought by the author not through political rhetoric
but through the depiction of their ordinary lives in which politics had come to play an inevitably notorious role. As Gandhi (1998, 5) points out,

The colonial aftermath is marked by the range of ambivalent cultural moods and formations which accompany periods of transition and translation.

This was generally true of the people of India on the whole at the time of independence and immediately after that. For the Sikhs who lived in Punjab and who were the inevitable targets and participants in the holocaust and its immediate sufferers, the reaction was not only that of uncertainty but one of total fear, dismay and hopelessness. For the rest of India which was not directly affected by the partition violence and displacement, independence was a much awaited moment of celebration. It was epochal and momentous and as Salman Rushdie describes in the *Midnight's Children*, Independence meant so much for the nation,

For the next three decades, there was to be no escape. Soothsayers had prophesied me, newspapers celebrated my arrival, politicos ratified my authenticity. (Rushdie, 2010, 3)

Rushdie here equates India’s independence with the birth of his hero Saleem Sinai and that is the reason he uses the personal pronouns ‘me’ and ‘my’. But as the spirit of the passage conveys, independence was a moment of celebration. But the Punjabi people’s minds were far from celebration. For the people of western Punjab independence actually was a death knell. It meant that they had to leave their ancestral land and run to east Punjab for their lives. The land of five rivers which had been theirs for thousands and thousands of years was to suddenly become at one stroke an alien land to be taken over by the Muslim *others*. Land, houses, businesses, belonging and everything was lost at a wink, lost forever. More grievous was the threat to their lives, their very existence. They knew that once Pakistan
was born, not a single Punjabi Sikh would be safe in that country. They realized that their time had come either to leave or die. What they did not foresee perhaps was that they would be butchered even after they decided to leave. There was no choice but to leave and they also knew that the land they were hoping to go would remain alien and hostile to them. Raj Gill captures this death-in-life experience of the Sikhs of west Punjab very graphically in his novel. There was no joy in their minds about independence. This is what makes Dalipjit say,

> How do they expect us the Sikhs and the Hindus in Pakistan to celebrate by setting fire to our houses, by pinning the head… (TR, 66)

The above mentioned words of disillusionment springs out of a sense of fear and uncertainty at the personal as well as the collective levels of the Sikh population of west Punjab. Beyond this there was also very strong political sentiments purportedly expressed by the Sikhs as reflected by the words spoken by some of the fictional characters. Dalipjit the hero, though young and inexperienced, shows surprising levels of social and political maturity and appears to have an astute brain while analyzing political issues and political leaders of various shades. Whether it is observations about the devious British colonialists and Viceroyes or about Hindu, Sikh and Muslim leaders, Dalipjit and the other fictional characters speak very clearly and strongly and demonize almost every leader. Such politically overloaded conversations and observations in the novel are not only frequent but also present very clear overview of how the Sikh population viewed things during the partition turmoil. Obviously, any fictional narrative that incorporates political comments and analysis would have to be seen as a discourse that is embedded in the author's own political views, beliefs and disposition. When Dalipjit speaks on partition politics, it could be argued, that it is Raj Gill who gives vent to his political views. Fictional characters per se cannot
comprehensively talk about contemporary politics as clearly and convincingly as do some of the characters in this novel and there is sufficient scope to argue that the political-autobiographical element plays an important role in Raj Gill’s *The Rape*.

Raj Gill appears to superimpose his strong and strident political views on the narrative flow of the novel. But in the same breath, it can also be said with conviction that this ‘political super-imposition’ does not affect the literary and fictional nature of the novel’s discourse. In fact, politics and political observations aptly fit into the fictional narrative because the theme and action of the novel is basically rooted in contemporary politics. Partition of India was more of a political occurrence than anything else even though religion may be seen to be the driving force that worked as a causative factor. Gill’s political observations through the characters comes a kind of “*Author note*” that seeks to “underscore his plea by deconstructing the entire fictional edifice” (Pillai, 1991, 75) This researcher would like to draw a parallel and point out that the author’s political commentary through the fictional characters appearing throughout the novel plays the role of ‘Chorus’ in the Greek tragedy. The omniscient commentaries and predictions of the chorus in the classical tragedy serve certain specific functions like interpretation and enunciation. Gill’s political ‘chorus’ serves a similar function and helps the modern reader to go back in time and understand the political dynamics which led to the human tragedy of partition. It helps us to cross the time-lag and recreate for ourselves the kind of political reality that prevailed at that time in which the partition phenomenon took shape. The ‘*Chorus*’ is powerful, virulent about the Sikh cause and a historically acceptable source of information conveying to us the feelings of the Sikhs and their viewpoint.
Compared to the other two novels taken up for study in this research work, *The Rape* by Raj Gill can be said to have a more powerful political component in its fictional framework. And this political component is not mere rambling or uninformed rhetoric. Dalipjit and his friends make very incisive comments about even great leaders like Nehru and Gandhi. It is almost difficult to believe that anyone could have uttered such critical castigation about nationalist stalwarts like Nehru who were the darlings of the masses – Dalipjit says:

