

CHAPTER-I

INTRODUCTION

“Dipped in Jinnah’s sweat
the pen
sliced the land of five rivers
giving birth to a sixth...”

-Sukrita Paul Kumar

This research intends to study select fictional works on Partition by women writers with a focus on narrativisation of women’s experience against the backdrop of Partition. It aims to foreground in its analysis the ordeal that women went through during Partition and attempts to dispel the silence generated by the dominant narratives which have consistently ignored the issue. The questions that it tries to answer are – what are the women’s experiences of Partition? Are the women writers engaging only with the Partition experience? Can the Partition experience of women be seen in isolation, i.e., without delving into their cultural constructs? Do they place the women in particular socio-cultural context which has a bearing on their Partition experience? If so, what are these contexts?

This study aims at unravelling the ‘little histories’ of women and ‘finding’ the women in Partition as represented in fiction by women writers. What is required is not to completely rewrite the available history but to re-angle our lens to bring into focus those histories which were never written. One such history is the women’s history. It is the fictional narratives – the novel and the short fiction – that are the most fitting space from where the women can ask those awkward questions whose answers can transform the way in which women in India are perceived. Such narratives have the potential to

break the stereotypical perception of the Indian woman who is eulogised as the goddess or seen in terms of Sita and Savitri of the myths – deified or self-sacrificing.

The study seeks to establish that the women writers do not represent the women's experience of Partition in isolation but they integrate the elements of ordinary everyday experience to the Partition experience. The most common feature evident in the fiction by the women writers that has been taken up for study in this thesis is that they do not concern themselves with only narrativising the Partition experience of women. They interweave into this framework the narrative of the experience of women as women. The thesis attempts to have a nuanced understanding of the actuality of an event that has often been depicted in black and white but which in the perspective of the women writers takes on various shades. Theirs is not a monolithic engagement with the Partition phenomenon but they are concerned with a complex web of issues intertwined with it. Disrupting patriarchal contours, women writers have taken up gender conscious narrative reinterpretations of Partition. They have expanded our understanding of established history into new directions.

Besides exploring the quotidian realities of women's lives, these narratives reflect on what it meant to be a woman in India in the days preceding Partition and during Partition. Having inherited an age-old legacy of resignation and silence, the women in India were expected to fulfil their role within the sacred domestic space. Patriarchal mores set the parameters of what was to be valued in women. However, the women writers have not assigned themselves the task of merely representing these facts in a fictive manner. The study looks into how their works are informed by an interesting medley of issues concerning women and how the women's experience is set against the scaffolding of India's Partition. Gender, identity, culture and the Partition experience all

coalesce to construct the women's experience. The study also investigates the ways in which the women protagonists pose awkward questions otherwise sidestepped in the national narratives and by the male writers.

The issues of women's agency, choice and protest have also been probed. While the women accept the roles that conventional norms have imposed upon them, yet they are able to arrive at a level of consciousness about the self. Wedded to this is also the discovery about responsibility – towards the self or towards others. While arriving at a juncture where they are able to make choices for themselves, they also become aware of their connection to the world. They hold marginal positions as women and Partition thrusts an added marginality on them. All the fictional narratives selected scrutinise the women's stereotypical roles within the family and society. All fulfil their prescribed roles and do not make any gesture of revolt in the everyday dealings of life. This may appear as a defeatist attitude and surrender to conventions. However, what this study also tries to prove is that as the narratives progress the women display their potential ability to rebel against conformity and that their acts of resistance are not separate from the awareness of responsibility. These acts may not be of radical proportions but are subversive enough to make a difference to their lives in their particular circumstances.

The division of the nation on religious grounds brought along with it unprecedented violence and suffering. Saint (2010) states that "Up to one million were killed, ten to twelve million were displaced and thousands were raped and abducted" (p. 6). These millions included men, women and children on the eastern and western borders. But though all sections of people were embroiled in the harrowing event, the women as part of a predominantly patriarchal structure underwent specific experiences which cannot be ignored if we are to gain any kind of an insight and understanding of a

society of which one half is made up of women. It is imperative that this should be taken note of, as it has always been the men who have been privileged over the women in India. Women's experiences need to be confronted and revived through addressing the writings which foreground them. This has to be done not for the mere telling, but for understanding and for the cathartic effect it can produce. The immunity, which the dominant narratives projected towards those sections that were away from the centre, needs to be ruptured. What is also interesting to note is that the women were the non-actors during Partition. Nowhere is it recorded that women from any of the communities were the perpetrators of violence. The high politics that unfolded at the national level involved male leaders, the arson, massacres, rapes and abductions were all carried out by the men of the different communities.

It would be relevant here to recall very briefly the manner in which India's Partition was executed. The departure of the British from India was an ill-choreographed programme, at least from the subcontinent's perspective. The date for India's Independence was initially fixed for 30th June 1948 and announced by Atlee on 20th February 1947. However, caught between the conflicting political aspirations of the Congress and the Muslim League and the resulting communal tensions, an early transfer of power seemed the only way out for the British. The year before, i.e., 1946 was a witness to a series of bloody killings in Calcutta, Noakhali, Bombay, Garhmukhteswar, and Northwest Frontier Province and in Rawalpindi in early 1947. Viceroy Mountbatten's 3 June 1947 Plan included the declaration that the date of India's Independence would be advanced by 10 months, i.e., to 15th August 1947 and the Partition of India into two nations – the Hindu majority India and the Muslim homeland, Pakistan. The allowing for a mere seventy-two days' gap proved to be

nothing short of a disaster. As Mahajan (2008) has put it so rightly, “There were no transitional institutional structures within which the knotty problems spilling over from division could be tackled” (p. 200). The tangle worsened with the task of chairing the Boundary Commission for Bengal and Punjab given to Sir Cyril Radcliffe on 30th June 1947 who himself admitted later, “I was so rushed that I had not time to go into the details. What could I do in one and a half months?” (as cited in van Schendel, 2005, p. 39). The hasty manner in which Punjab was divided on the western border and Bengal on the eastern, led to unprecedented displacement and migration with mayhem and bloodshed being the order of the day.

