Literature Review:

Literature and post – partition India

Several books on Partition and Partition novels are available. All these books deal with various aspects of the event as the responses of creative writers.

What Urvashi Butalia referred to as ‘silence over human dimension of partition’, was/is always voiced and addressed by various writers, poets, painters, lyricists: genres of art which does not deal with ‘history’ directly. The trauma left by Partition remains a major concern of Indian literature after independence. While independence was greeted by several poets with celebratory odes, quite a few considered it a false dawn: either because they felt, like Nazrul Islam of Bengal, that the Swaraj did not bring anything for the hungry child or because it was a divided India. Telugu, Kannada, Gujarati poets all expressed the same feelings. Memories of the communal holocausts were still fresh in people’s minds. The deepest anguish was expressed by the poets of the Punjab and Bengal directly affected by the Partition. From the other side of the new border Faiz Ahmed Faiz wrote, ‘this is not that longed for break of day, Not that clear down in quest of which our comrades set out.’ The trauma of Partition also was a major theme in fiction as in the stories of Krishna Chander, Rajinder Singh Bedi, Amrita Pritam, Saadat Hasan Manto. K.S.Duggal or Nanak Singh or in novels like Khushwant Singh’s ‘Train to Pakistan’, Amitav Ghosh’s ‘Shadow Lines’, Salman rushdie’s ‘Midnight’s children. Chaman Nahals ‘Azadi’ and K.A.Abbas’s ‘Inquilab’ in English, Bhisham Sahni’s ‘Tamas’ and Yashpal’s ‘Jhoota sach’ in Hindi. A monumental novel like Qurratulain Hyders ‘Aag ka Dariya’ in urdu reveals with race intensity and immense sweep the experience of Partition that was ‘a murderous attack on the millennial continuum of Indian history and civilization’.

According to Meenakshi Mukherjee, while the essential predicament of the nineteenth century American novelist was that of isolation, the major issues facing the twentieth century Indian novelists, until recently years, were involvement and concern: involvement with the changing national scene, concern for the destiny of the country. The independence movement in India was not merely a political struggle, it affected all aspects of life of Indians in the 1920’s and 30’s. No Indian writer dealing with that period could avoid reflecting this aspect of society either directly as theme or indirectly as significant public background to a personal narrative.
Emotionally charged national experience generally serves as a grand reservoir of literary material which can assume a significance beyond mere historical reality. Truly, the facts of history are to be handled and pondered over by scholars and historians, “but those in the thick of a maelstrom like the one of the Partition, cannot remain entirely passive, especially those gifted with such perceptual sensitivity as could capture the tragic event through an artistic media.”

Thus the French revolution and its Napoleonic aftermath, the American Civil War and the subsequent reorganisation of the country have all provided novelists with rich material for fiction.

History has always offered a context for fiction, which if appropriately used, can provide a useful perspective. However, over dependence on history can cramp the novelist’s vision and this can be an even greater risk if that historical circumstance is a part of the novelist’s life. But a good novelist uses historical material only to the extent it is essential to his fiction. He takes from history broad ideas and patterns and blends them into his narrative in such a way that they become a part of his fictional world. To quote Anuradha Marwah Roy, Partition literature “...can be roughly defined as the creative attempt to make sense of one of the worst pogroms in human memory. In trying to grapple with the enormity of misery, writers dealing with this period, obsessively deployed imageries of rape, violence and destruction.”

Thus, history loses its circumstantiality and becomes a timeless presence in fiction. Some of the most well-known examples of such writing are *A Tale of Two Cities*, *War and Peace*, *All quiet on the Western Front*, *A Farewell to Arms* and many more war novels written in the West. Dickens employs the French Revolution in his *A Tale of Two Cities* to fictionalise history and make it serve an archetypal function, not intrude into the narrative as an external agent. Salman Rushdie selects some broad events from Indian history and fantasises them in his novel *Midnight’s Children*.