Nehru who once said agreeing to the division of the country was like cutting off the head to get rid of the headache, even he is now silent. May be he wants to be the Prime Minister of India quickly, that is why he is bothered no more about partition. (TR, 66-67)

In any other state in India it would have been a blasphemy to talk about Nehru in these words. But Dalipjit and the other suffering masses of west Punjab, facing the threat of extermination, have neither time nor patience to indulge in nationalistic hero-worshipping. for them the threat to their very existence, loss of land and livelihood and forced eviction from their ancestral homeland was the burning issue. In this situation of life and death struggle there was no time for miracles. Dalipjit again says about Nehru,

Nehru is no socialist. He is just a Fabian, the one who dreams of other people’s welfare and tries to imagine the common man’s agony in the comfort of … (TR, 67)

What was happening in west Punjab was almost like genocide and ethnic cleansing. The Punjabi Sikhs bore the brunt of this murderous onslaught. The Sikhs on the Indian side had to contend only with the attacks they had to face and devise ways and means of retaliating in the orgy of violence. But for the Sikhs who were in western Punjab it was a total tragedy of untold misery, suffering and displacement. The land which had nurtured
them for thousands and thousands of years and in which their forefathers had lived and toiled was to become part of the Muslim Pakistan. Their lands, houses, belongings, wealth, their temples and Gurudwaras and everything else they possessed were going to be surely lost. The only priority was to stay alive, save their women and children and escape into Indian Punjab which anyway was not their land. There was no protection from the attacks of the marauding Muslims. Neither the British nor the Indian leaders, nor their own Sikh leaders had any plan or mission to come to their rescue. They were left to fend for themselves.

All attention was focused on what parts of Punjab and Bengal are to be declared Pakistan and what parts are left to Hindustan. The Sikhs just not only found fault with others in creating confusion but they also admit the weaknesses among the leaders of their own and it is described as follows:

The Sikhs were steadily losing the game. Their only leader—representative at the centre, Baldev Singh, that large, lethargic Sikh of colorless personality, was a complete failure in safeguarding their interests. He did not even grasp the situation and was completely blank about what was happening around him. The Sikhs committed the greatest blunder in nominating him to the centre. (TR, 70)

Fearing that they were losing the game, they start preparing with guns and spears not to obtain what they are denied but to hold on what they have in order to meet the onslaught by the Muslims, which they vaguely know, would break upon them and which is to be fought back if they were to survive.

A secret meeting is held and General Rai of Indian National Army is to address it. He is on a secret tour of west Punjab to organize resistance against the Muslim league rule and the Muslim effort to expel the non-Muslims from Pakistan. The plan of the general is to organize a combat
force. This campaign is aimed at both rescuing and defending the minority Sikhs and Hindus in the west Punjab. The partition line is not yet announced and speculations are ripe as to what parts will be saved from being declared Pakistan. A committee is formed and Santokh is the convenor. They arrange an organizational meeting. The committee has drawn out a plan of direct action. Dalipjit is to be the guard commander. Captain Singh chooses Dalipjit as Lieutenant in village Forty-one. Dalipjit and Santokh have fallen out in the first meeting itself.

Partition is no more a disputed reality. Bengal and Punjab have decided in favor of internal partition. The decision reached smoothly in Bengal but it is different in Punjab. The opinion is against division in districts with Muslim majority. The boundary line has been drawn. The great exodus has started. The announcement of the boundary is a stunning blow. Immediately after the announcement the great holocaust has begun. The Sikhs and the Hindus set out with vengeance to scorch out the Muslim population from the East Punjab as a belated vindication of the Hindus and Sikhs who are massacred in Rawalpindi. The repercussions are equally dreadful in Pakistan. Armed tanks are used to mow down the non-Muslim population sheltering in the cotton mills at Sheikhupura. Armed forces connive at the general shooting of the Sikh and the Hindu refugees awaiting expectation in the Lyallpur camp. Their village has to be evacuated. Their problem become as to what to take and what to leave.