Theories and opinions about this bitter legacy abound. Jalal (1985) blames the Congress entirely for the Partition, while Mahajan (2008) is of the opinion that “Jinnah was obdurate that the Muslims would settle for nothing less than a sovereign state” (p. 184). Talbot and Singh (2013) accept it as a “practical solution” (p. 7). Hasan (2001) perceives “repeated exhortations on Hindu-Muslim amity, cultural pluralism and secularity” in Jinnah’s “pre-March 1940 writings and speeches” while at the same time he takes note of Jinnah denouncing “the Congress leaders, accusing them of alienating Muslims through ‘Hindu’ politics...” (p. 58). However, there was “a decisive shift in his ideology” in his Lahore speech in 1940 and it was obvious that “he no longer championed secular nationalism” (Hasan, 2001, p. 60). The period between 1940 to 1947 saw Jinnah carrying on with his rhetoric of how Muslims and Hindus in India “were irreconcilably opposed monolithic religious communities and as such no settlement could be imposed that did not satisfy the aspirations of the former” (Talbot and Singh, 2013, p. 33). The possibility of an independent Muslim homeland managed to galvanise support from the Muslims and “The goal of Pakistan (the Pure Land) was

seen as the ‘Muslim’ answer to ‘Hindu oppression’ and ‘Hindu capitalism’” (Pandey, 2012, p. 27). All central players – the British, the Muslim League headed by Jinnah and the Congress headed by Nehru – agreed to this ‘inevitable’ division hardly realising what awaited the two new nations and its people.

There has been a lacuna in official and dominant versions of the history of India’s Partition in recording the experience of common people, especially women, during this period of traumatic upheaval. Mahey (2001) makes a very interesting analysis of the kind of history that was written about India’s Partition. According to him, historians engaged in “quantifying pain” (p. 139). Their chronicle was made up of “statistics” and “numbering the dead” (p. 139). Spear (1956) in *A History of India: Vol.2* is silent on the tales of loss and suffering and indulges in a mere cosmetic exercise by terming Partition as “inevitable” (p. 234) and offering the justification that without it there would have been “a weak and wrangling centre” (p. 235). He dedicates a single sentence to the catastrophe that was unfolding, “From this time on India slid steadily towards a civil war of the most frightful kind punctuated by communal killings when each community in turn wreaked vengeance on the other” (1956, p. 235). He is more concerned with the Jinnah-Nehru-Gandhi story and any other reference to the consequences of Partition is by way of quoting the number of massacres and migrations that took place. Spear’s (1961) later work *India – A Modern History* is simply a reiteration of his earlier bland perspective of Partition and its aftermath. Khan’s (1987) *Facts are Facts: The Untold Story of India’s Partition* is a counter-narrative to the “one-dimensional view” (p. 8) presented by the Bhutto regime about the creation of Pakistan. It is entirely engaged with facts based on documentary evidence about the divisive role of the British and attempts to set the record straight about Abdul Ghaffar

Khan's attitude to Partition. While the book is a commendable account of one aspect of the story – the political one – it is silent on other aspects of Partition. Chandra et al.'s (1989) *India's Struggle for Independence: 1857-1947* includes a chapter on Partition but merely engages with the British sense of failure and Gandhi's "unhappiness and helplessness" (p. 511) in the face of Partition. Therefore, the "historians' history" (p.7), to borrow a term from Pandey (2012), was all about an analysis of the political, constitutional and administrative stakes involved rather than any acknowledgement of what the people lived through during and after the event.

Fludernik (2009) highlights the very radically different ways in which historical writing and literary narratives engage with the act of producing the narrative text. Historical writing is an act of documentation of facts and must rely on empirical data collection. Historians do not have the liberty to veer their narrative away from the "statements made by their sources" (Fludernik, 2009, p. 3) and nor can they create events which belong to the world of fiction. History is limited by its inability to encompass all that has transpired in reality. According to her, the historians' narrative "involves selection" (p. 3) as they are guided by their own political ideologies and affiliations. Hence, historical narratives may be fragmentary when certain experiences are left unarticulated or relegated to the margins. Historians' accounts of events will tend to be repetitive and it is only the subjective handling of events that will set the narratives apart. History also is most likely to adhere to hegemonic parameters as has happened with the telling of the story of India's Partition.

The fictional narrative, on the other hand, while also limited by its inability to recount all that exists in the imaginary world, is unencumbered by limits set on the historical narrative. Fiction provides an empty canvas for the imagination to furnish and

design narratives against the scaffolding of reality. The fictional worlds that narratives conjure up may be a re-creation of the actual world and inhabited by characters that think and act and occupy a place and time. Fludernik (2009) defines narrative as “a story that the narrator tells” (p. 4). It involves the interpretation of real life experiences in the form of a story. There exists a symbiotic relationship between literature and society and the fictional narratives especially contribute towards transforming consciousness. The novel and the works of shorter fiction are cultural products which help us look at social reality both creatively and critically. Their transformative potential is born out of their unique conflation of compassion and confrontation.

In the last thirty-five years, a lot of focus has turned to Partition studies in India. Talbot and Singh (2009) trace the historiography of this newfound focus:

What has been termed the ‘new history’ of Partition was pioneered by feminist writers and activists who emerged from an intellectual milieu in the early 1980s provided by the Subaltern Studies school of writing with its desire to restore agency to non-elite groups. (p. 17)

In their opinion Butalia’s (1998) “*The Other Side of Silence* formed the seminal text that announced this new departure” (Talbot and Singh, p. 17). In the same year, Menon and Bhasin (1998) brought out *Borders and Boundaries: Women in India’s Partition* which also attempted to recover women’s histories. In 2004, Menon edited a volume which included women writers from the subcontinent who were witness, victim or social activist during the time. The hitherto widely accepted totalising perspectives provided by hegemonic and homogeneous historical narratives on India’s Partition have been greeted as inadequate by recent scholars and the common consensus that has

begun to gain ground is that the silenced voice of the marginalised must be retrieved. Butalia (1998) and Pandey (2012) have put out clarion calls for recovering the lost and forgotten voices of Partition's many victims about whom dominant history has pretended amnesia. Since history omits to archive the voices of the women who lost their home, hearth, honour and identity, the telling of women's stories born out of the Partition experience fills this lacuna and commits the unforgettable to memory in women's writings. In this context, Pandey (2012) rightly observes:

Mentalities – long-lasting attitudes of mind, social practices, memories, rituals – are made by more than the ruling classes and their initiatives: they are made through many 'little histories', long neglected by the historical academy. The need to pay closer attention to these should be self-evident by now. (p. 65)

Similarly, Butalia (1998) also points out the gaps in official history and suggests incorporation of women's history, which has otherwise been left out:

As a feminist I have been only too aware, sometimes painfully so, of the need to fold back several layers of history (or of what we see as fact) before one can begin to arrive at a different, more complex 'truth'. Why then, I have often asked myself, should the 'discovery' of women have come as such a surprise? But it did. Perhaps it was because the initial assumption I brought to my search was a simple one: the history of Partition as I knew it, made no mention of women. As a woman and a feminist, I would set out to 'find' women in Partition, and once I did I would attempt to make them visible. That would in a sense, 'complete' an incomplete picture. (pp. 125-126)

It would be right to say that one of the first initiatives for excavating the repressed histories that lay buried under the national histories was adopted by Butalia along with Menon and Bhasin. When the women's stories were brought centre-stage in their oral narratives, they served as eye-openers. Butalia (1998) provides a very insightful summary of the reason behind the women's silences, "I realised, for example, that if it had been so difficult for Ranamama to talk about his story, how much more difficult must it have been for *women* to do so. To whom would they have spoken? Who would have listened?" (p. 126). Hence, Butalia (1998) began the listening process – listening to "their speech, their silences, the half-said things, the nuances" (p.126). The same needs to be done by the reading of the fictional narratives written by women about women and probing into their lived experience during Partition because once again as Butalia (1998) says, "The men seldom spoke about women" (p. 126).

The increased attention to Partition studies is no doubt a notable event, but since the process has been both late and slow, there is much catching up to be done. One of the reasons for the revival of focus on Partition may be the inter-communal violence raising its ugly head in some Indian cities during the 1980's and 90's, which are believed to have triggered collective memories of the traumatic experience. The spate of writings on Partition continues. Contemporary works include those edited by Amritjit Singh, Nalini Iyer and Rahul K. Gairola and by Rakhshanda Jalil, Tarun K. Saint and Debjani Sengupta. Gulzar's collection of poems and stories on Partition has been translated by Rakhshanda Jalil. These are obviously attempts to 'revisit' and 'look back' at an event which cannot be erased from memory, even from the memory of the present generation. As Menon (1998) so rightly remarks in her preface in *Borders and Boundaries*, "Yet, years later, it seems to me that this is one conversation that can have

no closure, one memory that refuses to go away” (p. xiii). This clearly means that Indians as a people have still not come to terms entirely with the memories of Partition.

Alternative Partition histories have provided newer insights into how Partition affected the ordinary people. There has been a representation of Partition in almost every form – oral histories (Urvashi Butalia, Ritu Menon, Kamla Bhasin), new histories (Ian Talbot, Gurharpal Singh, Gyanendra Pandey, Himani Chatterjee, Mushirul Hasan, Sucheta Mahajan), poetry (Gulzar), films (*Garam Hawa*), museum (Partition Museum at Amritsar), memoirs (Anis Kidwai, Kamlaben Patel) and fiction. Of these, it is fiction which made pioneering attempts at telling the poignant stories of people whose lives turned upside down in the wake of Partition. ‘Partition Fiction’ is today recognised as a category and written in many languages. Almost all of this fiction has been translated into English helping it garner a wider readership.

If a small list of novels on Partition is drawn up it will include Khadija Mastur’s *Inner Courtyard* (1952), Khushwant Singh’s *Train To Pakistan* (1956), Attia Hosain’s *Sunlight on a Broken Column* (1961), Manohar Malgaonkar’s *A Bend in the Ganges* (1964), Rahi Masoom Raza’s *Half a Village* (1966), Jyotirmoyee Devi’s *The River Churning* (1968), Bhisham Sahni’s *Tamas* (1974), Chaman Nahal’s *Azadi* (1975), Intizar Husain’s *Basti* (1979), Bapsi Sidhwa’s *Ice-Candy-Man* (1988), Amitav Ghosh’s *The Shadow Lines* (1988), Joginder Paul’s *Khwabrau* (1990), Shauna Singh Baldwin’s *What the Body Remembers* (1999), and Kamila Shamsie’s *Salt and Saffron* (2000). Short stories on Partition abound including Sa’adat Hasan Manto’s masterpiece *Toba Tek Singh*, Amrita Pritam’s *Pinjar*, Rajinder Singh Bedi’s *Lajwanti*, Jamila Hashmi’s *Exile*, Krishan Chander’s *Peshawar Express*, Bhisham Sahni’s *Pali*, Attia Hosain’s

Phoenix Fled, Ismat Chughtai's *Roots*, Kamleshwar's *How Many Pakistans?*, Krishna Sobti's *Where is my Mother?*

Editors have brought out selections of short stories on the Partition. Alok Bhalla's *Stories About the Partition of India Vols. I-III*, Saros Cowasjee and Kartar Singh Duggal's *Orphans of the Storm*, Bashabi Fraser's *Bengal Partition Stories: An Unclosed Chapter*, Rita Kothari's *Unbordered Memories: Sindhi Stories of Partition*, Frank Stewart and Sukrita Paul Kumar's *Crossing Over: Partition Literature from India, Pakistan and Bangladesh*, Gulzar's *Footprints on Zero Line: Writings on the Partition* – all testify to the fact that the short story has been used as a potent medium to represent the memories of Partition. Critics and writers like Tarun K. Saint, Amritjit Singh, Jenni Ramone, Sukrita Paul Kumar, Rakhshanda Jalil, Suvir Kaul, Alok Bhalla, Kavita Daiya, Debali Mookerjea-Leonard, Jasodhara Bagchi and Jasbir Jain, to name a few, have engaged in scholarly studies of Partition fiction which focus on the consequences of Partition and the scars it left behind on the bodies as well as people's psyche.