In his introduction to the novel *Tamas* by Bhisham Sahni, Govind Nihalani states:

“A traumatic historical event usually finds The artistic literary response twice. *Tamas* is the reflective response to the Partition of India—one of the most tragic events
in the recent history of the Indian sub-continent.”

The Partition of the Indian sub-continent was the single most traumatic event experienced in recent years. The violence that it unleashed was unprecedented, unexpected and barbaric. Provoked by the hooligan actions of a few, the vengeance that ordinary Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs wreaked on each other coarsened our social sense, distorted our political judgements and deranged our understanding of what is meant by moral rightness.

The real sorrow of the Partition was that it brought to an abrupt end a long history of communal co-existence. No doubt the relation between the Hindus and the Muslims were not always free from suspicion, distrust or angry rejection by one group of the habits and practices of the other. Occasionally, the conflicts were harsher and even led to murder and arson, but such moments of communal frenzy were rare and short-lived. People had accepted co-existence as a way of life despite minor skirmishes or occasional outbursts of anger and violence which were suppressed quickly and normalcy was restored in a short time. Such was the mechanism developed by both the communities to contain tensions and disruptions, if any. And if at all there were conflicts and disruptions, the rich variety of the life of the two communities was never seriously threatened—the Hindus never ceased from paying homage at dargahs, the Muslims continued to participate in Hindu festivals, traders of both the communities carried on with their usual exchange of goods and services.

Had there indeed been a history of irreconcilable hatred between Hindus and Muslims, it would have been reflected in the cultural and social practices of the two groups. As Alok Bhalla puts it the pain of living together would have been extensively recorded in popular kissas or Tamashas and Songs. It does not, however imply that there were no organisations with communal bias or those which nurtured hatred towards each other or incited communal passions. But the people who commanded respect were the ones who highlighted dependence of the Hindus and the Muslims on each other and encouraged mutual support. In fact people like Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Togare, Nazrul Islam, Gandhi and many more supported the theory of a unified state with a multiplicity of religious, social or moral ideas. The daily life of the people (both Hindus and Muslims) was so richly interwoven into a common fabric and there was so
much similarity in their customs and practices, that the Partition came as a rude shock to the common people, leaving them in state of utter bewilderment.

It is as if Partition and its attendant carnage was so completely without any historical or social justification that most of the writers could only watch, as the place they had called home was reduced to rubble, and the memories of their collective rites and traditions, stories and songs, names of trees and birds were permanently tinged with the acrid smell of the ash, smoke and blood.

The ghastly tragedies of the Partition has been a major theme with fiction writers in Indio-Anglian writing. Though the writers may differ in the treatment of their subject matter and in their choice of gory incidents, they all seem to insist that the division of the Punjab was done arbitrarily that the Hindus and Muslims could have lived in a united India as they had done for a century and half under British rule. They assign the blame for the Partition to power-hungry politicians who inflamed hatred among a simple people to serve their own selfish ends.

The Partition led to widespread massacre, rape, terror, arson, orgy, rioting, hostility, distrust, religious enmity, attacks and counter-attacks all of which is the subject matter of the literature pertaining to the partition. However, there is also another dominant theme running through this whole literature and that is the restoration of humanism and propagation of communal harmony between the two communities. As can be expected, communal narrow-mindedness and religious fanaticism are deplored by most of the writers who vividly portray the evil consequences of religious intolerance. They show that human values are preserved by individuals in both the warring communities even in the midst of utter chaos, and that itself is a ray of hope for man. Having put their faith in human rationality, many of them have no words to express their disillusionment.

