“Partition and its impact on Indian English novel- A study”

INTRODUCTION:

The partition of India, 1947 is undoubtedly the most cataclysmic event in India’s contemporary history. India’s freedom was accompanied by a “holocaust of unconscionable horror that bit deeply into the memories of its inhabitants”\(^1\). In terms of its scale and its wide-ranging impact, Partition remains the singularly most important event and turning point. Ten to twelve millions people moved, within few months, between India and Pakistan. Between 500,000 to one million people are believed to have died, hundreds of thousands of children lost and abandoned, between 75000 to 100000 women were raped and abducted. Families got separated, fields of crops were left to rot, the homes were destroyed, India witnessed world’s largest mass exodus, accompanied by gross and the most inhuman slaughter and violence. People suddenly began to see each other as enemies. The violence of that vivisection deeply affected (and continues to affect) the psyche of people who had been thus divided. To quote G. D. Khosla, “History has not known a fratricidal war of such dimensions in which human hatred and bestial passions were degraded to the levels witnessed during this dark epoch when religious frenzy, taking the shape of a hideous monster, stalked through cities, towns and countryside, taking a toll of half a million innocent lives.”\(^2\)

There is wealth and treasure of writing on the political aspects of Partition. However, the ‘historians’ have ‘remained silent’ on the experiences of the people-women, children, men, people differentiated by caste and class, by religion – who lived through it. Historical texts, until recently, talked little about what the experience of Partition meant for those who lived through it, how much loss, trauma and grief they faced, how they tried to cope with them, how they put their lives back together again. Urvashi Butalia refers it as ‘the silence about the human dimensions of the Partition’\(^3\).

While India never accepted that division, Pakistan continued to justify it on the basis of the two-nation theory. The failure of Cabinet Mission Plan was followed by the Muslim League’s call for observing a Direct Action Day on August 16, 1946 when an armed and well-prepared mob of its supporters unleashed pre-planned violence in Calcutta. The spectre of death that the stress of Calcutta witnessed as a result indicates the limits human vindictiveness and
collective psyche can reach. Violence broke out in other parts of India in the months that followed. The Great Calcutta Killings were followed by horrors of Noakhali, Bihar and after a brief interval, the tragic events enacted in the Punjab, North-West Frontier Province and Sind. G. D.Khosla rightly observed that, “In the history of communal relations, the years 1946-47 mark a period of unequalled mistrust, bitterness and frenzied warfare in almost all parts of India.” One official reported seeing-3 women and 9 babies all dead in one well, a child of three or four with its face kicked in and then charred with fire, a women beaten to death while in the act of producing a baby, girls of twelve or thirteen raped and then killed by thrusting spears up them and ripping them apart. The violence combined national and religious passions. The police and military seemed unable to deal with it. “A new and pernicious doctrine had come to poison men’s minds- that religion divides instead of uniting. And men’s minds were warped; they forgot their humanity and turned upon one another with the ferocity of jungle beasts.”

Partition, perhaps is the most important event in the history of modern India. It changed the canvass of the nation and also, at the same time produced deep impact on the national psychology. It not only divided a united nation into two, but also created perennial enmity between two communities. The enormous loss of human lives as property is felt even today. Some sixty two years after the dreadful event.

Partition affected creativity to great extent. Several books were written, in regional languages as well as in English, depicting the horrors of the event. In Indian English alone, several creative writers produced remarkable works of fiction. The proposed research work is an attempt to analyse the works of some of them, who wrote about Partition and its impact on individual as well as society. These writers are Khushwant Singh, Amitav Ghosh, Salman Rushdie, Chaman Nahal and K.A.Abbas.