The large corpus of fictional narratives written against Partition's background includes those by male writers and mention can be made of Khushwant Singh's *Train to Pakistan* (1956), Balachandra Rajan's *The Dark Dancer* (1958), Manohar Malgaonkar's *A Bend in the Ganges* (1964), Rahi Masum Raza's *Adha Gaon* (1966), Bhisham Sahni's *Tamas* (1974), Raj Gill's *Rape* (1974), Chaman Nahal's *Azadi* (1975), Intizar Husain's *Basti* (1979) and Joginder Paul's *Khwabrau* (1990). These writers had been witness to Partition having lived during the turbulent period which had left indelible marks on their memory and psyche. Without attempting to discredit their work, it must, however, be said that the works of the male writers are structured within

a political framework which tends to focus on communal violence and the role of the administration in dealing with it. Such an approach takes a one-dimensional view of the horrors of Partition excluding the narratives of those on the margins, particularly of women as victims and survivors of Partition and the dimensions added by patriarchy to their experience. It is not the women's stories that determine their narratives. They tend to deal with events of a general nature, concentrating on the riots, the carnage, exodus and the politics of Partition.

Khushwant Singh's *Train to Pakistan* (1956) is a critique of communal fanaticism and the inefficiency of the administration in dealing with the violence associated with it. The title of Raj Gill's *Rape* (1974) is a misnomer as the novel does not particularly engage with the issue of rape as a form of violence against women during Partition which altered their very sense of identity bringing with it trauma and displacement. Instead the novel indulges in a blame game involving the central political figures like Gandhi, Nehru, Patel, Azad and Jinnah and becomes a tale of political betrayal. Chaman Nahal's *Azadi* (1975) does foreground the travails of a Hindu family caught in the throes of Partition and who must make their journey from Sialkot to Delhi and their suffering is delineated with poignancy. Once again, the focus seems inevitably to turn towards the massacres and attempts to denounce the role of the leaders in the division of the country.

The novels by these writers do not engage in full-fledged individual accounts of women's experiences during Partition and at best may offer mere traces of the women's situation in general but without forceful impact. It is almost as if they wrote within a preconceived parameter. Partition hid within its folds many layers. It has to be granted that one writer's fiction cannot represent all those layers. But, in the case of the male

writers there is a marked dependence on the experience of Partition on a more public level than on the private with a few exceptions to be found in the shorter narratives by male writers like Sa'adat Hasan Manto and Rajinder Singh Bedi.

Bedi's Urdu story *Lajwanti* does deal with the issue of the fate of restored women victims to their families, an issue also raised by a woman writer like Jamila Hashmi in *Exile*. But there is a difference. *Lajwanti* is the abducted woman who is rescued and restored to her husband. It is, however, only the response of the husband that Bedi foregrounds. Bedi confronts the dilemma of the husband rather than the abducted woman's trauma. Her choice or willingness to be restored is not addressed and the issue of rape itself is not problematised. The issue that remains unaddressed in Bedi's story is handled by Jamila Hashmi. Bibi, the abducted woman, exercises her choice and refuses to be sent back because of her ability to make practical choices keeping her own interests and her daughter's in mind. *Lajwanti* never questions either of her positions – her abduction or her restoration. Bibi questions both. This lack of questioning is what makes restoration acceptable for *Lajwanti* whereas Bibi is sceptical of the state's agenda and can apprehend that restoration is not necessarily the solution for her and perhaps may be the ground for greater complications. Bedi's treatment of the abducted woman's issue is limited to the husband's response and in Hashmi we have a more nuanced treatment of the same theme. In Bedi's *Lajwanti* what is lacking is the voice of protest.

Men's writings by and large did not enter the debate on women's experiences during Partition. The one aberration would be Manto. His Partition stories deal with the insanity that descended on humankind, unsettling to the extreme in their depiction of violence and brutality. However, even Manto is not able to trace the women's

experiences of Partition beyond a certain point. His story *Open It!* is about the trauma of a girl sexually violated by her own rescuers during Partition. Although a poignantly heart rending tale, the woman's experience is limited to the numbness caused by trauma and does not move beyond it. The intention here is not to suggest that true understanding of women's experiences is beyond the reach of men and that women only have the capacity and the authority to delve into such areas.

It would be impossible to assign precise reasons for the lack of Partition related novels and stories by male writers with women as the central protagonists. Perhaps the reason lies in the way India's culture has been structured where all institutions and customs are geared towards generating an attitude, which does not favour women as being so worthy of consideration. This same attitude may have made male writers too self-conscious to venture into the portrayal of women as victims. They may not have felt the need to enter this domain with the same kind of commitment as did some women writers. Women writers have not only confronted the disorder and the chaos of the times, but also transformed the perception of these into gaining alternative meanings which make the readers sit up and take note of what they say. Their narratives are not restricted to victimisation and nor are they bothered with perpetuating polarities. Theirs is a fiction which reflects a consciousness in the female protagonists – a consciousness which responds to situations even though traumatised. That these women writers could delve into so much else that did not strike the male writers is explained to some extent by Sage's (1980) remark about women writers of English fiction who, as she says, "were experts in all the fragile threads and treacherous currents that made up society's tone, men having neither time nor taste for such vital details" (p. 67).

Both the long and the short types of fiction allow the women writers to explore quotidian realities of women's lives. Through fiction they could articulate the knowledge of the way women responded to the shackles of conventional norms within which they were placed and also the way they responded to the Partition experience. The Partition experience of women is very much integrated to the socio-psychological and cultural issues related to them. The Partition experience of women cannot be seen exclusively as Partition experience. The women writers' assignment goes beyond mere representation of the factual nature of their Partition experience. Their narrativisation involves questioning of their position and identity in relation to society; it involves the assertion of women's agency, choice and it involves protest. Their exercise in writing women's stories is not simply to reiterate and replicate the prevalent general consensus but to be the voice of dissent. All books dealing with Partition highlight the far from seamless transition that it was. However, most engage more with the political and communal fault-lines that were created. The fault-lines related to women went largely unaddressed.

