A Saga of Pain in Partition Novels: A Study of selected Novels of Amrita Pritam, Manohar Malgaonkar, Bhisham Sahni and Bapsi Sidhwa

1.0 Introduction:

In August 1947, British Raj announced the process of dividing the subcontinent into India and Pakistan. The subcontinent was turned into a diabolical region. The division was based on two 'nation theory' with the argument that the Hindus and the Muslims cannot live together as one nation since both have distinct social, cultural and religious identities. The Muslim majority regions of Punjab and Bengal were divided, with West Punjab and East Bengal forming West and East Pakistan, and India in the middle of two. (Hassan: 1993). This resulted in massive and violent migration of people across the divide. Muslims moved into Pakistan and Sikhs and Hindus moved into India with the prospects of peaceful and better living, with their own religious as well as ethnic identities. The tragic storm of August-September 1947 blew away nearly ten million people, like autumn leaves, from one end of the country to the other - from Delhi to Karachi, from Karachi to Bombay, from Lahore to Delhi, from Rawalpindi to Agra, from Noakhali to Calcutta, from Calcutta to Decca, from Lyallpur to Panipat, from Panipat to Montgomery! The thousand-year old joint family system was shattered beyond repair. Age-old friends and neighbours were ruthlessly separated. Brother was torn away from brother, uprooted from their ancestral homes; millions found themselves driven to strange and alien soil.

Ironically, this mass scale migration entailed crimes of unprecedented violence, murders, rapes, bestiality, wickedness, pure evil erupt, conflicting loyalties, wild life, kidnapping, and bloodshed. It is very difficult to give an exact account of the people who became the victims of the partition but its "impact can be compared to that of great war on Britain or the second world war on Japan and France." (Roy: 2009).
Describing the monstrosity of the situation, Urvashi Butalia (1998) says that the partition left one million dead, 75000 women abducted and raped, and turning twelve million displaced into refugees status.

Unfortunately, the split between Pakistan and India served to heighten each other's hostilities instead of bringing peace in the region. Civil tension continued mounting for months: thousands of families were split apart, homes burnt down and villages abandoned. Some women were so embarrassed of the sexual humiliation that they refused to return home and opted for suicide. The destruction of families through murder, suicide and kidnapping caused grievous partition.

The tragedy of partition encounter has given rise to fictional explorations with an attempt to define the inner turmoil and social complexes that plagued the subcontinent. The vast volume of partition fiction in English, Urdu, Hindi, Bengali, and other languages of the subcontinent faithfully record the gruesome human disaster in the wake of partition. The incredible suffering and bewilderment of the people of the subcontinent has been a favourite theme with the Indian and Pakistani writers.

Khushwant Singh's Train to Pakistan (1956), Bhashma Sahni's Tamas (1973), Chaman Nahal's Azadi (1975), Amitav Ghosh's Shadow Lines (1988), Bapsi Sidhwa's Ice Candy Man (1988) and Cracking India (1991), etc. are some such examples that attempt to give us an insight into the public frenzy, communal hatred, extreme disintegration and large scale sectarian violence. These writers describe the monstrosity of the events with such artistry that the tragedy comes alive. These novelists were published with the gap of three decades. Still they share a lot of details while retaining their individuality as well. Instead of depicting the events in political terms, the novelists have provided human dimensions which bring to the event a sense of reality, horror and believability.