The author brings out the mental attitude of the people in the following lines:

Nobody was the protector of his neighbor, nobody thought good of others unless it included his own good. Everything was so much of barter or a business or a trade. Man’s history was a stock exchange report showing losses and gains, rises and falls and indicating future trends and promises and bids. (TR, 168)
Some of the events and tragic happenings narrated or as recalled by Dalipjit during his agonizing trek to India with people under his protection are heart rending stories which are based on some actual happenings seen during the partition displacement. The magnitude of the calamity, the horror of human suffering and the valiant attempt of ordinary humans caught up in a death situation are portrayed very powerfully by the author and are comparable to some of the most tragic literary description of human suffering anywhere in the world. There are two contrasting stories which seek to reveal human nature in a conflict situation. This is preceded by the ‘well’ scene which is narrated as follows.

Dalipjit and his squad escort the team. They sense some danger ahead, and they become alert and assign certain works. Dalipjit’s assignment is the most gruesome one. The women and children are gathered around the drinking well in which already about twenty copies of the scriptures of the Sikhs are dropped to avoid desecration. At a pre-arranged signal the women and the children are to jump to their death in the well. The reluctant ones are to be pushed into the well or killed by Dalipjit.

It is not the horror or the cruelty involved in the job that you have to think of. It is the honour of our martial race,

(Tr, 186)

says Sham Singh. But luckily the danger has passed. A truckload of Indian troops has come to their rescue.

Dalipjit is caught between two equally strong emotional pulls, one urging him to end his life and the other to disassociate himself from the inhuman drama from the killing lust of the primitives and from what is without principle and without direction.
Even the killing lust of the primitive was satiated at some point whereas this was with neither an ideology, political philosophy nor a religious crusade nor a divine scourge. (TR, 191)

The gruesome contingency plan of sending women and children to their watery grave by pushing them all into the well when the possible Muslim attackers come is one the most horrific scenes in the novel. In order to save the women from rape and mutilation, the Sikhs arrive at this plan even as they prepare to defend women with their lives. Fortunately, as a temporary respite, the danger passes. But the tragic anxiety created by the suspense of the situation, the extremely tragic possibilities looming large – all these combine together to create an agonizingly painful scene, which equates itself to some of the most tragic narratives in literature.

Much of the good is destroyed but it survives. Thus the tragedy is a presentation of morality in emergency … it is time that good can survive only at the expense of so much of virtuous force of the world. (Nair, 2005, 65)

The ‘well scene’ as it is called, where women and children wait to jump into the water to save their honor is tragically reminiscent of the British massacre of innocent civilians at Jallianwala Bagh where, when General Dyer order machine gun firing on unarmed civilians, women and children jumped into the well that was situated in the grounds. The scene is a powerful depiction of the horrific reality of partition violence and is very evocative in its tragic essence.

Dalipjit is bewildered and puzzled. He remembers Lakha Singh, the old priest, not wanting to leave his eighty-year old mother. He carries her on his back, ties the way the hill people tie their children on their back. He has walked five days with her, loaded on his back, bends at the hip and supporting himself on a staff. The sixth day he is so tired that he wishes his
mother would die. He doubts in his mind the wisdom of his act. She is eighty, liable to die any moment. Her being dead or alive does not make any difference any more. But she certainly is a burden on him, ‘burden that was slowly sapping his own energy’. (TR, 198) He sits down under a tree and almost sobs a sigh.