This study looks into both genres in fiction – the novel and short fiction. Like any other study, this one also has its own selectivities. Rather than a narrow concentration on writers in English on Partition, this study takes up women writers who have written in regional languages as well. The novels include Attia Hosain's *Sunlight on a Broken Column* (1961), Jyotirmoyee Devi's *The River Churning* or *Epar Ganga Opar Ganga* (1968), Bapsi Sidhwa's *Ice-Candy-Man* (1988) and Shauna Singh Baldwin's *What the Body Remembers* (1999). The shorter fiction selected are Ismat Chughtai's *Roots* (*Jadein* in Urdu), Jamila Hashmi's *Exile* (*Ban vaas* in Urdu) and Amrita Pritam's *The Skeleton* (*Pinjar* in Punjabi). Their fiction has been written in

Urdu, Punjabi, Bengali and English, these being the languages of the people of the affected areas. The works in Urdu, Punjabi and Bengali have been studied in their English translation.

Three of the novels selected – Attia Hosain’s *Sunlight on a Broken Column* (*SBC*), Bapsi Sidhwa’s *Ice-Candy-Man* (*ICM*) and Shauna Singh Baldwin’s *What the Body Remembers* (*WBR*) – have been originally written in English. This choice has been deliberate. Attia Hosain was impacted directly by Partition and her decision to neither migrate to Pakistan nor return to India from England has been shaped by her personal anguish caused by Partition. Omitting Attia Hosain would be tantamount to omitting a large chunk of women’s Partition experience of a particular kind, especially the Muslim upper class perspective. Bapsi Sidhwa was only seven when Partition happened but she went back to the event to write about it in *ICM* in 1971 which is in itself suggestive of the continued relevance of the event in the lives of the people of the subcontinent. However, more than the Parsi perspective – which has already received much critical attention – this study attempts to read the Partition experience of Ayah, a woman of the lower working class. Shauna Singh Baldwin’s epic narrative has been selected for its entirely different perspective, that of the Sikhs who felt short-changed when their land Punjab was divided. Being also a third generation Partition narrative, it adds its own unique flavour to the oeuvre of Partition fiction. All these narratives may engage with issues which intersect each other but they have their own distinct and different assumptions and emphasis.

The purpose in making this selection is to study the work of women writers across a wide spectrum: from Ismat Chughtai’s *Roots* which was published in 1952, i.e., almost immediately after Partition, to Baldwin’s *WBR* published in 1999; the work

of women writers who were actual witnesses to Partition and were affected by the event directly, to those who draw on family history to tell the Partition story. The turmoil of Partition was experienced on both the eastern and western borders with Pakistan, though the severity on the eastern border was of a lesser magnitude. However, the experience of the people was no less traumatic. Since the division of the country affected Bengal too, the Bengali novelist, Jyotirmoyee Devi's *The River Churning* (TRC) has been selected. It has also been selected for its powerful commentary on the harsh judgemental attitude that society adopted towards those women who were presumed to have been violated. Two of the novels, i.e., Sidhwa's *ICM* and Baldwin's *WBR* deal with the women's Partition experience in the Punjab. Attia Hosain's *SBC* has been chosen for the very reason that it is set neither in the Punjab nor Bengal. It is set in the city of Lucknow in the North, which goes to show that the jolts of Partition were felt in other parts of the nation too. This is a talented group of women writers who have retold the story of Partition from the women's perspective with a sensitivity and insight that their works deserve to be recognised as alternative history helping to shed the myopia caused by the dominant history. To foreground an important and extremely critical period of the politically volatile milieu of the first half of the twentieth century – whose repercussions and vibrations have in no way died down – with the focus on women has been no mean feat.

The women writers differ in their literary styles, themes, treatment, characterisation, perspectives and leanings. Each of these writers belongs to a different social background and community, which also colours their perspective of Partition. Shauna Singh Baldwin in *WBR* presents the events from the Sikh standpoint where she begins with the story of Roop and the discrimination she is subjected to under the

religious norms that her family follows. Baldwin's is a literary voice which identifies deeply with Sikh history and identity. She also dwells at length on perceived Hindu-Sikh divide during Partition. Attia Hosain's novel *SBC* portrays an upper class Muslim family steeped in notions of tradition, patriarchy and an aristocratic way of life, gradually proceeding towards and advocating a liberal view of women, all this under the dark shadow of Partition. The protagonist Laila remains aloof from the event of Partition but is deeply affected by the trauma of a more personal division. Hosain's upper class elite background is reflected in this portrayal. Bapsi Sidhwa, a Parsi with her home in Pakistan, shows the violent events of Partition taking place in Pakistan in her novel, *ICM* and explores the trauma of the Hindu Ayah after her abduction and rape. Jyotirmoyee Devi's novel *TRC* engages with the woman as a victim of Partition and her subsequent oppression by members of her own community. Devi's novel also draws upon her own experience as a widow bound by strictures and deprived of inclusion within the normal family life.

The novel and the short story are international forms. They have a cultural power and become the voice of various social groups and classes. This is indicative of how fiction, especially in India, has assumed a new use and value. Fiction in India emerged as a literary seismograph to record and reflect social reality and become a powerful tool for social change. The link that literature shares with society is summed up by Devy (1995) in a simple comment, "Literature is no literature if it does not form an integral part of a society's life" (p. 104). The novel and the short story have been later additions to Indian literature but within a short period have evolved as a major force. The novel was an import from the West into India in the 19th century. The short story also emerged on the Indian literary scene in the beginning of the 20th century.