Unable to explain the violence, many of the writers concentrate on painting elaborate scenes of violence during Partition in the hope of conveying something of their sense of horror, suggesting that fiction can recreate the event even though history may tend to distort. In doing so, they consciously avoid taking sides and put the blame equally on both warring factions. The literature that emerges immediately after independence is strewn with, “The stark images of abducted women being paraded through the streets, of mutilated bodies of men and women, of
train loads of corpses, of lines of moving humanity trudging through roads strewn with bodies and baggage left behind, the religious cries now turned into battle cries or calls for vengeance.” Veena Das on the other hand, reminds us that this was a time which produced a condition of dumbness as language itself was brutalized.

It is surprising that no novel in English by an Indian about the Partition was written until 1956, when ‘Train to Pakistan’ was first published (initially titled Mano Majra). Since then, of course, there has been a continuous stream of writing about this event. To quote Jasodhara Bagchi and Subhorajan Dasgupta, “From compensatory nostalgia to limitless despair, from growing distrust (women were singed out as victims) to resolute, defiance, from diurnal trauma in railway platform to epic struggles in refugee colonies- all these motifs have been recreated in the poems, short-story, novels, play extract and screenplay,” Indeed, so far only some ‘fiction’ seems to have tried to assimilate the enormity of the experience.” Mushirul Hasan opines, “These creative writers reject, implicitly or explicitly, religion (communal in common parlance) as the prime explanatory category, invoke symbols of unity rather than disunity, and are wedded to composite and synergetic pan-Indian values.”

Although Mulk Raj Anand, R.K. Narayan and Raja Rao depicted the freedom struggle and the impact of Gandhi’s ideas in their novels, they did not deal directly with the holocaust of the Partition in their writings as did Khushwant Singh or K.A. Abbas or Chaman Nahal. However, the trauma of Partition has also stirred the creative genius of such novelists as Attia Hosain, Manohar Malgonkar, Raj Gill, Kartar Singh Duggal, V.N. Arora, Gurcharan Das.

Apart from novels, there are a large number of emotionally charged short stories on communal incidents revealing the anger and disgust of the innocent people. There are stories which are full of lamentation and consolation and bring out the pathos of the situation by writers like K.A. Abbas, Saadat Hasan Manto, Kartar Singh Duggal, Khushwant Singh, Amitav Ghosh, Salman Rushdie. All describe an unusually vicious time in which the sustaining norms of society as it had existed in the past are absent. It is as if the Partition had not only shattered the continuity of the Partition of the nation in which the Hindus, the Sikhs and the Muslims had defined their individual and communal identities, but it had also ensured that it would never again be possible for anyone to recreate a community in which moral and political choices which
are valid for all can be made. It is true, of course, that for many migrants, the question of choice did not arise during Partition.²¹

Many short stories are concerned with the sorrows of migration, with uprooted people who find that they have nowhere to go. The Partition, they know has given them to leave behind a human world and has given them in return only a heartless substitute of a religious community. Manto’s story ‘Toba Tek Singh’ reveals the writer’s own state of mind. Fearful of communal tensions prevailing at that time, and persuaded by his wife and family, Manto left Bombay for Lahore in January 1948 and always regretted done so.

Among the groups is an old sikh, Bishen Singh, who wants to be neither in India or Pakistan but in the village -Toba Tek Singh- to which he belongs. And it is through his weird cry and death that Manto speaks of the pain and grief of the millions who were forced to leave their homes.

In another of Mantos stories, “A Tale of 1947”, a character Mumtaz speaks with great passion:

“Don’t tell me a hundred thousand Hindus
and the same number of Muslims have
been massacred. The great tragedy is not
that two hundred thousand people have
been killed, but that this enormous loss of
life has been futile.”²²

Mumtaz was sailing for Pakistan, a country he knew nothing about. To him religion was not an infection which afflicted ninety-nine percent of the people. It was a faith which makes a human being special, distinguishes him from the herd and proves his humanity. It is Manto’s own disillusionment that is reflected in most of his stories.