Son, why not leave me here? I will die in a day or two. At my age, I won’t feel it. You can’t make India carrying me like this in this heat. (TR, 198)

No one comes forward to accommodate this old lady in the cart. He thinks it will be a compassionate act if he brings an end to her misery. If she were about to die, why die slowly and miserably? But how to kill her? He decides to throw her into the canal. He gently lowers her into the canal. As she submerges in the cold water she revives and exclaims before sinking below the surface. “May you live long, Son, for cooling my soul” (TR, 199), it is too much for him. He drags her out by her hair. He carries her and moves on but his penitence does not last more than an hour. The heat, the fatigue cause color sparks before his eyes. He feels dizzy and feels that she must die. He thinks of killing her with opium. That night he makes her swallow a small doze of opium. In the morning he declares her dead. He hurriedly digs a pit and buries her. An hour later Sham Singh sees a hand protruding from freshly dug soil. He has the body dug up and to his amazement, finds the priest’s mother alive. He sends for the priest and expresses his disgust for his unfilial dastardly act. That night he decides to kill himself. But that night the old woman dies. She is buried with honor by the village people.

The story of Lakha Singh is another grimly tragic tale witnessed by Dalipjit. Lakha Singh’s trials and tribulations in trying to get his old mother to safety by carrying her on his back is kind of epic narrative that takes the tragic quotient of the novel to its height. Though there are some tragic-comic
twists in this tale, it is essentially a morbid kind of tragedy in which journey of a man with his mother being carried on his back expresses so many emotions at one stroke and vividly portrays powerfully the gruesomeness and brutality of partition violence which drove innocent people to the edge of unimaginable sufferings. Lakha’s Singh’s journey becomes, in its tragic essentiality, an epic journey and in terms of literary qualities too, it becomes a kind of epic narrative. There is the backdrop of a cataclysmic event of a nation breaking up. There are highly depressing scenes of huge groups of people and caravans moving against the skyline seeking a safer destination for mere survival, there is also the intermittent sound war crimes, attacks, killings and brutality, there is this one man’s singularly noble effort to carry his mother to safety, there is also his pathetic dilemma in seeking to mercy kill her, the black humor of the buried mother coming alive and the final totally enervating anti-climax of the old woman dying when Lakha Singh again decides to save her. This scene or the chain of happenings relating to Lakha Singh constitutes a towering emotional narrative which is truly tragic and highly powerful and resembles a scene from ‘epic theatre’ represented by tragic dramas like Brecht’s ‘Mother Courage’. It is this ability of Raj Gill to capture graphically the serious nature of human tragedy unfolding against the backdrop of partition which makes this novel a powerful work of fiction. The overt political observation found in the narrative are subsumed and overpowered by the forceful depiction of the human suffering involved.

Such large scale human displacement and tragic suffering cannot have only instances of noble suffering and exalted virtuosity. If on the one side there were acts of nobleness and virtue, there were also scenes and events which show the meanness, selfishness and crude vulgarity of human behavior and the selfish story of Wing Commander Kahlon is a case in point.
Wing Commander Kahlon had flown over the villages in a Dakotaplane asking the people to clear a runway in the wasteland for his safe landing. The runway is built by eager hands and the people are waiting with their children hoping that they will get a lift.

Kahlon came and flew away with his mother. He had tricked all. After all survival was a selfish act. (TR, 202)

Dalipjit comes across a man who shoots himself with Dalipjit’s revolver and a weeping girl of his own age. Guided by some human instinct he takes the girl with him. When he has brought Leila home, the first thought is to save her life. The second thought is to send her to Pakistan, when things are settled enough for safe journey. But he cannot do so because Leila does not have anybody and has no place to go. The presence of Leila is accepted by Dalipjit’s family though not without contempt and distaste. His father accepts her as house-help. The rest of the village hates her. They cannot give up their contempt for the Muslim. There are other Muslim women kept in the village. They are the playthings of the men, who can be used to satisfy their men’s sexual perversions. Jasmit has at first reacted to the new situation by withdrawing herself. Later she has taken to Leila more warmly than anyone else. Dalipjit holds Leila closer till he is one with her body and soul. Dalipjit’s father urges him to get married to Jawan Singh’s niece, his brother-in-law’s daughter. Jasmit cannot take a stand against her brother Santokh, all the more so after the death of her father and this brother now being the head of the family.