Meenakshi Mukherjee in *Realism and Reality: The Novel and Society in India* undertakes a study of the emergence of the novel in India. M. K. Naik and Shyamala A. Narayan also trace the emergence and growth of Indian Fiction in English in *Indian English Fiction: A Critical Study*. They perceive a strong presence of the element of fantasy in the early Indian English novels which were more in the nature of tales before Bankim Chandra Chatterjee's *Rajmohan's Wife*, a didactic novel with an eye towards social reform, appeared in 1864. A most interesting fact that emerges when we trace the historiography of fiction writing in India is that almost invariably all regional novels have begun the journey with historical romances, traversing through social and political realism and arriving at the social, political and psychological novels. Mukherjee (1985) in *Realism and Reality: The Novel and Society in India* also suggests such a similarity in the shaping of Indian fiction:

There was a sudden spurt of long narrative fiction in most Indian languages in the second half of the nineteenth century, whether these were called upanyas, kadambari, naval-katha or novel, and at least three dominant strands can be sorted out from the tangled skein. The first strand consists of the novels of purpose which utilised this new literary form for social reform and missionary enterprise. The second is an inclusive category where the apparently opposed tendencies of historical and supernatural fiction merge, the common denominator being the creation of an ethos remote in time. The third strand attempted to render contemporary Indian society realistically in fiction, joining the European novelists 'in that effort, that willed tendency of art to approximate reality.' This was perhaps the most important strand and it subsequently came to form the mainstream along which the Indian novel developed in the twentieth

century, although the other two strands have never been invisible too long. (p. 16)

The methodological approach that informs this study and helps bind the chapters together needs some delineation. The primary focus of this study is women's experience during Partition as represented in fictional narratives by women writers, and a variety of Partition based literary texts by women writers have been examined which comprise the primary sources. The method adopted for this analysis is qualitative and involves an interpretative approach to the texts under study. The texts have been analysed with a focus on the women's experience within the home, family and community with each woman situated on the margins of particular hegemonic orders. The study has adopted the historical research method along with an interdisciplinary approach. The historical method has been adopted because a past historical event in relation to women's experience will be examined in order to comprehend it better in the present and arrive at a meaningful conclusion. The study has adopted the APA format for referencing and providing bibliographic information.

Since the women's experience of Partition will be seen as connected to their position within the socio-cultural context, the texts undertaken for study have been analysed via the interdisciplinary lens which will explore multiple realities of women. The literary narratives have been analysed with the help of sources with different critical perspectives on issues related to women and the socio-cultural contexts in which they are placed. The study has drawn on secondary sources comprising scholarship from variegated fields such as women's studies and sociological studies on religion, patriarchy, home and community. The study offers insights drawn from scholarship engaging with alternative historiography of Partition such as oral histories,

by building on the work of scholars like Butalia, Pandey, Menon and Bhasin who initiated the process of questioning the silence related to women's experience during Partition. Ian Talbot and Gurharpal Singh's *The Partition of India*, Sucheta Mahajan's *Independence and Partition: The Erosion of Colonial Power in India* and Joya Chatterji's *The Spoils of Partition* provided the necessary understanding about the history of the Indian freedom movement and that of Partition on both sides of the border.

Memory and trauma as manifested in the women protagonists have been examined by drawing upon the works of Cathy Caruth and Kai Erikson in the area of psychology and psychiatry. Mushirul Hasan and Gyanendra Pandey's works have helped establish arguments on nation and nationality. Ideas of displacement, migration and exile have been explored on the basis of a reading of Edward Said's *Reflections on Exile* as also Haimanti Roy's *Partitioned Lives*. Although this study is in no way based on any of the strands of feminism, yet some ideas, like those related to the female body, have been teased out of Peta Bowden and Jane Mummery's *Understanding Feminism*.

The narratives under study feature Hindu, Muslim and Sikh women. Therefore, an understanding of the women placed within their religious contexts was important. *Sikhism and Women* edited by Doris. R. Jakobsh and *Sikhism: A Very Short Introduction* by Eleanor Nesbitt proved informative. For a general understanding of the origin and growth of Sikhism and Hindu-Sikh relations over the ages, Shiv Lal's *Dateline Punjab: Lifeline Sikhs* was consulted. A. S. Altekar's *Position of Women in Hindu Civilization* and Seema Kazi's *Muslim Women in India* helped frame arguments within the Hindu and Muslim contexts. Information drawn from Madhu Viz et al. edited *Women's Studies in India: A Journey of 25 Years* has been utilised for

understanding contemporary women's situation in India. The study has also derived insights on issues related to women in conflict situations in South Asia from *Gender, Conflict and Migration* edited by Navnita Chadha Behera and *Gendered Geographies: Space and Place in South Asia* edited by Saraswati Raju. The sources also include journals accessed from libraries and electronic resources, autobiographies, dictionaries and glossaries.

The several strands of scholarship situate the arguments in the study within a clearer perspective. The aim is to reach at a holistic understanding of the complex realities of women's existence during the time of India's Partition. In order to provide a more comprehensive understanding of women's Partition experience as portrayed in the fiction by women writers, it has been necessary to adopt an eclectic and interdisciplinary approach while at the same time remaining grounded to the main issue.

Each chapter of this study tries to offer nuanced and layered insights into women's experience. Anchoring all the chapters is the main theme, i.e., the narrativisation of women's experience during Partition. There is bound to be some overlap in the chapters because the women's experiences although largely dissimilar, do share some links. Forms of differences emerge because of particular socio-cultural locations and are perceptible as nuanced variations rather than as being starkly at odds with one another. Also the strategies for survival and resistance that the women adopt cannot be frozen into one uniform and fixed formula. What is also sought to be studied is the deep faith that all the female protagonists display in human values. The longer narratives have been placed in their own individual chapters and the shorter narratives, being equally potent in articulating the complex nature of women's experience have

been clubbed under a single rubric giving them a space of their own which they deserve.

Chapter I is Introduction and a guide towards understanding the theme and objectives of the present research. It provides a synthesising perspective of Partition history and Partition fiction highlighting the need for retrieving the women's story of Partition. It also provides a comprehensive delineation of the methodology used for the study and the various interdisciplinary areas from which it has drawn.