The most harrowing tale about rape is “Open It” by Manto. In it a muslim girl Sakina who has been abducted and raped so often that when she is hospitalised and the doctor asks the girl’s father to open the window her hands involuntarily move to undo her trouser strings. The father’s exclamation of joy. “she’s alive. My daughter is alive”,²³ is very ironical.
Stories about women being physically abused and mutilated are quite painful and nauseating. Kartar Singh Duggal’s “kulsum” brings out a moment of horror. In this story an old sikh rapes a muslim girl (whom he has abducted) for failing to oblige sexually his young guest, a school master. As the old man emerges from the hut trying his ‘tehmad’ we find ourselves as dumb founded as the girl, Kulsum. The earlier plea to the school master, ‘Marry me, Marry me First.... I beg of you. I shall repay you for your kindness.’ repeated many times by helpless girl, add to the pathos of the story.

Among both communities, the Hindu and Muslim, there were those who accepted conversion to the others faith to save their lives. In Bhisham Sahni’s “Pali”25, a lost Hindu child is adopted by a Muslim couple and circumcised and pronounced a Muslim. His name is changed from Pali to Altaf. Some years later, the boy is discovered by his real parents and taken back to India where he is rebaptised as a Hindu after the mundan ceremony and again called Pali. This situation, comic as it may seem is most poignantly moving and touching. One can easily imagine the utter bewilderment of the boy who had to undergo the formal ceremony of conversion from Hindu to a Muslim and vice versa only to satisfy the religious ego of the two communities. What about the feelings of the boy that are injured brutally in this process? Whom will he accept, his biological parents or his foster parents? Can he be insensitive to the succour provided to him by the couple because they were Muslims? The language of love transcends all barriers. But the greatest irony is that all the religious tend to forget the essential message underlying them. Bhisham Sahani’s story is an attempt to bring out this tragic irony and ruthless irrationality of religious bigotry and its horrible consequences. It was a common practice during the Partition to strip a man naked to determine whether he was Hindu or Muslim. In khushwant Singh’s “Train to Pakistan”, one of the characters who is circumcised muses:

“Where on earth except in India would

a man’s life depend on whether or not

his foreskin had been removed? I would

be laughable if it were not tragic.”26

The riots were a natural result of the Partition, and Khushwant Singh with incisive irony, presents the genesis of one such riot in a story called simply “The Riot”. Tension ran high in the two communities, but the real culprit of the day was the bitch, Rani. A stone thrown at her by the
Hindu shopkeeper, Ram Jawaya, catches a Muslim grocer, Ramzan. And soon, “what had once been a busy town was a heap of charred masonry.”27 the threadbare, matter- of- fact account of the happenings, without comment from the narrator, exposes the hideous face of riots.

Riots may be caused by a family situation but are aggravated in an atmosphere of fear and suspicion. It is during the riots that man’s rationality takes complete holiday and his savagery comes out with full vigour and forced.

Many writers were so disgusted with the harrow and violence of the Partition, that they blamed both the parties without taking any sides. The most striking example of a neutral account is Krishan Chander’s “Peshawar Express” where the author has presented almost a well-balanced statistics of the butchered men, women and children from both the communities.

Women writers also show a non- partisan point of view. Attia Hosan’s “After the Storm” is rich in feeling and shows how children and women struggle to keep alive in the hell let loose by their menfolk. Bibi, a child small and thin with serious anxious eyes and a smile on her face28, is led to speak about her past. It is difficult to tell how many years of childhood, life had robbed her of. Her story is given in snatches and with many digressions, and is a curious blend of fact and fiction. But one is able to gather from the story that Bibi is an orphan without a soul. Her mind refuses to fill the gap between the refugee camp and her adoption.

Krishna Sobti’s story “Where Is My Mother?” 29brings out the horrors imprinted in the little girl’s mind. Her persistent please and repeated requests to the Baluch- Yunua Khan, “I want my mother, where is my mother? Bring out the agony, which no promises of any kind can diminish. Her inconsolable and anguished cry is as poignantly moving as the cry of the lost child in Mulk Raj Anand’s story “The Lost Child”.