Soon after the partition, the holocaust lasted for several weeks reaching its ugly crescendo with displaced populations running to safety through the killing fields. Lakhs and lakhs got killed on the way never seeing the light of day. The worst hit were the young men and women, the former either killing others or getting killed and later either raped and killed or
abducted for ever into another country. Nayak, et.al (2018, 104) cites other authors and has the following to say,

The main thematic motif in tracing the impact of the tragedy on human life and have shown women as the worst victims of the tragedy. The truth of history as observed by Urvashi Butalia (1998, 131) who writes, "The history of partition is the history of deep violation physical and mental for women". Women were abducted, repeatedly raped, passed on from hand to hand, sold, auctioned, looted, abused, used and thrown away not only by the communal hooligans belonging to the opposite community but also abused and rejected by their own families. Women's bodies became sites to symbolize the nationalisms of the two new nations. "Thus the political programme of creating the two nations of India and Pakistan was inscribed upon the bodies of women", as views Veena Das (1995, 56). The plight of these suffering women has been projected through women characters.

The elderly, sick and the children became pawns in this grim game of death, some surviving luckily and escaping the jaws of death and others not so lucky. The mayhem gradually slowed down owing to two reasons. The first one is that the process of populations crossing the borders comes to a natural end because the exodus was not a planned one but certainly a desperate life and death emergency exit. A majority of the displaced people flee ending their flight either in death or escape. The second reason is that the orgy of communal violence and killing too slowed down not because of any change of heart but because the fanatic killers themselves become tired of drawing so much blood. Killing itself becomes a guilty experience even for the worst killers. The British Indian army which was a colonial apparatus was again not prepared to handle this widespread massacre. The army was basically the white man’s task force which fought the British wars in far off lands like Egypt, Europe and the far East. When the communal holocaust unfolded with blinding speed, the newly born states of India and Pakistan were still in the process of getting their respective armies in place. It was not only the
division or partition of the country but everything including the land, towns, villages, rivers and the armed forces themselves had to be divided and bifurcated. History is replete with instances of the heroism of the new Indian army which finally came to the rescue of the displaced people and drove the Muslim marauders out, ultimately reaching Rawalpindi before the Indian leaders called halt to its victorious march. But ultimately all this came a little too late. When the violent dust settled and the dead were buried, the two new nations were born to start their nation building process by trying to first heal the ghastly wounds of partition. The new state of Pakistan had brutally scored the first round victory by practically eliminating its Hindu and Sikh population whereas India allowed and protected a major Muslim population to stay back and continue to be Indian citizens. The history of partition is thus the history of the birth of two diametrically opposed countries – the Muslim Pakistan and the secular India.

Dalipjit’s dilemma is to go to college and to complete graduation or go to a camp of social service and get the degree without examination, as the government had declared that any graduate can obtain his degree by doing six months social service in a refugee camp. At last Dalipjit joins the hostel to prosecute his studies. His mind is so obsessed with so many thoughts that he gets himself fully drunk. He falls sick and he is brought home from the hostel. He is shocked to learn that his father is no more. Santokh and his father fight for a long time and both are dead before anyone can touch them.

One killed to live, strange it was, but true. People killed to live. Muslims killed the non-Muslims and the Hindus and Sikhs killed the Muslims all in a bid to live, not to die. (TR, 296)

Partition was not only about the painful birth of nations and realignment of land masses and redrawing of boundaries. It was not only
about the sharing of power, formation of governments, emergence of leaders, and departure of the colonizers or the other soulless artifacts of history. Partition was basically about people. After losing their land and belongings, there was no respite or relief in sight for the sufferers. Most of them had lost their near and dear ones in the mindless violence. Families and relationships were torn asunder. Prasad (1985, 215) says that the novel, "does dramatize the dehumanization of life and the collapse of all values." Partition violence appeared to bring out the worst form of the fanatically oriented and for them no consideration for human life appeared necessary. Nayak, et.al (2018, 139) also express a similar view: "Raj Gill's novel The Rape unfolds the collapse of human values during the partition and delineates the chaos and catastrophe, the partition unleashed on the masses." Thousands were left without a relation surviving. Men and women who had loved each other were violently separated or left to grieve the death of their partners. Personal and domestic lives were shattered beyond repair and people in most cases were to pick up the threads and start their lives right from the scratches. Dalipjit’s life was no different. This brave young man who was fit to be a warrior in a royal army had to participate and become a witness to some of the goriest scenes of killing and mass murder. The happiness and innocence of youth were cruelly plucked away from his life. After the killings and violence subsided, Dalipjit had to start his life again but he too suffered tragic and irreparable personal loss. His plans for a good education fail because the traumatic violence of partition refuses to leave his mind. His father’s death comes as a big blow soon after the horrible days of partition.