Chapter II, '*Sunlight on a Broken Column: Witnessing a 'House' Divided*', scrutinises Attia Hosain's novel as memorialising woman's Partition experience in different ways. The focus is on Laila's encounter with upper class Muslim patriarchy within the house *Ashiana* at the same time that India was fighting her own destiny of division. It analyses the constraints that tradition bound practices and beliefs impose on a woman and argues how Laila's liberal education is a tool of empowerment that shapes her ideas about, and her responses to, nationalism, communalism and Partition. Her role as witness to various forms of divisions within the house is of special import because history has no means of recording it. This chapter looks at the ways Laila's memories provide an alternative historiography of Partition. It focuses on the disintegration of 'house' at three levels – material, familial and national.

Chapter III is titled '*The River Churning: Re-locating the 'Woman' in Partition History*'. An attempt has been made to look at Jyotirmoyee Devi's *TRC* as a novel that constantly interrogates dominant history which is guilty of leaving out the woman's story of Partition. It deals with Sutara's experiences as a traumatised survivor of Partition riots, her subsequent societal rejection and the resultant journey into

permanent exile. Memory, trauma, and the sufferings of the exiled are the key issues that have been taken up to interpret Sutara's narrative. This chapter reflects on the patriarchy driven exclusion of Sutara from the space of the home and family during and after Partition because of perceived notions of 'impurity'.

Chapter IV is titled '*Ice-Candy-Man: The Trauma of Betrayal*'. It studies Bapsi Sidhwa's *ICM* as the narrative of a woman, Ayah, whose body during Partition becomes the site on which the male wars of revenge and reprisal are fought. The traumatic consequences of sexual violence have been studied along with pondering the questions of belonging and rehabilitation. Since the novel leaves a mysterious gap about Ayah's final rehabilitation, this chapter attempts to reflect on the possibilities on the issue. It also examines how through all the pain and humiliation, Ayah, post-abduction, still puts up an act of resistance against her abductor.

The title of Chapter V is '*What the Body Remembers: Reconfiguring Female Identity*'. It deals with analysing the experiences of Roop and her gender construction within set cultural norms culminating in the Partition experience which helps to re-craft her female identity. It also studies a phenomenon unique to the Partition experience – that of violence against women by their own men in order to uphold notions of honour and the Sikh belief in martyrdom.

Chapter VI with the title 'Partition Short Fiction: Unfolding Women's Multilayered Experience of Partition' brings together three short narratives within its ambit. The first story that has been studied is Amrita Pritam's *The Skeleton*. It has been examined with a focus on the character of the abducted Pooro who is not easy to read. A victim of pre-Partition Hindu-Muslim polarisation, her abduction gives rise to issues

of identity. Her trauma, resilience and agency have also been examined. The second story that has been taken for analysis in this chapter is Jamila Hashmi's *Exile* which explores the dilemma of an abducted woman who can never let go of her past. The study draws from memory and trauma studies to explore the psychological dimensions of a traumatic experience like abduction. The last story examines the ideas of community and nation as understood through the character of an old woman in Ismat Chughtai's *Roots*. It attempts to study her act of subversion in questioning the notion of belongingness on the basis of religion. This is the only story taken up in this study with an old woman as the protagonist.

Chapter VII forms the Conclusion and attempts to emphasise the need to look at women's experience of Partition from a non-linear perspective. Studying the women's particular Partition experiences not only reveals the nature of socio-cultural customs in India but also the ways in which women are perceived during times of conflict. The Chapter reflects on the necessity of lifting the discourse on to the macro level and extend the study to encompass social, cultural, political and psychological impact, not only of Partition, but also of other kinds of conflicts on various categories of people.

Since the 1990s there has been much historical inquiry on Partition and the process is still on. Similarly, critical literature on the way Partition is represented in creative works like fiction has gained ground. Existing critical analysis of fictional writings on Partition has emerged in the form of essays, articles and books. One of the earliest critical engagements with literature on Partition was by Seema Malik who undertook a research project on the subject in 1998 around the same time as the publication of Butalia's *The Other Side of Silence*. The study appeared as a book with the title *Partition and Indian English Women Novelists* in 2007 which strangely

includes Bapsi Sidhwa's *ICM* while in the course of the study she acknowledges Sidhwa as a Pakistani writer. A lot of attention has been paid to tracing the historical background of Partition. Partition's trauma and memory have also been included for study but have only been touched upon and not explored deeply on the basis of new findings and theories in the field.

Kavita Daiya's *Violent Belongings: Partition, Gender and National Culture in Postcolonial India* (2008) examines both literature and films and concentrates on the refugee experience as also Partition as an event that set about minoritising Muslims. The present study has drawn from this idea to explore such issues in Attia Hosain's novel. Daiya's book encompasses both Indian and global South Asian literature and films and also includes the study of ethnic and gendered violence.

Another book entirely devoted to the study of Partition fiction is D.R. More's *The Novels of the Indian Partition* (2008). It takes up twelve novels for scrutiny by both male and female writers from the north and the south. However, the book undertakes the conventional method of providing a general overview of the novels with the routine summary and development of character and plot.

Priyamvada Gopal in *The Indian English Novel: Nation, History and Narration* (2009) engages with seven novels in one single chapter on Partition, of which three are by women writers – Bapsi Sidhwa, Sorayya Khan and Mumtaz Shah Nawaz. It is only to be expected that this too brief an analysis is inadequate and cannot do real justice to the study of women's experience during Partition. She takes up Attia Hosain's *SBC* in another chapter but once again this too is guilty of being too brief and moreover, she throws only a cursory glance at Partition in the novel.

Tarun K. Saint's *Witnessing Partition: Memory, History, Fiction* (2010) focuses on an assortment of male and female writers and looks at Partition fiction through the lens of memory and history. Although a deeply researched work, the attempt is to establish how inadequate a tool fiction is to recount and recover all that Partition meant to the people of the subcontinent. Fictional expressions are therefore viewed as failures, unable to catch the trauma of Partition. This book has served as a guide to the present study in terms of the information it has been able to provide on much of Partition fiction as it has comprehensively covered numerous novels and short stories.