Some of the Pakistani writers have also written on the theme of the Partition and effectively brought out the sufferings of Muslim women. Manto, Bapsi Sidhwa, Qudrat Ullah Shahab, Ashfaq Ahmed, Aziz Ahmad, Ibne Insha and Intizar Husain are some of those who have expressed their feelings through their stories. Shahad’s “Ya Khuda”30(o god), is a powerful tale of harrowing misery to which Muslim women were subjected during Partition. The title “Ya Khuda” rings in our minds and symbolises our utter helplessness in the face of such an inhuman treatment given to women folk by men irrespective of what religion or country they belong to.
To quote Aijaz Ahmad, “In India as in Pakistan, the principal genre that served as a virtual chronicle of the Partition was the short story.”

Punjabi writers in English, Hindi, Punjabi and Urdu come to this theme again and again, perhaps because Punjab suffered the most on account of the Partition novels, short-stories, poems dealing with the trauma of the division of the country are found in abundance in Punjabi literature. Amrita Pritam’s “Pinjar” (translated in English as “The skeleton” by khushwant Singh) and her poem “Aj Aakhan Waris Shah Noo” (“I invoke warris shah today”) have moved the people on both sides of the border so deeply that even today when they read the poem they weep for what they themselves had done to each other, Singh of the sense of shame and disgrace, we feel even now.

Besides these stories, there are a large number of stories written by men and women who were witnesses to this age of genocide. Kamleshwar, Rajinder Singh Bedi, Mohan Rakesh, Yashpal, Kulwant Singh Virk, Maheep Singh, Ismat Chughtai, Vishnu Prabhakar and many others. Most of the stories are ironic in their tone and realistic in their depiction. They bring out the inhuman aspect of the Partition, but uphold human goodness.

K.A. Abbas’s Inquilab (1955) is a detailed picture of the Indian political scene over a period of almost two decades upto the 1930’s. The novels offers glimpses of Bhagat Singh, Tilak, the Ali brothers, Gandhiji, Nehru etc. and also of the political developments taking place. But perhaps because of its objective stance, the novel reads like a newspaper report rather than a work of fiction.

Attia Hosain is the only women novelist who evokes Partition in a nostalgic mood in her novel “Sunlight on a Broken Column (1961)”. Manohar Malgonkar’s “A Bend in the Ganges” (1984), is an epic presentation of India’s struggle for freedom from the late 30’s upto the down of Independence in August 1947, thus encompassing the history of a saga depicting the movement for Independence, the world war and the Partition of India.

Raj Gill’s novel, “The Rape” (1974) dramatizes the dehumanization of life and the collapse of all values. Dalipjit, the protagonist in the novel, is dazed to discover; on his return home after Partition, that his Muslim girlfriend, Leila. Whom he had rescued and who has been given shelter by him, has been raped by his own father.
Chaman Nahal’s “Azadi” (1975)\textsuperscript{36} (freedom), written on the epic scale offers a most comprehensive account of Partition. The actual event and its aftermath. The author recreates in vivid detail the consequences of the partitioning for a Hindu family and its close associates as they journey from Sialkot to Delhi. His story represents the story of a whole nation, of millions who were forced to leave their homes and to whom ‘azadi’ brings only unholy misery and an uncertain future.

H.S. Gill’s “Ashes and Petals” (1975)\textsuperscript{37}, records another gruesome aspect of Partition—the killing of one’s own women folk, in order to save their honour. The novel opens with a trainload of Hindus and Sikhs on their way to India. When the train is attacked by Muslim hooligans, Risaldar Santa Singh shoots his fourteen year old grand-daughter, Baljeeto. Her seven year old brother Ajit, sits through the act as a silent witness.