Another shocking news is that Jasmit commits suicide. Yet another bolt from the blue is the words from Leila:

I am not the same Leila. He had me, your father, Wednesday night it was. I told him about you, being the first, but he would not listen. (TR, 296)
He feels then that Santokh killed his own sister to stay alive and his father almost killed Leila egged by the same motive. Whom will he kill to live on? Dalipjit feels colder than ever, so cold that he does not shiver any more.

_The Rape_ by Raj Gill is introduced with a tempting and provocative blurb:

A tender, tragic love affair sustains the story remarkably until the dramatic ending shakes one, as nothing ever did before, the hero returns home to find his beloved raped by his own father. (Radhakrishnan, 1984, 61)

The story centres round the hero Dalipjit, a conventional hero, popular, honest, brave, one who has a lot of compassion for the poor and one who moves freely with Harijans. Despite all these heroic qualities he is essentially weak both mentally and physically. At every critical stage he falls ill and whenever he is agitated he thinks in terms of putting his life to an end. Such a conventional hero should have a rival and it is Santokh who emerges as a villain. The villain who is presented as an aspirant to the leadership of the village has only one duty and that is to oppose the hero. But the hero, like the heroes in mythologies, has a magnanimous heart to forgive the villain.

Ironically Santokh’s sister and Dalipjit are lovers. Notwithstanding their quarrel, Dalipjit rushes to attend to Santokh who gets his legs hurt. This generous gesture of the hero makes the villain forget their difference of opinion. For a time the quarrel appears to get patched up. But it does come when Dalipjit brings home the orphaned Muslim girl, who later stays in dalipjit’s home. Santokh sends a petition to the government alleging that a Muslim girl is kept in the house of Dalipjit as a prostitute. Having found Santokh’s petition malicious and mischievous, the Deputy Superintendent wants to take action against him. But the large hearted Dalipjit
requests the officials to pardon Santokh. At the personal level Dalipjit’s father and Santokh fall fighting each other. Jasmit commits suicide and Leila is raped by Dalipjit’s father.

The novel seen against the background of partition is about two lovers of Lyallpur, a predominantly Sikh village. If it was conceived as a love story the novelist could have told it in fewer than fifty pages. Interwoven are the effects of partition on an otherwise placid village—their reaction to the national movement, the subsequent measures they take to meet the Muslim threat, their exodus and settling down in an Indian village and the relationship between the hero and the two girls with whom he falls in love. There are two heroines, one who commits suicide and another raped by the hero’s own father.

Raj Gill tries vigorously to find out the causes leading to the ghoulish events and graphically presents the untold agonies suffered by the people of Punjab as inevitable consequences. One disaster follows another and each produces reaction elsewhere. Raj Gill’s novel reveals the selfishness of the political leaders, criticises the British for their policy of divide and rule, shows the religious fanaticism leading the mass violence and shameful acts, holds both the Hindus and the Muslims equally guilty for the ghastly acts and communicates the novelist’s vision of life at the time of the partition. The dehumanised society of those terrible times and the unforgettable scenes and sights of the terrible historic events have been fully delineated in it.

As already stated earlier in this chapter, the novel scrutinizes the factors responsible for the partition of the country. It criticizes the politicians of all kinds and communities responsible for the division of the country and for the shameful acts that followed it. It does not spare any leader or party-Gandhi, Nehru, Patel, Jinnah, Master Tara Singh, the British government, the Congress and the Muslim League—all become the subject of
criticism. The author aptly describes the part played by the leaders describing each one with an apt epithet:

the fanaticism of Jinnah, the idealism of Nehru, the pragmatism of Patel, the spiritualism of Gandhi, the confusion and the haste of the Viceroy, the political short sightedness of the Sikhs were to be melted into witches’ brew, so revoltingly unpalatable, yet to be rammed down the gullets of the innocent people who did not ask for partition. (TR, 129)

Dalipjit too makes no secret of his dislike for Gandhi. He is sick of his political methods and dreams of shooting him. It is this feeling that at a later stage causes a great agitation in him, when the news of Gandhi’s assassination reaches him, he cannot believe it.