Isabella Bruschi's *Partition in Fiction: Gendered Perspectives* (2010) takes up a number of both male and female writers for analysis in greater detail. Bruschi's selection comprises only the fiction written in English. Whereas the present study draws upon translated texts originally written in Bengali, Urdu and Punjabi while also including three novels in English. Such a selection allows greater scope for including writers who are drawn from a wider spectrum – the ones who suffered the agonies of Partition being a member of one of the three warring communities, the ones who witnessed Partition from afar and the one who draws upon family memory to recapture the experience. Part of Bruschi's (2010) selection deals with four novels clubbed together in one chapter and by her own admission, "in none of them does Partition play as pivotal a role in the development of narration as in the novels dealt with before, either because it is not central event around which the characters' destiny revolves...or because it is not part of the chronology of the story" (p. 254).

Deepthi Misri's *Beyond Partition: Gender, Violence and Representation in Postcolonial India* (2015) takes a look at both literary and non-literary representations of violence and is a feminist undertaking. It not only deals with Partition's gendered

violence as represented in literary texts but also moves beyond it to locate other forms of violence such as caste violence, street violence, police atrocities and custodial rapes. Well informed and well researched, Misri's book has proved valuable for the insights it has offered on Baldwin's novel *WBR*.

Sunil Kumar Navins's book, despite its title, *Comparative Perspectives on Partition Novels* (2017) goes about it the tried and tested way. Once again, like almost all other critical examinations on Partition literature this book too devotes a large chunk to providing the historical perspective. One could locate neither the comparisons nor the grounds on which comparative studies were to be made.

Ajay S. Deshmukh's *Mapping Feminine Angst: Partition Narratives* (2017) offers general overviews and simple textual analysis, regardless of whether it is related to women or not. It tends to focus on the history of the communal divide in India.

There has been a profusion of edited anthologies on the literature of Partition as there is of articles and essays. *Translating Partition* (2001), edited by Ravikant and Tarun K. Saint, includes Partition stories in translation as well as critical essays. It has been instrumental in turning the focus on the literature written on Partition and includes both short stories and criticism. It includes Bodh Prakash's essay on 'The Woman Protagonist in Partition Literature' which studies fiction in which women are the important focus. It is against the issue of rape that he discusses the presence of agency or lack of it in the women victims. His selection consists of three short stories and two novels. He makes a brief appraisal of Hashmi's story 'Banished' and raises pertinent questions about female consciousness in women who were raped and abducted, enriching the present study with such insights.

The Trauma and the Triumph: Gender and Partition in Eastern India (2007) edited by Jasodhara Bagchi and Subhoranjan Dasgupta is an eclectic collection of pieces on literature, film, and interviews. The essays attempt to redirect attention to the representation of Partition on the Bengal side of the border, which tends to get subsumed sometimes by the public discourse focusing on the more horrific violence on the western side. The present study has benefitted from insights offered on women's experiences of displacement, rape and loss.

Barbed Wire: Borders and Partitions in South Asia (2012) edited by Jayita Sengupta includes articles, stories, poems and memoirs. Himadri Lahiri's brief article 'The Emblamatic Body: Women and Nationalism in Partition Narratives' focuses on Bapsi Sidhwa's *Ice-Candy Man* and reads the woman's body against the nationalist narrative.

Glimpses of Partition in South Asian Fiction: A Critical Reinterpretation edited by Farzana S. Ali (2013) has a collection of twenty seven articles all of which take a mere cursory glance at umpteen Partition writers.

Amritjit Singh et al. edited *Revisiting India's Partition* (2016) has a collection of nineteen essays and forges into newer territory by encompassing the areas of Sindh, Kashmir and the Northeast in their study. Contemporary Hindu-Muslim violence, memory, trauma, displacement are issues which confers an interdisciplinary aspect to the book and have provided crucial leads on these issues in the present study.

Looking Back: The 1947 Partition of India 70 Years On (2017) is an edited work with collections of essays, fiction, memoirs, poetry, drama and interviews on Partition. This collection makes it very evident that the Partition discourse is far from

over and in fact needs new and fresh reflections. There is an attempt to foreground marginal voices. It includes Debjani Sengupta's article 'Scripting an Enclave's Marginal Lives' which studies Selina Hossain's story *Bhumi O Kusum* from the perspective of enclave dwellers, the ones living on the borderlands. Questions of belonging and citizenship, and the vulnerability of enclave dwellers are the issues around which the essay centres. Such interventions in the field of Partition studies doubly reinforce the fact that the tangled knots created by Partition still remain and that it has always been the marginalised categories which have been affected the most, a point also emphasised in the present study.

Alok Bhalla's *Partition Dialogues: Memories of a Lost Home* (2007) is a work with a difference. It is based on conversations that Bhalla has had with six well-known writers of Partition fiction including Bapsi Sidhwa – writers who had lived through the experience of Partition and who assess both Partition and their fiction on Partition in their own words. Bhalla's work has provided a precious contribution to this study as it could explore the artists' minds and their perspectives of Partition.

Most scholarship on Partition fiction discussed above does address women's experiences. However, it is inadequate as some of the scholars concentrate on Partition historiography limiting their analysis of the fiction. Not many scholars have taken up an interdisciplinary approach to the analysis of women's experience with regard to Partition. Therefore, there is a need for more nuanced critical analysis of Partition literature. This study will be significant for adopting an interdisciplinary approach to see the women's experience from many angles. Its significance also lies in its potential to trigger renewed and wider debate on the women's position in India vis-a-vis family, community and nation.

Excluded from the hegemonic narratives, the stories of women's experiences of Partition in fiction have been examined in their relation with the everyday life of the women in the chapters that follow. This study is interested in determining how these narratives constitute a counter-history interrogating dominant political and cultural memory. The burden of Partition's history and trauma that the subcontinent still carries can be addressed by newer perspectives offered by literature.

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