In Kartar Singh Duggal’s novels “Twice born Twice Dead” (1979)\textsuperscript{38}, we are given a panoramic picture of human suffering. Anita Desai’s “Clear Light of Day” (1980)\textsuperscript{39}, is another novel which refers to India’s independence struggle and the Partition that followed it. However, this appears only as the background of the events in the life of the Das family.

According to Alamgir Hashmi\textsuperscript{40}, the novel “Clear Light of Day” is also the story of colonial India’s growth and maturation into the separate statehoods of India and Pakistan. Anita Desai has woven together the public and the private, and has given a balanced treatment of the historical elements in the book to the study of the characters.

“Tamas” (1974)\textsuperscript{41}(darkness), by Bhisham Sahani also portrays the tragic period of the Partition of the country. He attempts to depict the communal frenzy that gripped the west Punjab in Pre-Partition days. The novel “Ice- Candy- Man” (1988)\textsuperscript{42} by Bapsi Sidhwa is also a poignant tale of Partition. The novel is set in Lahore in the 1940’s in the period when Independence and Partition were brewing and it culminates in the ultimate horrors of the holocaust, seen through the eyes of a young Parsi child, Lenny.

“A Fine Family” (1990)\textsuperscript{43} by Gurcharan Das is another Partition novel that traces the fortunes and misfortunes of Lala Dewan chand’s family from the year 1942 to the Post-Independence era, right through till the 1970’s it provides a means of understanding the past in order to understand the present.
Salman Rushdie’s novel “Midnight’s Children” (1982) covers the period of India’s Independence to the lifting of the Emergency. The novel begins with the narrator-protagonist Saleem Sinai, who is the embodiment of a supreme movement of the history. Another similar character is Mian Abdullah, “the Humming bird”, an active opponent of Partition whose joyful ecstasy in work is symbolised by his constant humming and who falls a victim to the knives of Muslim fanatics.

The ‘Shadow Lines’ questions prevailing precepts and ethics, which man inherits blindly. The value of political zeal and social freedom is no longer stable, permanent and immutable as Tha’mma and I la had believed. The apparent stability which is offered by such idea is illusory. Concepts which have always appeared to be well-defined are seen as shallow, capable of vanishing at a closer look, leaving man alone and defenseless. Tha’mma is totally bewildered and aghast to know that violence and bloodshed had not resulted in a physical boundary between two countries.

The holocaust of the partition has been a recurring theme in the writing of many other writers such as B. Rajan’s ‘The Dark Dancer’, Collins and Lapierre’s ‘Freedom at Midnight’ and these writers have highlighted their own points of view in their own subtle way. From the survey it becomes clear that the horror and trauma of Partition was undergone by many Indian novelists in English and its dramatic potential was also captured by many regional novelists like Yashpal in ‘Jhoota-Sacha’ (Hindi) or Qurratullain Haider in ‘Aag Ka Darya’ (Urdu). But the first to use Partition as the central theme was Khushwant Singh in his first novel, ‘Train to Pakistan’. This is by far the best known and the most powerful novel on Partition. Symbolism, mordant satire and ruthless realism are the hallmarks of this novel which depicts the holocaust through a simple plot building up to a spine-chilling climax. ‘Train to Pakistan’ is not only the first novel in English dealing with the Partition but also perhaps the most realistically presented. In the midst of all the horror he presents, however, Khushwant Singh also sees a ray of hope for mankind.

A Suvir Kaul says, ‘Partition issues’ need to be explored because they define not only our past but in crucial ways, our collective future. And these ‘Partition issues’ should not only be explored in archives. V.P. Menons, Ayesha Jalals or in any other ‘official’ and ‘historical’ documentation of Partition, but also in the literary corpus of Partition authored by literary figures.
or litterateurs. Therefore, the researcher attempts to make a study of four literary figures-
Khushwant Singh, Amitav Ghosh, Salman Rushdie and Chaman Nahal- and their writing on
Partition of India (strictly on partition and not their other literary writing)