In the end, Dalipjit is sad when he realizes that killing was no more a vindication. It was not even a punishment. Killing was weeding. Killing was a sport of cannibals. Killing was witches’ Sabbath. (TR, 191)

The Rape graphically depicts the sudden steep decline in all human values and the negation of life at the time of partition. Dalipjit the hero of the novel finds the refugees different kind of people who have been forced to lose all kinds of values. They by force know how to loot, fight, rape, kill and destroy. People are not normal human beings in any sense of the term. The novelist portrays the frustrated psychology of the refugees who out of sheer bitterness turn on themselves and indulge in senseless destruction. Their fighting among themselves is only an expression of their inner feelings. The troubled times brings a tremendous change in human perceptions and the refugees cannot remain normal human beings.

The novel is remarkably vivid in recording the scenes and happenings of those terrible days, and is very profound and positive in its delineation of the theme. Through Dalipjit the novelist has shown the ravaging
consequences of partition – the Hindu – Muslim hatred, loot, arson, killing, rape, abduction, mass exodus, the psychological impact of the event on the victims, the social changes, loss of human values, the expression of frustration in the victims and the fact that both sides kill and loot and are equally guilty. All these find excellent expression in the novel.

The novelist fervently pleads for forgiveness and appears to echo Shakespeare’s message in ‘The Tempest’ that virtue lies in forgiveness and not in vengeance. He accentuates that the cycle of revenge must be liquidated through love, sympathy, kindness, understanding, restraint and forgiveness. Towards the close of the book also the novelist through the protagonist offers us a positive interpretation of the all-pervasive human slaughter during the days of the partition. He thinks that a man kills another just to live though all these might look absurd. The Muslims killed the Hindus and the Hindus massacred the Muslims “in a bid to live and not to die”. (TR, 296)

Despite the vivid delineation of the gruesome crimes and collapse of all human values during the partition days, The Rape is not devoid of hope and idealism. Dalipjit is terribly shocked by his father’s rape of his beloved and by the terrible scenes of sufferings on both the sides of the borders. He for quite some time is firmly determined to take revenge upon his father, the people of the older generation and the Muslims. But after a while nobility controls his baser instincts and intentions and makes him abandon them forever. He realizes the unreasonableness of killing the Muslims in India simply because many of them massacred his fellow Hindus in the newly created Pakistan. We find him recovering from prolonged ailment and acquiring peace, hope and warmth of life. This transformation of his from a nihilist and pessimist to an optimist makes the novel a sublime work of art.

In The Rape the Indian transition from a state of frenzy and madness to one of reason is represented by the adolescent protagonist’s
transformation into adulthood. Dalipjit is introduced to the horrors of the adult world during those days of the travail that brings him across the border to India but there he emerges purified of the sins of their fathers. Dalipjit’s first reaction, upon hearing the shattering news of The Rape of the beloved by his father, is an urge to kill someone. But his father is already dead, killed in another feud. The novelist thus stops short of depicting a real patricide and allows his protagonist to fight back to a sense of sanity and acceptance of life. But this acceptance is possible only because Dalipjit decides to dismiss his father as one among that mad generation for whom any girl of another community is a legitimated prey. In imagining his Leila to have been a victim of other similar violation, Dalipjit tries to dilute his father’s offence.

Dalipjit finds that the urge to kill is growing strong within him in this pervading atmosphere of slaughter. At first he is even inclined to think these acts of revenge as a noble undertaking, “a fraternal gesture towards those belonging to his religion and community”. (TR, 208) But when his turn to take a Muslim’s life comes, he realizes the irrationality of making scapegoats of a whole group of people for what he has suffered across the border. Yet the angry youth decides to forget, wipe off his past and alienates himself from the polluted generation. By this the author if not forgiving, resorts to the next noble mode of forgetting the past and moving on to the future. From this angle the novel can be seen as an assertion of reality. “Its purpose is to describe how the small and sleepy village of the Punjab becomes aware of the impending freedom and the simultaneous Partition of the country”. (Patole, 2016, 17)

The Rape by Raj Gill is thus a powerful partition novel that depicts touchingly the heart rending tales of human suffering during the partition and also effectively foregrounds the perception of the Sikh people on partition through its incisive political comments and a realistic portrayal of the Sikh people. It is a novel which recreates the horrific history of partition and helps modern readers to
have a glimpse of the blood stained part of India’s pre-independence history. And by having such a fictionally created visual access to partition history, the younger generation may stop looking at history as a mere past construct and as an abstract illustration of what went by but as a reference to “an existential mass of suffering individuals.” (Gandhi, 1998, 72)